

The Y in YOur man is silent

CHAPTER 1

Ever walked through the same gate for 8 years straight, carrying a backpack and a student card loosely draped around your neck? Walked the same tarred road daily, saw the same buildings, know all the lecturers by name and ate the same food? You know you have been at university for too long when you know the menus of all cafeterias by heart, know the registration process like you designed it, know the security guards and cleaners by their first names and can recite the institution's rule book in your sleep. And if that's not enough, wait until your mother wakes you up every morning with a "When are you finishing school kanti?" text! And you know what she's really asking is "When is the money going to start rolling in?"

I'm sitting now on a bench, watching people walk by, mostly in twos, mostly female and male, mostly gigglish and happy looking. Young love shame. I take a second bite into my chip roll and watch familiar faces, lecturers, with heavy laptop bags on their shoulders and empty lunch bags in the hand, walk out of the glass doors that I have walked through for the past 8 years. Some even have boxes full of exam papers under their arms so they can mark at home. One by one, they do the exact same thing as if they are following a set procedure. They open the boot, drop in the bag, look at their phones and then disappear into their cars and drive away. By 5 pm, the parking lot is empty, with only my car sitting there under the rusted carport, looking lonely.

This chip roll tastes a bit off, but I paid R20 for it so I will finish it. I'm really starving. Besides I'm pretty sure I'm now immune to food poisoning, the cafeterias serve us bad food all the time! 8 years ago, I had a serious case of food poisoning after eating stew from the main cafeteria. My stomach was on fire and I was convinced that I was dying. I survived and it just left my body stronger.

Two students rush past me, sprinting towards the train station. It's 5:15 now and I know they won't make it in time for the 5:20 train, but their determination is admirable. And who knows? the train could be delayed, I heard they burnt a train in Bonteheuwel, so the ripple effect could delay many trains.

Campus is dead. The face brick buildings scattered all over the place suddenly look sad and gloomy. Maybe I have looked at them for too long. It feels like I have been in a toxic relationship with this university for 8 good years. When it's good it's good, but when it's bad it's terrible. It's the type of relationship where I'm the first to say something bad about my other but should an outsider try to say something bad too, I immediately switch to defense mode! It may not be the best university in South Africa, it's not even in the top 10 but it's a university and gives us degrees just as good as all these other fancy universities.

In this campus, I have found love, I have lost love, I have made friends and they have left me here and I made new ones, and they too left me here. I have found myself in this place that I love and hate at the same time. And yes, I have graduated over and over again yet I'm still here. On my third graduation, the VC held my hand a little longer than he should have as I knelt down for him to cap me. The poor man looked confused. He had seen me the previous year and the year before that. I flashed him an 'I can explain' smile and strode off towards the

woman who would drape the hood across my shoulders and pronounce me a graduate.

The next day I was back at school, working towards my fourth graduation. I feel myself drowning in memory and I take that as my cue to go. The brain of a postgraduate student has no business lingering on times gone by. There's rheological models and equations waiting to be solved. It's time to return into the building and bash the buttons of my keyboard and type my thesis.

I feel so stuffed. It's probably because I just had carbohydrates with carbohydrates, without even a drink to wash them down. The lady by the cafeteria window had told me that a can of Coke zero is R14! "R14?", I had asked her, louder than I had intended. She is crazy! That's way too much for 330 mL of sugar free black water! And so, I had had my chip roll dry.

I bump into a timid looking girl, with long overdue braids on her head, scurrying out of the building, holding onto her books for dear life. "I'm sorry ma'am", she whispers. I look at her for a brief second! That had been me once upon a time. A book worm. Minus the bad hairstyle of course. I was always on point, but I had been so competitive and could not settle for anything below 90%. Maybe that explains why I'm still here, in this abode of knowledge, still competing against God knows who.

But wait. Did she just call me ma'am? I feel like calling her back just to clear that, but she has disappeared and is headed towards the library. Ma'am? I'm not even that old! I'm only 25! I really have been at this place way too long! "Please sign in ma'am!" the security guard says. Just great! Another ma'am. We have a new security guard and he's wearing camouflage. Isn't that disrespectful to the army? I

ignore him and make my way towards the laboratory. Well, I share it with three other students but technically it's mine because they all found me here! The security guard lets me go, he was too busy on YouTube anyway, watching an old episode of Date My Family and clearly not doing his job. Has he never heard of earphones? I wonder!

My access card refuses to work and I stand there just beeping it over and over. I really need to get this thing sorted out. Because what if I'm trapped inside the building at night one day and there's a fire and my access card can't work? How will I get out? I'll die mos. I'm about to bang the door when Bunkechukwu opens it. "Madam", he says. He always calls me that and I hate it, but he really is a nice guy and he shared his garri with me in the afternoon, so he gets a pass. "Thanks Bunke. Yhoo, I'm so tired!", I say as I walk to my desk. He laughs and says nothing. I know in his head he's saying, "But you always say that madam!".

Four of us share this lab. One small portion is reserved for our seating and the rest is populated with instruments. I sit by the corner, near the window. I was here first after all. Bunke sits on my right, Brain sits behind me and Ndivhu sits at the other corner. We are a family now, a weird family.

Bunke is from Nigeria, he is a tall, dark guy, who just bangs his fists on his desk at random intervals. I think something is no longer right in his head! Must be all the formulas he has to derive day in night out. He looks good though with his well manicured beard and strong facial bone structure. He is sweet and treats me like a little sister and he never says no when I ask him for R20. Shame, I'm finishing his bursary money. He is married back in Nigeria but has not set foot home for 3 years! Poor wife! He says he just needs to finish this thing and get it over with. He

must be about 32 years old or so, if I remember well from that Faculty report I had to submit for him the other day.

Then there's Brain. Brain is from Cameroon. I'm still convinced that his parents wanted to name him Brian though and someone at Home Affairs misspelt it in his birth certificate. Those things happen! Brain puts truth in the saying, 'It's in the name'. The man has a brain. He is our go to guy for every problem. If the rheometer is acting up, he always fixes it, if an equation is not balancing or we don't know which model to fit your data to, all we need to do is go to Brain. And the best part is he never says no.

Just yesterday, Brain asked me something uncomfortable. He asked if he would be good enough to be my husband. Like why Brain! He just had to go and mess up this special thing we have, you know, of me asking him for help all the time and him giving me the help. Now he had to ask that? Frankly, I wasn't sure how to respond so I just laughed it off. Later at night as I was laying in my bed I pondered on his words. Was he just asking if any man like him would be a suitable husband for a girl like me, as in generally speaking? Or was he asking me out? But if he was asking me out he would have asked to be my boyfriend right? Not jump all the stages and go straight to wifing? I really don't know. All I know is I need help with plotting this curve using Weltman's model and I need him.

Then there's Ndivhu, from Limpopo. The Zimbabwean side of Limpopo. He has a strong Venda accent, it's hard to understand him sometimes when he's speaking English. It doesn't help that he loves using big words unnecessarily. He is always laughing at Bunke's accent, but personally I think his is worse. Bunke's accent is cute, and when he speaks pidgin, he just becomes perfect. Oh! he's married by the

way, such comments are inappropriate. Ndivhu has been here for two years and he is not even done with his proposal! He just spends his time on YouTube laughing at things that are not funny and annoying us with stupid memes that we don't even get. He starts everyday with a "Guys guess what's trending on Twitter!". Like seriously dude! Get a life. I have become a personal therapist for him, he always has girl problems and has a new girl every other week. He's working out these days because he got himself a "hot thang!" as he put it. I think it's just sad. But as long as NRF is funding his lifestyle I don't think he will quit his studies just yet.

Then there's me. Lastborn Fierce Nkomo. Yes, Lastborn is my name. And what's sad is that I'm not even the lastborn in my family. I have two younger siblings! My parents really didn't think this through when they named me and now I'm stuck with a name I have to defend every time I introduce myself. I prefer being called Fierce though. It's also a stupid name really. My mother gave it to me in memory of a guerilla she helped during the liberation struggle (Chimurenga) in the 70s called Fierce. How she decided to name me after a man or a guerilla for that matter beats me to this day. But it's better than Lastborn!

I'm the only girl in our lab and that has earned me a princess status. Well I didn't earn it per se, I bestowed it upon myself and since no one objected, it stays. My 'brothers' treat me well, although I saw Brain get hurt when I called him brother this morning. I'm 25 years old and spend my day in a testosterone infested lab doing things I sometimes don't understand. We are all doing our PhDs in Chemical Engineering and our lives are complicated.

I'm from Zimbabwe and I go home every December. I used to go home three times a year but my visits are rarer now because I am tired of the list of groceries and of furniture my parents and siblings send each time I say I am coming home. I can't even pay R14 for a coke zero! How am I supposed to buy a fridge? Besides, we live in rural areas without electricity, what exactly will they do with a fridge! At least now ZIMRA put those limitations on what can be brought into Zimbabwe, I now use that excuse why I can't bring groceries home. "I don't have a job!", I keep trying to tell people, but no one seems to believe me. "But you are so educated and you are in South Africa!" they say. As if as soon as you cross Beitbridge boarder you are automatically given a job, a house and a company car! Mxm.

I come from a big family. My father has two wives and each wife has six kids. I never really thought of my step siblings as my real brothers and sisters. I don't know if it's because I already have too many full siblings or I'm just selfish. Brain says I have childhood trauma and because I was a middle child in such a huge family, I did not get attention, that's why I'm still at school trying to prove myself. When he said that, I felt like slapping him. Since when is he a psychologist! I was just venting not asking for advice! A man like that cannot be my husband dear Brain.

I'm slowly becoming like my brothers, my full brothers. I have three of them. One is a medical doctor doing well for himself, but mother asked that I speak to him because he doesn't send money home anymore ever since he got married. I'm yet to talk to him. Then my other brother was last seen in Hillbrow, in Johannesburg. No one knows exactly what he does but I don't worry about him. He always resurfaces. Then my other brother is a teacher in Zimbabwe. My parents say he

did well and chose a respectable profession. But he is so broke, he keeps asking me to send him money!

I sigh out loud as I sit in front of my computer. I need to compute my data today then hopefully by midnight I will be done. Ndivhu is laughing as usual at something on his screen, Bunke slams his fist on his desk and grits his teeth. I ignore him. He does that sometimes. We are all stressed and have our own ways of showing the stress. Well, except for Brain, well I don't know what Brain does, he seems to have everything under control. To relieve stress I eat, my food and everyone else's food. That's how I deal. Bunke slams his desk. Ndivhu paces, well the few times he's stressed, like when we have to submit progress reports and he realises he hasn't done anything.

"Fierce, I need your help with something small", Ndivhu says disturbing my peace. I look up at him and smile, my infectious smile. My mother always said my smile was my weapon. She used to say it can make the strongest man weak. I was too young to understand what she meant then and now I'm just too busy to use that super power. Ndivhu's strong perfume is suffocating me.

"Look man, I want to make 1M of hydrochloric acid from 37%. How do I do that?". Bunke is looking at me, judging Ndivhu as much as I am right now. That's a stupid question! I want to say. That's high school chemistry! Sometimes I wonder how my home boy got through Masters really, or undergrad even. He seems clueless! We are literally doing his work for him, well the few times he decides to work. I pull out my notebook and quickly do the calculations for him. I don't even think he's looking, he knows he will come and ask again next time. "Here you go. Use 82.6 mL and make up to a thousand", I say. He takes the page and looks at it then

thanks me. I hope he actually knows what hydrochloric acid is and that he will need a fume hood! I quickly put on my earphones. I'm not listening to anything but I just need to ignore people. I have work to do.

CHAPTER 2

It's 10 pm, and I'm on my fourth coffee of the day. Thank heavens, Bunke has a whole jar of Nescafe. Didn't I tell you the man was perfect? "Madam. I'm leaving now. I will see you tomorrow", Bunke says, taking off my earphones. He never leaves without saying goodbye. I suddenly remember that I don't have money for fuel but I don't know how to ask. He gave me R200 on Monday but I ended up buying McDonald's on my way home and only got R130 fuel. "Bunke", I call. I look around, I'm really embarrassed. "Please borrow me R100. I don't have fuel", I whisper. He pulls out his wallet from his back pocket. "It's fine Bunke, I will give her", Brain jumps in. I turn red, well not literally, this brown skin can't turn red. Bunke looks at Brain then at me then at Brain again, then nods and walks away.

It's a Thursday but at PhD level you really don't have a life, unless you want to do it for 10 years. Ok, so Brain gives me R265. I think that's a weird amount but I don't complain. "I will pay you back next week", I say. "No, you don't have to", he says and touches my shoulder. I don't argue because I wasn't going to pay it back anyways, I was just being polite. He returns to his seat and I return to working.

I'm stuck and my graph looks funny. I sigh. I ask Brain for his expertise. He asks me a few questions and I can hear him breathing down my neck as he stands behind me. I feel crowded but beggars are not complainers. "Oh I see! Just use the log scale", he says. Why didn't I figure that out! I must be very exhausted. I finish my graph and pack my backpack. "Bye guys. See you tomorrow", I say.

I walk down the stairs and walk to the checkout register, the security guard looks very uninterested. I walk to my car, stop by a garage and ask for R200 unleaded then drive through McDonald's for a good ol' McFeast Deluxe medium meal. Then I drive to my apartment at Durbanville Crescent. It's a nice, corner one bedroom flat with a view of the lake and a balcony I never really use.

I'm so exhausted and my place is a mess. But I'm an engineer and I know that disorder is the best order. I lie to myself every time. I know I have to move back to rez next year. I can't afford this place, except if I can get a blesser. But I don't know how I would get a blesser when I'm always hidden in that lab. I moved out of rez end of last year because I thought I was too grown and needed my space. In hindsight, that was a very stupid decision.

I throw off my shoes, throw myself on the couch and look at my phone. I go through my WhatsApp and I have silly messages from friends asking how I am. They wouldn't understand if I told them how I am so I leave the messages unread. I haven't figured out how to remove the blue tick from read messages, so I can go through the messages without the senders knowing I've read them. I will ask Brain tomorrow.

I eat, watch an episode of Better Off Ted then feel myself dozing. I don't know where this thought just came from but I call Bunke to find out if he is ok. "Bunke, It's Fierce. Did you get home ok?", I blurt out. He keeps quiet for a moment. "Yes, I did. I stay at rez madam", he says, sounding confused. I suddenly feel stupid. He stays at rez, on campus! I don't even know why I called him. I'm going to bed now. I'm really tired and I need to be in the lab tomorrow at 6 am, I have lots of samples to run.

I'm woken up by a private number. It's my brother, that one in Hillbrow. He wants me to send him R400 urgently. I tell him I will eWallet him. All the money in my account is reserved for rent. I eWallet him anyway, he really sounded desperate as usual. I will find a way to replace it. It's 5 am so I might as well get ready to go to campus. It's still quite dark outside. I get to the lab but my stupid access card won't work. I could call Ndivhu but he is probably having a girl sleeping over so I don't want to disturb. Brain, I think I would rather not. That comment he made the other day is still not sitting well with me. My last option is Bunke.

I call and as always, he's polite. I drive to his rez and for some reason the security guard lets me in without questions. I go up the stairs to the left wing and knock on his door. He opens the door almost immediately, I guess he was waiting for me. He is topless with a towel around his waist. The towel is a little bit lower than it should be. He looks darker or do I need spectacles now?

I didn't know he had this body. I mean, yes he looks fit and all, but I had no idea he looked this delicious. Does he gym? Would it be wrong if I give him a hug? His arms look like they are asking me to run into them. He looks really divine. My eyes keep scanning his body! He really needs to stop wearing those hoodies, they are hiding all this! I wonder if it's true what they say about Nigerian men. I wish his towel could just fall. What's wrong with me, this is a married man! I take the access card and Bunke looks at me funny. He must have seen me drooling over him. That's just embarrassing.

I'm back in the lab and ignoring my mother's calls. Ever since I bought my mother that phone and she discovered WhatsApp calling, I know no peace. The woman harrases me day in night out and I always dread the "When are you finishing

school", question. I load my sample onto the rheometer and set my parameters and click start. I have other samples to run on the GC, so I do that. I knew I should have had breakfast, now I'm starving. It's 8 am and it feels good to be alone in the lab without the boys. I take Bunke's coffee and make myself a strong cup, to wake me.

It's 9 am. Time really flies. I want to go to the administration building to take my proof of registration and apply for this bursary that someone forwarded to me. But I can't just leave. I have Bunke's access card and I don't want him stranded outside. It's selfish. To my rescue, Brain walks in. We exchange pleasantries. "Please make me coffee", he says. This man has lost his mind. Since when do I make anyone coffee? They make me coffee! I decide he's joking so I laugh. "I'm going to the admin. I'll be right back. Please open for Bunke if he comes", I say. Brain is staring at me like he didn't hear a word I said. I don't have time for this, so I'll just go. I take off my labcoat, straighten my T-shirt and I'm leaving.

"I love you Lastborn!", Brain says. I don't look back, I just walk out as if I didn't hear him. He's just being weird now. What does he mean he loves me? He loves me like a sister perhaps? I don't find him attractive at all. Yes, he is good looking, but he's light skinned and he's not quite as tall as I like my men.

Why is Brain doing this though? Like why is he messing this up? I still need him to finish my PhD. I don't know what to do really. I take my proof of registration. "Lastborn", a male voice calls me. I swear I hate my name. It's the VC. When even the VC knows your name but you are not in SRC or anything like that, then you know you are an ancestor at the university. He asks about my research and my life then we go our separate ways.

Thankfully, Bunke and Ndivhu are there when I return. I didn't want to be alone with Brain. I check my samples and sit at my desk. That's all I will do today, run samples and write. There's an article I should be working on with Bunke but I think I will bully him to do most of it. I have an infectious smile after all and these boys have a soft spot for me. "I brought you a sandwich", Bunke says. I swear this man was sent to me straight from heaven. I thank him and go and make a cup of his coffee. Breakfast is served.

Tomorrow is open day and I was selected along with some Masters students to be at our Departmental stand. None of the guys will be there. That's a bit sexist! I really wished I would sleep in late tomorrow but now I have to be on campus at 8. My life sucks. I realise why I should have stayed at rez.

So now I'm going to spend my Saturday telling high school kids why they should study chemical engineering. Maybe I should tell them not to do their PhDs, otherwise they might find themselves confined to labs, broke and not knowing why exactly they are still at school. Brain and I didn't speak about his weird confession this morning and I'm determined to forget he ever said that.

CHAPTER 3

I really can't believe it's been 8 years of straight studying! I remember the first time I walked into this university. I was only 18 then and just discovering myself. I was disappointed that university wasn't what American movies had portrayed. There were no cheerleaders, football teams with hunks, endless house parties and cool dormitories. Even the cafeterias were not half as cool! But I had been excited none the less and had so much energy. It hadn't taken me long to forget my high school sweetheart back in the village. I wrote to him twice but by the end of the first

semester I knew we wouldn't make it, I had changed so much and he was still herding his father's cattle after school in the village.

From the village to Cape Town, that was a huge leap. All was new to me and I had so much to learn. The lecture theatres looked majestic as hundreds of us sat there listening to the professors. Back home we had had some of our classes sitting on the ground under a tree! I was scared and lost, intimidated by the students who looked cool and used different colours of highlighters on their notes. I gained my confidence when the 90% started coming and I was top of the class. Second semester, half of the class was gone. They had failed and could not proceed. By the time we finished fourth year, it was just 20 of us left.

I have fond memories of years past. Some that make me laugh and some that make me want to crawl under a rock and hide. I made bad friends at some point and would club hop in Longstreet every weekend. Those friends were resourceful though I must say. They always had money for alcohol or found men with the money. I always hated the taste of alcohol but I would suffer through cocktails just to fit in with my crew. I went through all colours of hair, from pink to white to blonde to green. I was so lost shame, it wasn't even funny. I realised I had to stop when I got an 80% in Engineering Maths 1. That was a new low for me and my professor called me to his office and gave me the talk. He said to me "Lastborn, you are a good student. I have seen many good students get sucked in by university life. You need to stop whatever nonsense you are doing and focus!". I returned to my room after that and cried my eyes out.

My girls had found me then and after I told them what the professor had said, we had all decided he was an old, miserable fool without a life. We even said he

probably wanted me and giggled at that. To cheer me up, my girls said they would take me to a new club downtown and hook me up with someone who would treat me like the queen I was. The three of us were picked up in a nice BMW with soft leather seats. The man was quite older looking and being 18 and tiny, he really looked grandfatherly to me but I wasn't the one expected to sleep with him so I didn't really care.

At the club, we went to the VIP section with our mystery chauffeur who was too touchy feely with one of my friends. He had two equally old looking men there waiting and it was one for each of us. Mine wasn't so bad looking but he had huge muscles as if he was on steroids and his blazer looked too tight. I kept brushing off his hand from my thigh until one of my friends pulled me to the bathroom. She gave me a speech about how I was ruining the night for everyone and that since I was a girl and would have sex anyway, why not do it with someone who had money. She assured me that the sex wouldn't be so bad, she said she had slept with him before and he wasn't gifted at all and would last 30 seconds tops, so I wouldn't feel anything. How she thought me having her sloppy seconds was ok still beats me to this day. My friends didn't know I was a virgin then. She then took me back to the guy and gave me a 'behave!' eye!

Three pina coladas later, my short dress was even shorter and my leg was draped over this buff looking man. He looked like a bouncer but he said he owned some construction company in Black Hearth. I wasn't really listening. Five pina coladas later. I was finished. I was seeing double, laughing out loud and being ratchet. I started feeling hot so I took my dress off and I was twerking and grinding on this strange man's lap in a bra and panties. Lucky enough, one of the girls had taught me the importance of wearing good underwear every time and of never wearing a

bra that did not match panties. So at least I looked good as I made a fool of myself. My friends didn't stop me, instead they cheered me on and gave me another drink. We also sniffed a funny looking white powder that made me laugh uncontrollably.

I have blackouts of the memory, but I remember Mr Muscle carrying me out of that club covered in his blazer and throwing me at the back of a Mercedes Benz. I was laughing the whole time and must have passed out at some point. I woke up as we entered a hotel apartment in Waterfront. As he put me down, I just started throwing up and I messed up the entire kitchen. I woke up the next morning still wearing underwear and sleeping next to the strange man. Although he kept saying, "I didn't touch you", I didn't believe him. I had a banging headache and as he dropped me off at rez and I made that walk of shame past the security guard, I thought never again.

That afternoon, I was lying on a bed in a surgery as the gynaecologist checked if my hymen was still intact. It turned out the man had spoken truly and had not touched me. I never got to know that man's name and my friendship with those girls ended that day. My grades improved and they rose above 90% again and I started wearing braids like a normal student. I even got myself a boy my age.

Then at the end of semester one, my boyfriend at the time dumped me. I guess he got tired of waiting for me to give it up. I was so hurt, I found Jesus. I joined a fire-fire kind of church that had so many rules, it felt like a whole subject on its own. I went to church every Sunday, I stopped eating pork, I would go for prayer meetings on Tuesdays, cell groups on Wednesdays, bible study on Thursday, minister room by room on Saturday mornings. It was a full time job! I memorised

verses, exchanged my shorts for long skirts and decent dresses, prayed before every meal even in restaurants and tirelessly posted inspirational scriptures on Facebook. I even tried speaking in tongues. I failed yes, but boy did I try! I even found myself a good Christian brother who called me Sister Fierce. He was so holy we didn't even kiss me the entire relationship! We would fast and pray for our future marriage and go to church camps together, it was so romantic. Looking back, it was weird that we were dating and called each other brother and sister.

I went home for the holidays and stopped going to church. When I returned to campus the next year for 2nd year, I had lost my way and my fridge was packed with bacon. My then boyfriend was convinced I was possessed by a demon and that all the pork I ate had weakened my faith. He prayed and fasted for me but when all that failed and I was still skipping church and stuffing my face with bacon, I found myself single.

That year, I tried the single life. I was bored out of my mind. I had no clubs to turn to and no prayer meetings to fill my time. All I did was read. The 98% and 100% were evidence of the reading and hard work, but I was so bored. I joined the athletics club as I had done some track in high school. I kept that up for 2 months then just stopped as exam time approached. I never went back.

I went away on inservice training for a year. That was so much better because I worked a hard 7 hour shift everyday so I was exhausted when I got to my room. Because I worked so hard, put in overtime and public holidays, and did not have anything else going on for me, I'd saved up quite a bit when the year was over. I used the savings to buy myself a car. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever owned and I was so proud of myself. It was a white VW Polo.

My parents had been so proud of me and had convinced me to bring it home so we could kill a goat for it so that the ancestors could bless and protect it. They were lucky because I had fallen off the Christian wagon because had they found me then, I would have offered to cast out their demons for them. I suffered the long 2191 km to Zimbabwe through Botswana. The fact that I had only recently gotten my license or that my friend who travelled with me did not know how to drive, did not help at all. We had the ceremony and introduced the car to the ancestors. I don't even think my great grandparents knew what a car was. We were just confusing them in their graves shame. My father even poured scotch on my grandfather's grave. I thought it was just a waste. Looks like whatever the ancestors did worked though, because, 4 years later, when I sold it, it had never been in an accident or been stolen or broken into. It's either that or I'm just a good driver.

I drove back, and slept at my step brother's place in Johannesburg then proceeded the next day to Cape Town. I stayed at rez, did not party and pretty much spent all my free time in the library so I never really drove my car. Then it was my final year. My last year at school before I went out into the world and made my mark. Reactor Technology and Maths 4 started showing people flames and I found myself with friends again. I would help "my new friends" as much as I could and even allow them to copy my assignments.

That year I met a guy, he said he was a prince back in Congo. His name was Karome Chadel Karome. His first and last names were the same. He tried to explain it to me but I didn't get it, something about one of the names being his father's and the other his, I really didn't get it. I just called him Chad and he liked it.

So, Chad was a postdoctoral fellow and was a teaching assistant for the module, Chemical Engineering Technology. Looking back, I have no idea what I saw in him. Besides being intelligent, there was nothing else going on for Chad. Although I like dark skinned men, he was not the right kind of dark, his hairline made his afro look funny, and his teeth were too white, I don't know if there's anything like too white teeth, but they were too white! Chad ruined French for me. French is supposed to be romantic but when Chad would speak it, it sounded like a scratched CD, it was just awful. This man, who was 12 years older than me was just terrible looking, yet day after day I was in his lab laughing at his unfunny jokes.

I was ready to take our relationship to the next level as I had already started learning some Lingala to impress him and had even looked up flight prices for when I went to visit my in-laws. Well, our relationship never saw it past Chad's lab, thankfully. I found out he was married and staying with his wife in Belhar. I saw him the other day, he is a lecturer now and I don't know what I ever saw in him. And he wasn't a prince, he was lying!

I mourned the loss of Chad for months, finding myself in his office on some days, crying and letting him lie to me some more, kissing him and hating myself later for kissing a married man. One day I walked into Chad's office in my tiny shorts and a vest with a backpack and books in my hands, for another "I hate you Chad" session, and found his wife in his lab. She was a wifely looking, decently dressed woman with too much makeup and a red and gold weave. I had never seen anything like that in my life. She wasn't ugly at all but the weave was. Chad looked at me with "please don't tell" eyes and I didn't tell. I wouldn't dare, I was too embarrassed. I asked him for help with some model and that was the last time I

stepped into that lab. The woman looked at my bare thighs and cleavage, judgmentally and internally, I advised her to lose that baggy dress and show some skin, because her husband loved it.

Later, Chad sent me an 'I'm outside your rez' text. I ignored that. Then he left me a voicemail asking me to be his second wife. Hell! I would not end up like my mother. A second wife who resented her husband but stayed anyway. I blocked him and cried my eyes out. On that day, I swore never to love again. To show how serious I was, I shaved my head. 3 years of good afro all gone.

I finished my fourth year with my head held high, ignoring Chad's love-backs. I graduated top of my class. I received a scholarship to pursue a Masters degree, and after doing the Maths, I realised that I would make enough studying than labouring in industry, so I took it. Masters was a walk in the park, I glided through it like it was first year. My brain was working and I was just happy. But as always, a man happened. I was 22, doing Masters and a virgin. It was just so sad. But I had enough experience with bad relationships that I knew what I wanted. An educated man, with a bright future and money. He had to be tall, dark and handsome too, obviously. But I wasn't looking really 🙋♀

CHAPTER 4

I was in a queue at the staff diner one good afternoon. You know when you get to Masters level, you start thinking you are better than undergraduates and you are suddenly too good for the cafeterias they go to. I now bought my food at the staff diner and lunched with staff members. It was a bit more expensive but bursary money had my back so I was good. "I will have chicken with beetroot and coleslaw,

please”, I said to the lady behind the counter. I then fumbled for money in my purse and only realised I had used that R50 I had that morning in Bellville. As I was about to cancel the order, the man behind me says to the lady, “It’s alright. I’ll have what she’s having as well. I’ll pay. Add two juices to that. I’ll have the JustJuice orange and what will you have?”, he asked me. His perfume smelled so divine! “I’ll have a coke zero, thanks!” I blurted out then felt stupid immediately. Coke zero is not a juice, it’s a drink. I didn’t want a drink anyway, but he had asked so nicely how could I have said no?

What a cliché! Girl finds herself without money, handsome stranger pays for her. “Thanks. You can walk with me to the ATM just outside and I’ll give you your R46”, I said. I may not like paying my lab mates back their money but I won’t be cheap to a stranger. “I’m in a bit of a rush. You don’t have to pay me”, he said. I thanked him again and waited for my order. He was on his phone the entire time that he waited for his order, and I kept stealing quick glances at him. When my order arrived, I had finished building his profile. He was tall, I came only up to his chest, he was the perfect kind of dark, his slim fit suit looked expensive, he smelled good and he had Audi keys in his hands.

He made me feel self-conscious standing next to him. My jeans were not that flattering and my braids were not styled. I looked terrible and my white AllStars were so dirty I just wanted to run away. But he didn’t really seem like he was studying me. I thanked him one last time as I was leaving. “Here is my business card. Call me”, he said handing it to me and looked back at his phone. How rude! I took it, not knowing if I would call him or not. I studied his card as I made my way to rez. It read Prof Elikplim M. Nkrumah. Lecturer: Mechatronics, then phone numbers and email addresses.

For some reason, I was intrigued. How did he have a professorship? He didn't look older than 35! I rushed to my room and went full CIA on the poor man. I searched for him on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, nothing came up. I looked him up on the university website, ResearchGate, Academia, LinkedIn and Googled him even. When I was done I knew that his middle name was Mawufeasi, he had a PhD in Robotics and Mechatronics from the National University of Singapore, had lectured in Singapore, in University of Zimbabwe (UZ) and at Rhodes and had only moved over to our university for an associate professorship. I still needed more information though. I needed to know his age, marital status, background and if possible I needed his financial records as well. I knew I had to pull out the big guns now.

I was borderline stalking him but that didn't stop me from picking up my phone. The advantage of staying at university for a long time is that you make alliances with skilled people. I dialed a friend's number. "Tindo, can you run a background check for me on this guy. I'll text you his name just now", I said. "No problem. Come to my room rather and we do it together", he said. Tindo was the go to guy for all our hacking, Photoshop and any IT needs. He always got us our results long before they were published! But for some reason he had failed and was redoing his fourth year for the third time! I rushed over to the undergrad rez and next thing I was sitting on Tindo's bed watching him do his thing. I got bored after about 20 minutes. "I'll go get us pizza", I offered and left. I hadn't even touched the lunch the kind stranger had bought earlier.

When I returned an hour later with a something meaty triple decker pizza from Debonairs, Tindo had gone over and beyond. He had pulled up several pictures of the young professor. He was 34, only 11 years older than me, and to my relief, he

was not married, had no children, and earned R60 000 a month from lecturing and was a partner of a consulting company. "This guy is swimming in money!", Tindo had exclaimed. We all know there's money in consulting. I had never met any one more perfect. I would give him a call the next morning or maybe go and look for him in person. Deep down I really hoped he didn't have a girlfriend. The problem with being at school for too long is all you can date is students, lecturers or security guards, you don't have much of a choice. I hadn't dated in a while and I was determined to get it right the next time I did it.

I called Elik the next morning and felt butterflies in my stomach when he answered. His voice! We ended up agreeing to meet at the staff diner for lunch. I still laugh when I look back. I dressed up in a bodysuit showing just a bit of cleavage to let him know I had boobs and that they looked nice, I paired it with a flared miniskirt to show a bit of thigh, but not too much in case he'd think I'm loose and get turned off. On my feet, I wore a nice black wedge. I would have worn a pair of heels but walking across on grass would have been a mission, so a wedge worked just fine. I wore my hair in a bun and made up my face just enough to give the illusion that I didn't have any make up on. I did all that just to walk 100 m to the staff diner! I found him waiting, glued to his phone. He looked even more handsome now that I knew he wasn't married. Just by looking at him in that black fitted suit, I started thinking up wedding venues and baby names.

He said I looked too cute for the staff diner so he took me to the Towers in Century City. A huge part of me was so relieved that he hadn't just asked to meet so he could ask for his money back. He drove an Audi Q7 and was the perfect gentleman. The lunch went great and when he dropped me off at rez, we exchanged numbers. I wouldn't be the first one to send a message so I literally sat

on my bed all afternoon looking at my phone, waiting for him to text me. He eventually did after 8 pm!

We started flirting and doing lunch dates every day and without saying anything, we just started dating. We would chill in his office, and occasionally do fancy dinners somewhere in Green Point and he would randomly send me gifts, just because. By week two we had upgraded to kissing. For the first time in my life I received flowers and I had found a man who was all mine and gave me all the time in the world. It was refreshing to find someone who enjoyed watching the sun set on top of Table Mountain, enjoyed long walks on the beach in Camps Bay and enjoyed watching city lights from Signal hill at night. I was in love. His office became ours and I would sit by the corner and work on my thesis while he marked and did his stuff, then he would walk me to rez. He had an apartment in Rondebosch and lived with his younger brother. His name Elikplim means God is with me, and never had that been so true in my life! A month went by and I was the happiest girl on earth.

One evening when we were done with work and were ready to go, we made out as usual. He kissed so nice and nothing is sexier than a man that smells good! As he breathed down my neck I held on to him, never wanting to let go. His hand was wandering into uncharted territory and I kept tensing up. He would kiss me each time I tensed and I'd relax. He knew I'd never done it before. We had tried a few days back but I had been so tense it hadn't worked. He did all he could to prepare me and he said I should trust him which I did. Eventually, all our clothes were on the floor on top of students' answer scripts and we were at a point of no return. The way he looked so hungry for me was a major turn on. I asked that we pause and go to his house to finish this but he said he couldn't wait.

I had read in a Mills and Boon novel that losing your virginity felt like a prick that soon would turn into pleasure and blow your brains as you reach ecstasy. There was no ecstasy to be found for me that day! He tried to be gentle but he just murdered me. I was convinced I would be paralysed afterwards. I let out a scream which he quickly covered with his hand and I hope he didn't mistake it for me enjoying it. I felt like I was in labour. I should have listened to Google's responses after I'd typed 'Sex tips for virgins'. Some suggestions were that you take painkillers 30 minutes before the act. Like, these things are quite random, so how would I have known when it was 30 minutes to go, so I could pop an ibuprofen?

After what seemed like forever, we were done and Elik thanked me. Like what was he thanking me for? I hoped he was not always going to thank me everytime after sex! I had lost my virginity on an office desk. He took me home with him that day. I'd thought my first time would be on a king size bed layered with rose petals, with champagne and chocolates on the bedside and I would have been wearing Victoria's Secret lingerie and it would be magic. But it was on a hard, wooden desk and it had hurt as hell! I didn't regret it though, if anything I found it funny. Later at night Elik tried to get with me again but I wasn't having it!

I wish someone had warned me about how painful it actually is, so that I could have given it up a long time ago to someone not so well gifted, you know. Someone who would probably have hurt a little so that I would at least have been ready for Elik. But in all honesty, I was happy. I had given the most intimate part of me to a man I truly loved and who loved me without reservations.

He was patient with me. We tried again in a couple of days and it was much better but still ecstasy wasn't there. When we tried for the third time, I began feeling things I couldn't describe and he had won me. It was now so good that when we

were done with our steamy sessions, I'd sleep flat out, then wake up wanting some more. Life was good, school was good and I was the happiest girl on planet earth. I had found my unborn children a father and my parents a son in law 🥰😊

CHAPTER 5

Elik was perfect! You know when you are in love, your brain sometimes blurs your lover's flaws leaving them perfect in every way. That's how I viewed Elik. He was perfect. He gave me all the time in the world while juggling his lecturing job and his consulting gig. That was priceless. I did mention that he is from Ghana right? I never really dated Zimbabwean guys (High school doesn't count), because when we meet up in Cape Town we easily connect and become friends and then there's no room for dating after we've been friends.

The year went by so fast and the university closed. I didn't want to go home but Elik was going home so I had no reason really to be in Cape Town alone for Christmas. Besides, I really missed my mum. So, in December I went to Zimbabwe and Elik went to Ghana. We had shared a beautiful 8 months and I could not wait to spend forever with him. At the rate we were going, I was sure he would propose soon.

I thought about him every passing day and could not wait to go back to Cape Town. We texted every other day, getting network coverage in the village was a mission for me. It didn't help that I was using NetOne! January came and I asked

him if I could come back to Cape Town earlier and stay with him till rez opened. He said he was still in Ghana. I said ok and sulked at home.

I only went to Cape Town when rez opened and Elik said he was still in Ghana. He sent me some money to use till he got back which was very thoughtful of him. I was back at the lab putting in long hours now that I had nowhere to go to after hours. One day, as I walked back from the cafeteria, I thought I saw his car driving out of campus but since he had said he was in Ghana, I thought, well, cars are the same.

I was sitting on my bed, minding my own business, eating rice and canned pilchards in hot tomato sauce, watching Pretty Little Liars. An email popped up and although I usually ignore pop ups, I thought I might as well open it since Pretty Little Liars kept buffering. The message was from Tindo and had an attachment. I opened it quickly, wondering whose dirt Tindo had uncovered. The message on the body of the email read, "If you are standing Fierce, sit down before you click open". I hoped it was not one those graphic videos of foreigners being burnt alive in Durban or being chopped up in Johannesburg. What if it's my brother, they chopped? He's in Hillbrow and they say it's not safe. I panicked and had to open the video quickly to settle my senses.

It was just a video of a wedding. A woman I did not recognise was walking down the aisle. She looked beautiful, I had to give her that. Who's this and why does Tindo want me to see this? I was about to stop the video and return to my Pretty Little Liars when the camera moved and zoomed in on the groom. Elikplim. My Elikplim! Smiling and looking sexy as hell in a black tuxedo. I froze as the rest of

the video played. Maybe it's his brother or cousin or someone nje who just happened to look exactly like him. It could not be Elik!

"Elikplim Mawufeasi Nkrumah, do you take Komla Kwabe to be your lawfully wedded wife?", the pastor said. It was him! My heart shattered and the laptop slipped from my grip and fell on the floor. The bowl with the rice and fish followed. I stood up, I sat, I knelt down, I stood up again, I sat again. I thought I was going crazy. My hands were trembling and I could feel a sore lump stuck in my throat. So, while I was climbing trees looking for network just to tell him I loved him, he was busy getting married? And the date on the video was 28 December! I had spoken to him on that morning and he had told me he loved me more than anything only to repeat those words hours later to someone else under a R50 000 chandelier? That right there is the definition of witchcraft.

Still in my pyjamas, the shorts barely covering much, I ordered an Uber, not trusting myself to drive, and 30 minutes later, I was outside Elik's apartment, knocking my knuckles off. He was home, I had seen his car outside. So, the whole 'I'm still in Ghana baby' was just a huge lie! Thankfully, the security guard at the gate had let me in because he now knew me. The bathroom window was open and I was considering jumping in through it if he did not open that door! I was too hurt to think straight.

I kept knocking and eventually a woman opened the door. I stood there staring at her and her staring at me. It was her from the wedding video! Although she looked less pretty now without the make up and hair do. I pushed past her and strode to the bedroom. A bedroom I knew so well. "Where is he? Where is Elik? Elik!", I shouted. I could not recognise myself. I was going mad. Elik appeared through the

door and from there everything just happened so fast. I was screaming and kicking, Elik looked shocked to see me there and his wife was also yelling, asking who I am. His brother held his wife back as Elik literally carried me out of the apartment and to his car. He threw me in the back seat like I was a child and drove off. He just kept driving and I kept screaming and crying. He ignored me. Thankfully, I had a brain not to do anything too crazy and get us in an accident.

We must have been somewhere in Franschoek when he pulled over. I had stopped screaming then and resorted to sobbing. He asked that we sit and talk as he joined me in the back seat. I got out of the car and he followed. I cried and kicked and lashed at him but he held me against the car until I calmed down. He begged that we talk and that I let him explain. Stupid me agreed. My eyes were swollen from crying and I hated him with everything. He held me and blatantly lied to me about it being an arranged marriage that he had had no say in. He said he didn't tell me he was back because he was not yet ready to look me in the eye after what he had done. My heart broke all over again and I cried. He took me in his arms and held me tight and let me cry.

For whatever reason, I let him kiss me and I actually kissed him back. I directed my heightened emotions towards the wrong thing.

Before long he was tearing my pyjamas off and the car was all steamy and we were going at it like rabbits. I held on to him, and clawed my nails hard into his back just to hurt him. I hated him but I loved what was he doing to me at that moment. I was too exhausted to argue with him afterwards so I just asked that he takes me to campus. He dropped me off at rez and I found Tindo waiting for me. I thanked him for the video and asked to be left alone. I vowed never to see Elik

again or to ever even think of loving anyone again. My Masters would be my love from then on. I would not even mourn him.

The next morning, I went to the Department to avoid being alone. I received flowers from Elik in the morning and tossed them in the bin without even reading the note. I received chocolates around 12 and gave them to the girl sitting next to me. I would go to the toilet and cry, every now and then, and I lied to people, telling them I had sinusitis that's why my nose was red and my face was swollen. I received a box just after lunch and I wanted to toss it in the bin so bad but I opened it anyway. There was a small card inside and Toyota keys!

"I'm sorry Fierce. My heart will always be yours. I know this is nothing, but you always said you wanted a Fortuner and since I want to give you everything you want, here is a start", it read. I laughed. "I want you idiot! Can you give me that?" I said out loud, to no one in particular, drawing unwanted attention from the other Masters' students. He was joking! The delivery guy was still standing behind me with his hands behind his back. He was wearing a jacket with the Toyota symbol. "Please come with me ma'am", he said politely.

All the Masters students sitting in our postgraduate area were so excited and followed us. Nosey people! A white Fortuner was neatly parked, ironically, next to my Polo. I let out a scream and ran to the car. I had always wanted a Fortuner! Everyone was hugging me and congratulating me. It was the perfect gift. I started crying. They all thought it was joy but it was pain. Pain I could never explain in words. A stab through my heart. Elik was the best thing I would never have. He had been my soulmate for a while. And as much as I hated him, I loved him. I would keep the car, he owed me that at least.

I drove around campus and even took my friends to Bellville. I even forgot I was sad and we drove through McDonalds for McFlurries. After hours, when we were back in campus and everyone else had left, I was left sitting alone with my thoughts. The temporary happiness was gone and the pain had returned. I went to Mechatronics. I needed to look Elik in the eye and ask him why. I needed to tell him we were over and there was no getting back from such betrayal. I was so done with him and I never ever should have allowed him to get under my skin the previous night.

He was still in his office, working, as always. The whole building looked deserted. "Fierce!", he said standing, as I walked into his office, as if he was expecting me. "Did you like your gift? You know, we need to go to the traffic department tomorrow and sort out the papers, ok?". Why was he carrying on like nothing happened? I couldn't understand. Had I really meant so little to him? "I hate you!" I screamed at him and he grabbed me and pinned my hands to my side. He probably thought I wanted to hit him. I started crying. The pain was so fresh. My heart was sore and the lump in my throat wouldn't go away. He held me until I stopped protesting then he turned me around to face him. His touch got me all the time and I think he knew it. And he knew me all too well and knew exactly what to do to get my heart racing. Next thing he locked the door and I was on his desk with my legs flapping in the air.

The car was registered in my name and every evening I would go to let Elik know how much I hated him but would always end up under him on his desk, singing a different tune. Knowing he would leave and go to his wife afterwards just broke my heart over and over again but somehow I could not stop. He had a hold on

me. Months went by and I had given up fighting what I felt for him. I tried to make myself forget that he was no longer really mine.

He moved from that apartment in Rondebosch to a free-standing house in Pinelands. We did the house viewings together and I chose the Pinelands house! His wife was pregnant then and was having a hard pregnancy so could not be meeting him every lunch time in a different part of town to view a house. She gave birth to twins and I remember seeing the pictures from the photoshoot he did with his wife and kids. It made me sick to the bone yet I still could not get rid of him. I hated myself but it was a toxic loop that never seemed to end. I was stuck and he wasn't helping. He still treated me like a queen.

I graduated with my Masters and since my family couldn't make it, he was there for me. He had even gone dress shopping with me and paid for my photoshoot. He took me out for dinner and bought me a beautiful watch engraved "F.N with love E.N" as a congratulations present.

CHAPTER 6

Even the half happiness I had left with Elik was short lived. I should have known it wouldn't last forever. He wasn't mine anymore! Between sharing his love with his wife and kids, there really wasn't much left for me. But I held on, longer than I should have anyways. My mind was the only part of me that would say, "But Fierce, come on! A married man? Really? Dump his ass girl and move on!". That was the logical thing to do, but when it comes to love, logic doesn't apply. My mind could never win against my heart and body. I loved him.

It was a blessing in disguise when Elik got an offer he couldn't refuse from a university in Johannesburg. He moved to Joburg and I thought that was my opportunity to move on. It was hard though and I missed him so much. I was too dependent on him and couldn't survive on my own. We texted daily and video called each other. I was just addicted to him, it was sad. After a month, I couldn't help myself anymore, I asked him to get me flight tickets to Joburg and he did. I was to spend a week there and we promised to pass by me after work, every day. I was used to have a limited amount of time with him so I was fine with that arrangement.

I flew to Joburg and he picked me up at the airport and checked me in at the Hilton in Sandton. Sandton is near to his home so he wouldn't have to drive far when he was done with me. He spent that afternoon with me, reminding me exactly why I couldn't get over him and confusing me with his sexiness. I was sad when he had to leave in the evening, to go home to his wife and kids. As I sat alone in that hotel room, looking out of the window, I started thinking clearly, I was much better than that and I deserved better. I was never cut out to be number 2 and to share a man with anyone.

I pulled out my laptop, went to TravelStart and booked myself a late night flight to Cape Town. I paid with my own money for once! Well Elik had given me that money but normally I would have called him up and asked him to just pay. But I was learning to be independent so I paid with my own card. I hadn't unpacked much so I ordered an Uber, checked out and took a shuttle to the Gautrain station and headed to the airport. I'm sure the man sitting opposite me wondered what was wrong because I cried the whole way. I needed all the hurt to flow out. Then I was on my way to Cape Town.

I blocked Elik on WhatsApp, marked his email as spam. I had to switch my phone off for a month because I couldn't trust myself not to go stumbling back to Elik's arms. When I finally turned my phone on, I had multiple missed calls from Elik and hundreds of WhatsApp messages from my mother, who thought I had been human trafficked because I had just disappeared! Elik eventually stopped calling. That hurt but I had finally found the courage to let him go and I was proud of myself. I stood in front of the mirror and shaved my hair. I was ready for a new beginning. It hurt and I cried myself to sleep every night and still had a picture of Elik and I as my screen saver. I moved on and I kept my Fortuner. I wondered if I should take it home for the ancestors to bless it. Would they bless it?

I told myself that I was done with men, and now, a year later, I still am. I'm pursuing my PhD in peace and sharing the lab with my beloved brothers. Bunke, Brain and Ndivhu are my family and I really don't need a man. So, I really don't know what Brain is trying to do here. I can confidently say African men are terrible for me. I have dated men from Ghana, Congo, Zimbabwe and South Africa, and all broke my heart, I'm not willing to give Cameroon a chance. Maybe Brain is right that I have abandonment issues!

It's Monday and at least I rested all day yesterday. I went to Ster Kinekor in Tygervalley and watched the new Captain America movie. Maybe I will ask Bunke to come with me next time. But I have a history with married men so maybe I should leave him alone. I even bought myself Cinnabon with extra icing and a smoothie to celebrate my full year of celibacy. I think I can do this for life!

I only left my apartment at 9:30 this morning, I had a hard time getting out of bed. But it is what it is, I have to go to the lab. I knock on the door, my access card is still not working. Brain opens the door for me. "How was the weekend guys?", I

ask, dropping my backpack on the floor. "It was good. You are late today", Ndivhu says then goes back to his screen without even waiting for me to say anything. It's past 10, I'll be here till after midnight so what's the rush! "Madam", Bunke says standing and coming to my desk. These inappropriate thoughts of Bunke really need to stop now. I'm looking at this man and I'm sinning in my head! It's getting too much. Maybe I should go back to church! Maybe mother is right that my stepmother is bewitching me because her children never amounted to anything. I haven't amounted to much myself though, if we are being honest.

Bunke is standing behind me and he smells so manly. I love his scent. I really need to get a grip. I keep wondering if those abs I saw on him last time will feel as hard as they looked. "Madam!", Bunke calls again and I come back to reality and turn my head to face him. "What's up?", I ask. "I booked an appointment for us tomorrow at 2 at the consulate", he says. Consulate? What consulate? Oh! by the way! I totally forgot. We have a conference to Venice in three weeks. How could I forget that?

Conferences are pointless if you ask me, why should students tell experts about their lousy, incomplete research? But it is what it is and this is the life I chose. Now I have so much to do to prepare for this conference. Maybe I should shed a little weight? But for who? Brain, Bunke and Ndivhu tell me that I look perfect everytime I ask them if I'm fat. I thank Bunke then check my samples that I'd run over the weekend on the HPLC and work on that computer, trying to integrate my graphs. I need to start working on that poster for the conference before I go and make a fool of myself.

I spend the whole day organizing my supporting documents for the Schengen visa. I had to go to the bank for a bank statement, print out the conference

program and invitation letter, make copies of my passport and previous visas. Lucky for me Bunke already had Prof write us letters stating that we are registered students, to prove to the consulate that we will be returning to South Africa.

The 3 weeks went by so quick and I spent 90% of it in the lab. I needed to get as much work as possible done so that I won't be thinking about school when I'm in Venice. I've been too busy to be properly excited about the trip. The flights are booked, hotel rooms are booked, airport transfers are booked and our Schengen visas are intact in our passports.

We are leaving tomorrow. I spent the whole of yesterday packing, washing my braids and shaving my legs. I had my nails done in Bellville, just short and naturally looking, nothing dramatic. I sent my poster to Bunke and asked him to print it out for me when he prints his. Lastly, I went to Sorbet for a Hollywood wax! Initially I asked for a Brazilian wax but when the lady was done, that landing strip looked funny so I asked her to just take it all off. I don't know why exactly I need a wax because it's not like anyone gets to go there anymore.

I woke up early today, made sure I packed everything I will need and I'm now just waiting for tomorrow. This is going to be my first long flight. I spent today going through my emails and researching Venice. The day went by too quick and it's night already. I can't sleep, I'm so excited.

Let me call Bunke before I sleep and ask for his reference number so I can check in for the both of us and we can sit together. He doesn't answer so I text him. He responds minutes later and says he was in the shower and sends me a screenshot of his e-ticket. I go to the Qatar website and check us in. All the side seats are

taken so we have to seat in the centre row. I guess that's what we get for checking in late! The only 2 seats next to each other are at the back half of the plane! Physics tells me that's not the best place to sit on a plane, as you are prone to feeling turbulence more, but right now I don't have an option.

I must have fallen asleep somehow yesterday, because it's 8 am now. Our flight is at 4 pm. I shower, dress up and make sure all the windows are closed. By 11 am I'm ready to go to the airport, I will grab something to eat and get some work done there. I told my mother that I'm going to Italy and she has told the whole village that I got a personal invitation from Pope John Paul 2 and will be spending a week with him. I don't know how I will do that, since Pope John Paul 2 died in 2005! Mother is even telling people that I speak Latin now and that the pope is going to give me an award because I'm the first girl in Africa to do a PhD in Engineering! I'm embarrassed.

I find the university shuttle waiting for me outside. The driver gets my door and I get in as he takes my suitcase. I over packed, I know, but I would rather have more clothes than have less. I'm at the airport in 30 minutes. I get my suitcase bubble wrapped, I can't risk anyone slipping drugs in there or stealing my stuff! I drop off my bag and then head to Mugg n Bean.

"Hey B! I'm at Mugg n Bean!" I text Bunke. "I'll have a hot chocolate please with cream", I say to the waiter. I open my laptop and go through my emails. One is from Prof, our supervisor, telling me to have a good time and showing off that he has been to Italy and saying it's a pity I won't get to see the leaning tower of Pisa which he saw last year. I respond with a thank you and a promise to enjoy.

Bunke shows up at 2 pm, with just a backpack and our posters rolled up. I get up, give him a hug and he sits opposite me. He's wearing a hoodie, as always. If I wasn't half his size I would have taken one of his hoodies already. He orders a coffee and works on his laptop too. I finish that article we were working on. Bunke did almost everything in terms of writing. I did the experiments with him, Brain did the data analysis and I just finished proof reading it. We didn't even bother involving Ndivhu in the project, we didn't want the stress. The article is ready now for the International Journal of Engineering. We make a great team, if I do say so myself.

We decide to go through the security gate already and sit at the waiting area. I'm typing away on my laptop. I need to finish the cover letter to send to the Journal and Bunke is now on his phone. The boarding call sounds and we join the queue. I'm excited and scared at the same time. I don't really like flying. We board and as the flight takes off, I grab Bunke with both hands. It's time I told him the truth. "I hate flying", I whisper. He holds my hands. "It's the safest mode of transport madam", he says. I know that but that doesn't make me feel any better. I close my eyes and lift my legs off the floor. That usually helps. We are in the sky now and I'm trying so hard to sleep but I can't, my brain knows we are flying and it's scared as hell.

Then the worst thing is happening. I think I'm going to pee on myself. The plane is bouncing up and down. I feel like it's about to fall. I'm whimpering and my palms are sweating. Why is Bunke so calm though? You can't tell me he's not feeling that! "Bunke", I whisper. My voice is shaking and I can't help it shame. "Yes madam", he says taking off his earphones. I'm holding on to him for dear life. "The plane", I say. I know I'm not making sense but he understands what I'm trying to say. He puts

his hand around my shoulder and pulls me closer, letting my head rest on his shoulder. "Madam, you are a genius! You understand fluid dynamics. We are passing over mountains, we'll be fine in no time", he says. He squeezes me tighter and I relax a bit. After an eternity, the turbulence finally passes. The plane is stable now and they are serving drinks. We will live to see another day after all.

After eating, I managed to sleep. I woke up on Bunke's shoulder and he was resting his head on mine. I went back to sleep not wanting to disturb him. We had a 2 hour layover in Doha, Qatar and then we were off to Venice. I was so tired when we landed and thank goodness Italy and South Africa are just 1 hour apart so I wasn't jet lagged. We got a shuttle to the hotel and I fell asleep as soon as I got to my room. I didn't even bother to change, just kicked off my shoes and went to sleep.

I woke up feeling so refreshed today. The conference only starts tomorrow so today we will just take it slow and tour Venice. I hope Bunke is up for it. He says he is. He looks so chilled in shorts and a tight T-shirt that's giving a detailed outline of his chest. He looks delicious! I'm in shorts too and a tank top. Our hotel is away from Venice central so we need to catch a train. Bunke pulls out Google Maps and navigates to the train station. It takes us 10 minutes to get there. We board a train and jump off at Venezia Centrale. I can't believe how beautiful it is! It's like I'm in another planet.

We spend the afternoon strolling through the canals of Venice, taking pictures. Bunke has a canon camera, I think it's that one from the Department. I really don't think we are allowed to take it away and use it for personal purposes, but it's so

helpful right now, I won't complain. We stop for some gelato, I get the cookies and cream and he takes a plain strawberry. We walk on. We jump on a water taxi and watch couples passing by, being serenaded in Gondolas by men in black and white striped T-shirts. It doesn't look as romantic as they show us on TV though.

By lunchtime I'm starving. We find a pizza joint and I'm so excited to try real Italian pizza. It looks different from what I know. It's one round, unsliced dough with topping. It tastes so much better though than any pizza I've ever had. Bunke offers to pay and I thank him. We are holding hands as we make our way to the water taxi stop so we can go to the famous St. Mark's square. I don't know why we are holding hands but our hands just found each other. We get there and it's buzzing with tourists and pigeons. I want more ice cream so Bunke gets me some. We sit on the steps facing St. Mark's and talk.

Bunke tells me about his wife. He says he doesn't love her. He got her pregnant and her family made him take her. So, he took her and left her with his parents. He says they are not really married, he just paid damages for her and left her with his parents. He says he accepted the scholarship to study in South Africa just to escape her. This is the first time ever that we have spoken about his wife. I didn't even know he has a child! Why do men sleep with girls they don't love though? Without even a condom no! Irresponsible if you ask me! Look at me, I have only slept with one person all my life and I loved that man with my heart, body and soul. Then when it didn't work out, I simply gave up men.

Bunke asks about my love life and why in the past years he's known me, there's been no man. I feel like lying to him but I feel so relaxed right now I might as well just tell him the truth. I tell him my sad story of Elik and how he married someone

else behind my back. I leave out the parts of me receiving gifts from him and continuing to sleep with him long after I found out he was married.

He hugs me and tells me how beautiful I am and how I deserve so much better. I agree with him. And since I have concluded that all African men are bad for me and I only date dark skinned men, meaning I can't cast my net on other skin tones, I guess I will be single for a very long time!

Bunke and I really had a wonderful day today and we bonded. It's a beautiful Sunday. I'm tired as I walk into my room, so I have to sleep early if I'm to be awake tomorrow. We have to go to the conference tomorrow morning anyways. I set an alarm, take a shower and sleep. For some reason, I kept thinking about Bunke.

CHAPTER 7

It's 7 am and I'm wide awake. I go down for breakfast then take a shuttle with Bunke to the conference venue. I'm so excited. We will just be in Venice for 4 days and 1 day is already over, leaving us only 3. We could have stayed longer but our Rheology Centre back at the university is hosting some students from India and Prof insisted that we be there. So, we leave on Wednesday. We arrive at the venue. The who's who of engineering is here, and probably all those people I reference in my articles are here today. The poster session is at 1 pm, a weird time because I would think that would be lunch time!

I find my way to the Chemical Engineering session and find myself a good seat. Bunke met some of his friends he studied with in Nigeria and I haven't seen him since. The keynote speaker comes up and reminds us of the importance of

innovation in the Engineering field. Like duh! We are all researchers here. Isn't that the whole point of our existence? The first speaker comes up and speaks about the contribution of nanotechnology in paints. My concentration span is very short naturally, so midway through his talk, I drift away to my phone. People are clapping, so I know the speaker is done. Another comes up. We go for tea break at 10, we are back at 10:45. The next speaker goes up.

I actually haven't gone through the conference booklet to see what else is there. It's interesting to just read titles of people's research. I just saw a session that caught my eye so I flip the page back. "Robotics and Autonomous Systems". For some reason my heart just skipped a beat. I used to know someone who was an expert in that field! I scan down and right there in black and white. 12h00.

"Keynote speaker: Prof. Elikplim M. Nkrumah". It can't be! There's no way. It's just a name. I'm sure his name is popular in West Africa.

It's 11h45, I don't know what I'm doing and I really want to hear this talk about the possible application of insect protein in nanoemulsions, but my heart is not here anymore. I stand and quietly leave the room. I quickly find the Robotics venue and tip toe in. It's 11h55. I find a seat at a corner at the back. The facilitator stands and says a few things then he introduces the keynote speaker, to begin the next session.

My eyes must be deceiving me. It's Elik! He hasn't changed a bit. He looks so handsome in that black suit and as he speaks, that deep voice just goes all the way to my soul. I haven't spoken to him in over a year and I finally managed to get over him so I don't understand why I'm feeling so nervous. He keeps talking. My phone is vibrating. It's my mother sending messages asking how the pope is

doing. I actually think she believes I went to see the pope! I tell her the pope is fine and sends his blessings. She is excited and I'm sending her funny face emojis. She's precious. I miss her shame.

I lift my head up and there's a woman on stage. Was I really on my phone for that long? Where's Elik? Did I imagine the whole thing? I'm panicking now. My phone vibrates and I'm suddenly annoyed so I put it on silent. I'm still try to figure out what happened and where Elik disappeared to, or if he was there at all. I scan the room, it's a bit dark in here and I can't see him anywhere.

"Hey beautiful", a deep voice whispers in my ear. I almost jump and my blood runs cold. I know that voice, I used to love that voice! I turn my head and my eyes meet Elik's. He looks so good and clean I could eat him up. He takes my hand, I let him and he holds it, saying nothing. We listen to the speakers and my heart is just palpitating. We just sit there, my hand in his and I steal quick glances at him but each time I find him concentrating and looking at the front.

"I need to go. Are you coming to the poster session?" I ask in a hushed voice, leaning over. "No, I have some business to attend to. But I'm sure your poster is perfect, like you", he says and kisses the back of my hand. He takes my conference booklet and writes at the back, "Hotel Daniele, Room B14. I love you". He then stands up and leaves me sitting there even though I'm the one who said I was leaving!

I follow shortly after and find Bunke at the posters. He introduces me to his friends and they are cool people. The poster presentations go well and by 2 pm we are done. Networking is hard work, especially if you are not looking for anything. I don't want a job or anything at the moment but I just network for

possible collaborations and because that's what everyone else is doing anyway. I feel empty for some reason, I don't even eat much for lunch.

I leave Bunke and his friends and catch a taxi to the edge of Venice then walk the rest of the way. I'm in Venice and I intend to make the most of it. I jump on a water taxi and just sit watching the water as we move towards the islands. I drop off at Murano and walk around exploring the glass blowing factories. It's really amazing what they do with glass here! Before I know it, it's almost 7 pm so I jump on the water taxi, drop off at the station and I take a train back to the hotel. I feel so proud of myself for not thinking about Elik. I finally got over him for real. I take my laptop so I can submit that article. I go through the author guidelines then proof read our manuscript one more time. By the time I'm done, it's almost 9 pm. I submit and then take a long shower. I feel empty.

Bunke passes by just as I'm about to sleep. I can see his eyes wandering around my thighs. I'm sorry I just opened the door wearing boy shorts and a small top. Who needs to fully dress when they are going to bed? I was too sleepy to think straight. He wishes me good night then goes to his room. I tell him I will see him in the morning.

I really can't sleep. I get up, throw off the small top in exchange for a short dress. I take the lift down to reception and ask them to call me a taxi. As I step outside, the cold air hits me hard but the taxi is here already so I can't ask to go and get a jacket. I will be fine though, I'll be back in no time. In about 10 minutes we have arrived at my destination. "Grazie", I say as I pay and get out.

I walk into the hotel and the receptionist looks at me funny. She probably thinks I'm a hooker or something! I can't blame her though, because this dress is way too

short for the weather outside. After some convincing and talking slowly in English to get my point across, she lets me go up and shows me the elevator. Two floors later the lift lets me out and I'm counting room numbers. I find B14, I knock and wait. The door opens. Elik!

He gives me a hug but I shrug him off, I'm not here for that! I need to let him know that I don't want anything to do with him, not now, not ever! I have had a perfect year without him and I won't let him just waltz back into my life and destroy everything! He doesn't take me serious just like the old days! "Look what I got you. I hope you are still the same size!", he says. It's a lingerie set from Victoria's Secret. I remember the first time we walked into Victoria's Secret in Waterfront and he bought me a bra for R2000! I couldn't stop saying how stupid expensive that was! But he had said my boobs deserved the finer things in life and had bought equally expensive, matching panties. I know he's trying to distract me with this gift. I'm sorry, it's not going to work. I have had over a year of practicing how to resist him.

"Elik!"

"Yes beautiful!", he steps towards me but I step aside.

"Stop calling me that!" I snap.

"Well, technically I'm not calling you that, I'm just stating what you are!" he says, with a smug look on his face.

Wow. What am I gonna do with this man though! He hugs me tight, too tight. His hand lifts my chin up and looking into his eyes is my biggest mistake! He lowers his lips to meet mine for a brief kiss but I quickly look down. I can't let this happen.

"No Elik", I tell him. I'm not here for that. He hugs me and whispers.

"You still love me right?", he says. I keep quiet.

"Fierce? You do right?", he asks again but I remain silent.

"Well I still love you!", he says.

"Good for you!" I snap.

"I'm sorry Fierce. I'm so sorry baby. If you want to go just say the words. I won't stop you, I promise", he says still holding me. He kisses me again, deeper this time and I pull away and look down.

Suddenly I'm not so sure if I want to go or not. This man is my weakness and the longer I stay in this room, the slimmer the chances of me walking away. Many questions are buzzing in my head. Would it be wrong to just spend the night and not do anything? Ok, that's reaching, there's no spending the night with him without doing anything. If I sleep with him, will it be wrong? I mean, I used to sleep with him! Just once? For closure nje?

I lift my head to face him so I can tell him what's on my mind, he takes it as his cue to kiss me again. I feel his hand grabbing my bum and my dress is all the way up to my waist. I wish I hadn't worn these granny panties from Mr. Price though, I hope he doesn't notice. They are just so comfortable and I wasn't expecting any action. I mean I haven't gotten any in over a year! What would I need to walk around in lace for?

The dress comes off from the top of my head and I'm not wearing a bra because I was about to go to bed. I quickly remove my panties and kick them under the bed so he doesn't see them. I don't think they look that bad but if this is the last time I get with Elik, I need him to remember me as perfect. I need him to regret ever hurting me and not fighting hard enough to get me back.

He takes time looking at me as if it's the first time he's seeing me. I help him out of his clothes and an hour later, I'm lying exhausted in his arms, trying to catch my breath. I really put in the work, I need him to miss me. He intertwines his fingers with mine and I feel his wedding ring brush against my finger. I'm such a terrible person. His phone rings, well at least he can afford roaming rates! He reaches for it and puts his index finger on his lips, signaling me to stay quiet. I hate this. It's his wife checking in.

I listen to him go on about how well his day went, how he's alone in his room and how he just finished going through some documents and is about to sleep. He tells her he loves her and hangs up. So I'm 'documents' now? Just great! "Sorry about that baby. I had to take the call, you know she gets paranoid sometimes!", he says. I hate myself right now but as he pulls me closer for another go, I forget.

CHAPTER 8

It's 8 am. I overslept, I was really exhausted. Elik is already dressed and ready to go. Like why didn't he wake me up though? I immediately regret last night and I scurry out of bed. "Why didn't you wake me up? I'm late!" I say as I find my dress in a heap on the floor. He hugs me and kisses my forehead. "Good morning to you too!", he says. "I love you. I will always love you. But I need to go now. See you later?" he asks. "No, you won't see me", I say in my heart, but outwardly, I just smile at him and say maybe.

I take a quick shower then wiggle into my dress, trying to pull it down. I take the Victoria's Secret bag. Inside there's 300 Euros, maybe it's just some change he got from shopping. If I take this money does it mean I just got paid for my services? I don't care right now, I'll take it. After all Elik put me through, I deserve it.

I really hope I don't bump into Bunke when I get to our hotel. He must be gone to the conference anyway by now. I rush to the lift and as I step in, Bunke steps out. "Madam!", he says looking at me suspiciously. I am so embarrassed right now, I wish the world could open and swallow me up. "Are you ok?" he asks. "I'll see you later Bunke. I'll meet you at the conference. Don't wait for me", I say and the lift finally closes. I get ready and I'm in a good mood. I'm going to wear this Victoria's Secret thing today. It fits perfectly! Red is really my colour! The bra fits like a second skin, my boobs are well pleased and the Brazilian cut underwear makes me feel like a model. I fix my braids and wear one of the dresses I consider hot. Not trashy hot but classy hot. I'm going to a conference not a club after all.

It's after tea break by the time I get there. Today is the last full day as we are flying out tomorrow evening. I find Bunke and he looks at me suspiciously but I tell him I wasn't feeling well and had to go out to get some ginger to chew on and that I'm feeling better now. I don't think he buys it but thankfully he doesn't push it. He says I look beautiful and I say "Thanks bro", then fist bump him.

A waiter walks up to me and hands me a note. Bunke is chatting with his friends so I read the note. "Baby, this conference is boring. Let's go to my room and find more interesting things to do, I really enjoyed you last night. I need some more". I promise you, I hate this guy, I'm so not going! I join Bunke and his friends. They

are talking about the English premium soccer league and I have nothing to contribute to the conversation.

I tell you, something is wrong with me. I'm seriously messed up in the head. I'm sure my mother dropped me on my head as a child and something moved out of place. I'm not normal. I leave the venue and ask for a taxi. 20 minutes later I'm in Hotel Daniele, knocking on Room B14. Elik opens immediately and before long he's seeing the red lingerie and he likes what he sees. We spend the afternoon in bed putting the work in and catching up in between. I admit that I occasionally thought of him. He says he always knew we would find our way back to each other because we are soulmates. I don't even know what that means, like wouldn't he had married me rather if we were soulmates?

All the feelings I once had for him are back and I don't know how I will get rid of them. Why did I let this happen? How? I was doing well for a good year and I'm sure I had even become a virgin again. Then I had to go and throw it all away! I have to admit though, I missed him and maybe it's because I have never been with anyone else so I don't have anyone to compare him to, but damn, he knows how to put it down!

I'm sure Bunke is worried about me since I just disappeared without a word, but I will spend the night here. I don't want to but I don't want to leave either. I hate Elik but I love him. I curl closer in his arms, for the very last time, I promise. I just need closure. He says and does all the right things to me. I will stay the night and deal with feelings tomorrow.

It's 8 am and I have to go. Bunke must be worried sick now and that's unsettling me. The last thing I need is him telling Prof back at school that he can't find me. They treat me like a child sometimes. But Bunke can wait one more hour I still need to finish getting my closure here. Elik and I shower together for old time's sake and we laugh like everything is ok. I wear yesterday's dress as I have nothing else to wear. Elik suggests that I wear one of his shirts but that's just absurd, I can't walk out in just a man's shirt!

"I love you Fierce", he says and sounds really genuine. I really wish he could stop saying that. I look at him. He is just my kind of dark and that ugly scar over his left eye looks so cute to me. He's a young professor who rocks a suit like a model and smells like a million rands. That's rare to find. At university, it's like the more educated the men become the less they care about how they look, as if their powerful minds are enough! Besides, most professors are old anyway and look scruffy.

Elik is everything I ever wanted. I don't understand why he betrayed me like that. Just like that I feel the tears coming and I start crying.

"Baby? I'm sorry", he sits me down on the bed and kneels between my knees. I'm still crying.

"What's wrong?" he asks.

Would it be wrong if I told him that his sex is so good I'm crying that he didn't marry me so I can have it all the time? That I really need him in my life even though I know I can't have him?

"Nothing. I'm fine!". I try and pull myself together.

"Talk to me baby", he says.

I sniff and wipe my tears but they just keep coming.

"Fierce, I know I did you wrong. I know. I loved you baby and I still do. I think about you and often I wish it was you that I married. You would have been a perfect wife for me", he says.

"Then why didn't you? Why didn't you marry me?", I yell. I didn't mean to yell, it just happened.

He looks down and doesn't respond.

Since we're talking now, let me get some answers.

"Was it really an arranged marriage Elik?" he shakes his head, still looking down.

"No", he says, then pauses.

"It's just, I had already paid lobola for her. Then I met you and you were amazing. I couldn't lose you. I so wish I had met you first. You would be my wife right now", he says.

"Do you love her?", I ask but I don't even know why I'm asking all this.

"I love her, yes. But not as much as I love you", he says and kisses my hands. I feel like believing him.

"I'm sorry", he says holding my hands. I've been down this road so many times before, I don't want to walk it again.

"So, baby, are you seeing someone now? Was there anyone after me?", he asks. I shake my head. I don't know why I'm telling him the truth, it's not like he deserves it.

"There's been no one else", I say.

"So, all your life, you've only slept with me? I'm the only one who knows you like that?" his eyes light up as he asks that. I nod this time. I just haven't been able to give myself to another man, I don't know why. He looks at me so sincerely and then buries his head in my thighs and hugs me tight.

"I messed up", he keeps saying.

I have to go now though. I have opened old wounds and I will need another year to heal.

Bunke was worried sick about me. He snapped at me when I got to the hotel and I apologised profusely. He has calmed down now. I packed as soon as I got to my room and we headed to the airport. I feel a pain lingering in my throat and a hollowness in my heart. But I will be just fine. I just need to forget about Elik. I'm looking at my ticket. "Bunke! We have a 14 hour layover in Doha! That's just terrible. What will we do for 14 hours at an airport?" I show him the ticket. "I called Qatar airways, they organise rooms for passengers with long layovers at the airport hotel. So we are good", he says. "Thank you", I hug him, he is truly a life saver. I have no idea what I would have done all night at the airport. I was going to lose my mind. He doesn't hug me back, I think he's still upset with me for disappearing like that and refusing to tell him where I was.

We had a smooth flight and we arrived in Doha at 7 pm. We go to the Qatar service desk as soon as we disembark. I'm on my phone checking for an open Wi-Fi signal while Bunke talks to a lady behind the desk. Bunke pulls me aside and he looks very worried. Turns out there was a misunderstanding and they thought we were a couple so they only reserved one room and now they can't get us a second room because it's short notice.

"You can have the room madam. I will be fine", he says.

"No Bunke that's crazy! I can't take the room and let you sleep on a bench!", I say.

"It's fine really! I don't mind", he says.

"No that's ridiculous. Let's share the room. It's just sleeping! It's no big deal!", I say.

I don't see why not, he can have the one side of the bed and I'll have the other. We will just sleep.

"Are you sure?" he asks.

"Yes. As long as you don't snore!", I play slap him on the back.

We take the room. Did he honestly think I'd leave him to sleep on those metal chairs when he's the one who got the room? We find the hotel and the room is exquisite. I just love it. Too bad we just sleeping then waking up and flying back to Cape Town. We won't get to enjoy it. Bunke asks to shower first. He takes forever in there while I'm on my laptop. Finally, he is done. He comes out with just a towel wrapped around his waist and that chiseled chest all out in the open. Damn you Bunke!

I go to the shower. I just need a quick shower then I can sleep. I'm done in no time. I wrap a towel tightly around myself. I need to find my pyjamas so I can go back into the bathroom and dress up. Then I realise we checked in our bags all the way to Cape Town that's why we don't have them. Ah man! Now I have to sleep in jeans and wear the same jeans tomorrow. That sucks, but there's no other way. I'm having this conversation all by myself in my head.

Bunke is staring at me. I can feel his eyes boring right through me. I turn to face him so I can voice my predicament. He looks into my eyes and I can't help but look at him. I don't think he is blinking, it's weird. He really is a good looking man, not in a pretty way but in a rough manly type of way. He's the Elik kind of black chocolate with the right amount of muscle and broad enough shoulders. I think I have a type!

"Lastborn", he says. Did he just call me by name? He's never called me that before. He calls me madam! And I hate that name! He reaches for my towel and pulls me towards him, all the time holding the stare. Why am I not stopping him? This is bad. Very very bad. The towel falls. I can't even help myself, I just stand there not sure what to do. He sits there, his hands on my waist, studying my body from head to toe. I shiver a little, feeling a bit awkward and battling with my thoughts. Why am I not stopping him?

He stands and kisses me too hard and his towel falls too. His skin is on my skin and he has one hand on the arch of my back, holding me close. Unlike Elik who works me up and romances me and tells me sweet nothings, until I'm a marshmallow, Bunke just throws me on the bed, kisses me from the tummy down, just enough and then goes straight for the kill.

He eventually finds his way through and my body finds a way to acclimatise to him. He's going all animalistic on me, grabbing my hair a little too hard and choking my neck. I can't really move, I'm trapped under him and his weight is crushing me. The only sounds in the room is me choke-screaming, him breathing and the bed hitting against the headboard. As he let out that final groan, he bites into my collarbone so hard I yell and claw his back. The pain complements the pleasure perfectly and my body just erupts and joins him in the climax. We are all sweaty and I'm sure my body is all bruised.

We look away from each other and nothing is said. We are just listening to each other trying to catch our breath. What have I done? What's wrong with me? I just graduated from that celibate girl to a hoe in 3 days! What kind of person sleeps with two guys in one day! I just had Elik this morning!

I can't sleep, I'm fighting with my conscience but I convince myself that these things happen and I can't be the worst girl in the world.

I smile a little though. Like who knew Bunke had it in him! And the whole roughness took me by surprise, I wasn't expecting that.

He reaches for me and instinctively I turn towards him. I hoped he would hold me so I wouldn't feel so used. He kisses me on the forehead then lets me fit my body into his. He holds me until I fall asleep.

I was woken up in the middle of the night by a heavy weight on my body. I was too tired and sleepy so I just lay flat on my stomach and let him have me. It was hard to ignore him though and in no time we were going at it like animals. And ya it's true what they say about Nigerians.

I saw the lines my nails left on his back as he got out of bed this morning and went to shower. I asked him to give me space to dress up after I showered. That's funny considering this is someone I spent the whole night doing unbelievable things with, but now I don't want him to see me naked! I have marks on my neck, teeth marks on my shoulder and bruises on my waist, thighs and back.

We have a flight to catch and we really can't look each other in the eye. I think we should never talk about what happened last night. What happens in Doha must stay in Doha! The flight to Cape Town was quite smooth, to my relief. We didn't talk much. I fell asleep on his shoulder and he covered me with a blanket. I wish I knew what's going on in his mind. Unfortunately, I don't have time to be nursing his feelings right now, I'm battling my own demons.

The shuttle dropped me first in my complex then took Bunke to campus. I just want to sleep and forget. It's back to waking up early tomorrow. As I get into bed, I

get a text from Bunke. "I'm so sorry Fierce", it reads. Like why is he sorry again? "Don't be. Good night B!", I type. Another message comes in, it's from Elik. Yes, I kind of unblocked him on WhatsApp. "I hope my beautiful baby travelled well. I had really missed you. And I can tell you've been eating your pineapples *wink*", I blush at that. Before I can respond, he sends through another one. "Can't wait to see you again" it says. Ah no, you will not be seeing me again Mr. I'm done with you. But I can't deny that I feel guilty. I feel like I cheated on Elik. Why did I have to go and hurt myself like this? I mean both these guys are married, and nothing good can come out of it. But it just happened, I didn't ask for any of it. "Hope you had a safe flight too. Goodnight Elik", I type and get into bed.

CHAPTER 9

It's Friday and it's back to the lab. I'm going to call Prof and tell him I'm sick, Bunke and the others can surely handle the Indian students. I just want to lie in bed. It feels weird to just do nothing, I'm so used to working all the time. I reach for my laptop but decide not to take it. I just lie there. This sucks! It's just 10 am. What will I do all day? I reach for my phone and I'm calling Elik. I quickly hang up but it must have been too late because he calls right back.

After a long 4 minutes I hang up. I think I just let him convince me to come to Johannesburg tomorrow! I'm so lost it's not even funny anymore. Ok, this staying at home is not working. I'm going to campus. I don't have fuel as usual but I have Elik now, so I can ask him for money. I want to send the subsistence money that

remained from Venice to my mother. I should do that now actually, since I'm having a slow day. I take my passport and proof of address and head out.

I don't know who I am anymore. I asked Elik to 'borrow' me a R1000 and he gave me R2500. I deserve it! I really need to stop telling myself this. I'm now one of those girls sleeping with married men and asking them for money, the girls I despise and call names. I'm one of them now. This needs to stop and that trip to Johannesburg tomorrow is not happening. I'm better than that.

I just filled my tank now. I'm sure my car is going to stop today because I don't remember the last time it had a full tank. I drive to Bellville and stop at Mukuru.com. Bellville is crowded and buzzing with people as always. I find an FNB ATM and I eWallet my brother in Hillbrow R500, then I go to Mukuru.com and I send R5000 to my mother and R1500 to my brother, the teacher. I'm officially broke.

"Sister, Muriright?", the guy greets me in Shona "Hie. How are you?", I say. "Unoda kutumira mari?" he continues. "I'm sorry I don't speak Shona", I say. "Oh! You are Ndebele!", he says. "Yep", I say. "I'm sorry. I was asking how much you want to send", he says. We chat about the struggles back home as he assists me. I'm done, now I can go to campus.

I get to our lab and there's no one so I go to the rheology lab. It's lunch when I get there. Bunke is laughing with Brain, Ndivhu and an Indian student at the corner. "Fierce", Brain says putting down his juice and coming to hug me. I join the guys. "Madam", Bunke says and quickly looks away. I hug Ndivhu and hug Bunke last. His scent brings back a memory I would rather not think about right now.

“Oga is telling us how much fun you guys had in Venice! I'm so jealous”, Ndivhu says. “Ya, it was fun. Let me get some food guys”, I say. It was fun. I don't know if I can call that fun though. All I know is I messed up big time in Hotel Daniele and at that Doha airport hotel. I grab a side plate and put crumbed chicken, fish fillet, 2 kebabs, small burgers and a fried chicken drumstick. My plate is full but I eat when I'm stressed and right now I'm very stressed.

“So what did you guys do so far?” I ask. “Nothing much. We were supposed to start at 9 but we only started at 10. African time. Prof did the welcoming then left the students with us. We went over theory all morning so you can do a demo on how to use the rheometer after lunch. I nod and keep eating. I catch Bunke looking at me and he looks away when our eyes meet. I finish eating.

It's after lunch and I have finished a whole demonstration on rheopexy. Some students looked at me like they don't know that some materials increase in viscosity with increasing shear. So I had to go into theory before I did the demo. “Yes, I know, thixotropy is the common flow behaviour. But some materials thicken with increasing shear rate, they show what we call rheopectic behaviour. Please don't confuse that with dilatancy. Rheopexy is time dependent”, I explain. “Like which product”, one student asks. “Well, like, let's see.....Magnesia magma and gypsum paste for example”, I say. “And clay suspensions”, Bunke adds in. Another hand. “Why do those materials thicken?”. Are you kidding me right now? I was told these are Engineering students from India. Isn't India in Asia? So, since there are Asian, shouldn't they know these things in their sleep? Or do they just know Maths and IT? I'm confused.

“There could be a number of factors determining the rheopectic behaviour. It depends on the material really. But what normally happens is that, in a colloidal suspension, when the amount of shear stress exceeds the ability of the inter-particle forces to maintain their original structure, the fluid enters a state of flocculation and it begins to behave more like a solid. You understand?” I say. No response. I look at the guys to bail me out but they just shrug. They probably went through it already and think it's my turn to suffer. Ok, I'm not winning here, maybe let me just show them what I mean. They all gather around the computer.

By 4 pm I'm glad it's time out. I don't think any of the students understood anything I said! “Guys. Are we really going to do this for the whole of next week?” I ask as we are going back to our lab. They laugh. “You explain well though”, Brain says. I flash him a smile and I think he just blushed. Well, I don't think I explain well but to fellow Engineers I expect things to just make sense! Of the 4 of us, I'm those Indian students' best bet, if they are to learn anything.

Brain is brainy but he struggles with explaining. He can show you or even do it for you but he never seems to find the right words to explain. Bunke on the other hand, between his accent and his deep voice, it's sometimes hard to understand him if you are not used to him. And I think he also just doesn't like talking. With a body like that, he doesn't have to talk really, he just has to do. Wow, my mind drifted away from the point so fast! Ndivhu on the other hand, I'm convinced he doesn't know much.

We are back in the lab and it feels weird. I make coffee and for the first time ever, I make coffee for all of them. I actually just wanted to make coffee for Bunke but thought it's best if I just make for all. I look at the data I collected before I left and

it's just too much. Like, when am I going to analyse all this! Bunke keeps looking my way, he thinks I can't see him. He's got this guilty look on his face, I wish he could stop already.

Oh flip! I need to text Elik and tell him I'm not coming. I've decided that I hate him so I'm going to block him.

"Fierce", Ndivhu says sitting on my desk, facing me.

"Yes Ndivhu!". Can't this boy see I'm working here!

"I met this pretty young thang in the club last week and we just hit it off you know. But now I'm in deep ish", he says. "Ok. Speak! What's wrong?", I say.

"I don't want her anymore. But she's in my room and she's not getting the message. How do I throw her out, gently you know, these girls can get crazy!", he says. Yes we know how his girls get crazy. I don't blame them, no one likes to be played! One actually stabbed him in the arm once, but clearly, he doesn't learn.

Ndivhu and his drama though.

"Dude. Just tell her you don't want her anymore. It's that simple!", I say.

Ndivhu looks at me.

"It's not working. I've tried, look". He opens his WhatsApp. The girl is saved as Q. I have a feeling he doesn't know her name.

"What's her name?" I ask.

"Ey, I can't say it man. It's a Khosa name", he says.

"Xhosa! Not Khosa!" I correct him. He laughs. In this lab, my tongue is the only one evolved enough to pronounce clicks.

"Does she study here?" I ask. "Na, she's at Varsity College" he says.

"I see!"

The messages between Ndivhu and this girl are very graphic. If I'm to help I need to see the whole chat so I scroll to the top. They just met last week but there's a lot of messages, mostly from ugirl! She's too much. She sends nudes, that I quickly scroll past. She asks for sex. She thanks him for sex. She reminds him that they will have sex later. It's just sex! He does say to her somewhere, "I'm not the right man for you", but she says he is and sends a picture of her boobs, to entice him I think.

"Fierce. I need my space. I need her out of my room. She won't leave!" Ndivhu sounds desperate.

"But if you 'hit it off' as you say. Why exactly don't you want her again?", I need to know. "Well, to be honest. She gave it up too easily. She stopped being attractive at that point", he says. I throw a quick glance at Bunke and he's not looking. Does he think the same about me? That I gave it up too easily? Am I now less attractive? Was I ever attractive to him in the first place?

"Ok fine Ndivhu. Give me your keys, I'll go get rid of her", I say.

"For real?", he runs to his desk and gives me a bunch of keys.

"Give me R50 as well for her transport", he owes her that at least.

He reluctantly gives me the R50.

"I'll be back guys. I have an eviction to make. Ndivhu, stay here and don't answer your phone!". Brain and Bunke are looking at me like I'm crazy, probably wondering how I'm going to do that. I'm not quite sure myself.

I drive to rez, I know it's just here but I need to be back soon. I don't have all day! I make it up the steps to Ndivhu's room. I knock on the door, no answer. I wait. She's in there I know. There was music playing when I got here and it's now quiet. Oh well. I look for the key that matches the name on the padlock. Found it. I open.

She jumps out of bed, shocked to see me. She looks quite young. Why is she doing this to herself! "Sorry sisi, I need to ask you to leave" I say. She looks at me then crosses her arms across her chest. I really don't have time for this. She is wearing a mini skirt and a string top and she looks at home next to that three-quarter bed.

"Squatting is not allowed! So I'm giving you 5 minutes to get your stuff and get out. Otherwise I'll call security to throw you out" I say. I sound very mean. She stops looking defiant and now looks scared.

"But where is Ndivhu? I need to wait for him", she says.

"You have a phone mos, so you'll call him or whatever, just get your stuff and get out", I say, my voice rising. There's so much anger in my voice. I'm angry at Elik and at Bunke and I'm taking it out on this poor girl.

She packs her stuff. She tries to call someone, Ndivhu I assume, but the phone goes unanswered. She looks really hurt. Me of all people should understand but she's still young, she'll learn. I scan the room. It's the basic rez room. It has a bed, a study desk piled with books and a book shelf. At least in post grad there's a communal kitchen shared by only three people. In undergrad you would have your single bed, a boiling kettle on the floor, a 2 plate stove under the bed, a desk, a bookshelf on the wall, a fridge and a microwave all in a small room.

She's done packing and is looking at me like I should tell her what to do next. I give her the R50 and she takes it without even asking where it's coming from. "You can go now", I say to her. She walks out, I lock Ndivhu's room and walk behind her until she's out of rez. She walks in the direction of the gate, to get a taxi to Bellville I assume. I drive back to the department. I just did her a favour, Ndivhu was never going to be serious about her!

The guys are sitting on my desk when I get back. They want to hear about the eviction! Who knew guys like things kanje! "It's done!" I tell them and break it down for them, exaggerating here and there to make it seem like I'm bad ass. Ndivhu hugs me and thanks me. He says he has blocked her on WhatsApp and I make him promise to stop playing with people's hearts. He promises but we all know it's just empty words.

Why am I feeling so guilty for what I did to that girl. I was just helping a friend, what's wrong with that? But maybe it wasn't my place and I was wrong for it. I can't focus so I call it a night. I'll come in tomorrow.

"Guys. Who's coming in tomorrow?", I ask.

"I'm going to a friend's wedding tomorrow", Brain says.

"I'll be hungover. I need to go out tonight and celebrate my freedom!" Ndivhu says.

"I might come. I'll see. My chapter 2 needs some work", Bunke says.

Alright then. I take Ndivhu's access card and say bye to the guys.

I get home, eat and watch an episode of Our Perfect Wedding on YouTube. I unblock Elik, to see if he sent me messages. None come through. I'm upset. Just because I don't want him doesn't mean he shouldn't want me too! I keep watching Our Perfect Wedding, but it's a boring episode without drama, so I eventually fall asleep on the couch.

CHAPTER 10

Nothing interesting happened all week. I went to campus on Saturday. I really need to get a life! Bunke was already there, buried in his work, when I got here.

We spent the whole day working and never once do we bring up that night in Doha. Maybe it's better that way. It's not like there's anything to discuss, what happened happened. We spent the whole week in lab coats, with the Indian students. Teaching and demonstrating. "I don't get paid for this!", I complained to the guys every evening when we got back to the lab but they didn't seem bothered, maybe because they left all the talking to me!

It's Friday and the training is over. I usually don't care what day of the week it is but for once I'm glad it's Friday. Bunke and I still haven't discussed that forbidden night. I also haven't asked anyone for money this whole week! Maybe because lunch was catered for everyday, but still! It's a breakthrough. I feel so sad, I'm not sure why, I think I'll just go grab something to eat. Food soothes me.

"I'll have a chip roll, please", I say, handing the woman behind the window a R50 note. "And a can of Coke zero too", I say. "What sauce?", she asks. "Seafood", I say. I wait. I'm going through Facebook and just trolling people in my head for no reason. She looks so fat from that angle! With that stomach, she should never again be allowed to wear a bikini! That's an ugly dress! Girl, your man ugly! Lose that weave babe, it's not working! I mentally troll as I go through my timeline. I haven't posted anything on Facebook in a while. I have nothing to post. I checked in in Venice though!

My chip roll is here. Now I can go sit on the bench with my thoughts and eat carbohydrates and drink sugarless water. Looks like Prof hasn't left yet, his Chevrolet is still in the parking lot. These face bricks look older every time I sit

here and look at them. Just years back, I was excited by campus life and would take pictures and upload them on Facebook. I think I need to go home. I feel so sad and the chip roll isn't helping. There's a bash at the student centre tonight. From here I can see students headed there and guys carrying equipment from a truck. I have only been to one of these bashes once and I decided it wasn't my thing. I had been convinced by a friend to just go and see. It had cost only R10. I had not enjoyed standing the entire time with drunk girls shoving me and some drunk guys grabbing my ass. I decided on that day that it was just not my thing.

I bite into my chip roll. These chips are very hard. It's like I'm chewing through a full potato. I eat on though, I don't waste food. White ducks walk in front of me. These ducks have been here since I was first year! I don't know if they are the same ones but they look very similar. I'm done eating, it's time to go back to the lab and work.

"Fierce, I have an extra ticket to the bash. You know I was gonna take that girl, Q, but you know. Please please come with me. You need to loosen up, besides I owe you one", Ndivhu says. For a 30 year old he really is childish! Brain looks at me with a disapproving eye. "No dude. That's not my kind of scene", I say. He is begging, in another accent that might have been cute. I say no. He begs and begs and begs. "Ok, ok, I'll stay just one hour and I'll leave. Deal?" I give in. "Deal!" he says and we fist bump. I'm wearing ripped boyfriend jeans, AllStars and a plain top. This won't work. I look too casual.

I'm excited by the idea of going to the bash now. "I'm going home, I'll be back at 8 Ndivhu", I say. We agree that I'll tell him when I'm outside his rez. "Lastborn!" Brain says. "Bashes and dirty parties are not good for a real woman! Don't go!" he says. Whaaaaaat? What did this man just say to me? Who does he think he is? He just became even less attractive right now. I'm just going to ignore that comment! I wish Bunke a good weekend because I'm not planning on coming in tomorrow. I don't say anything to Brain. After that comment he doesn't deserve a good weekend.

I get home and shower and I feel good. That sadness I felt earlier is gone. I pick one of the dresses I used to wear for Elik. He liked this red one the best. I do my face, the best I can. I haven't mastered these eyebrows on fleek, they don't look natural to me and I decided the first time they started trending that I don't like them. I tie my braids up in a bun and I pull out a pair of black high heels. The dress is a little tight on the bum but it will work.

I stand in front of the mirror and feel like taking a picture of myself and sending it to all my exes just to show them what they gave up. I look fierce! I'm ready to paint the campus red. It's 10 pm! I'm 2 hours late but it's ok, if I learnt anything from my clubbing days, it's that it only starts really getting down after 11. I'm outside postgrad rez at 10:30 and Ndivhu comes out. He's wearing jeans and a T-shirt. I now feel overdressed. I get out of the car and Ndivhu is staring at me. "Damn mama!" he says. "Who knew you could be this hot!" he says. Is that a compliment? He keeps wowing. It's enough now, I get it, I look good and more so because all you ever see me in is jeans, T-shirt and a labcoat!

We walk towards the student centre and pass a couple making out by the tennis coat. Is that guy's hand really under that girl's dress? Anyway, it's none of my business. We pass another girl on her knees, throwing up. This early? The music is so loud I can hear it from here. "You look so fine, Fierce. Damn!" Ndivhu says. Ok. He really really needs to stop now. I hope he isn't getting any ideas. It's hard enough with Brain trying to wife me and having gave it up to Bunke! I can't have drama with all three of them in that lab! Please.

It's loud. People are drinking and dancing. Some girls are twerking on tables and it's just chaos. "What do you want to drink?" Ndivhu shouts over the music. "Coke zero" I shout back, so he can hear me. He looks at me funny but doesn't say anything. We walk to the bar and he buys a 6 pack of castle light and gets me a can of Coke zero and water. I'm really feeling the music. You know house music just gets you moving and before I know it, we are dancing. I have loosened up. I really needed this. My song comes on, 'Oliver Twist - D'Banj'. I really love that song. I sing along as I get down and dance. Ndivhu looks pleasantly surprised and he's dancing with me.

"I'll be right back", Ndivhu says. I nod and keep dancing until I really need to pee. There's toilets inside the student centre. I push my way through and finally make it to the door then walk to the bathroom. There's a queue. I hate this. I have always hated this part from clubbing days. When you have to pee, you do it in front of all of us, we are not closing the door just in case you fall asleep in there! It's finally my turn. The girl before me is still struggling with putting her breasts

back into her jump suit. She's practically naked as she had to drop the whole thing. Doesn't she know never to wear a jumpsuit when drinking? The girls in this queue are drunk and ratchet and laughing too loud. I leave when I'm done. That's how it's done ladies, short dress, no underwear and those bathroom trips will be a breeze.

I can't find Ndivhu anywhere. I don't even have a phone to call him. I gave him my phone and keys to keep for me in his pockets. I have been looking for 30 minutes now and this guy spilled alcohol on me. I stink. I need to find a phone and try and see if I can call him but I don't know anyone here.

My wrist watch says it's 2:12 am. I walk out of the barricades and into the open air. I want to pee again. That water I drank eeish. I think I will go behind the clinic and pee, no one will see me there, I don't want to queue in the toilets again. Let me take off my shoes, mud and grass damage the heels of shoes and Elik bought these red bottoms from overseas honey! I ain't damaging them.

You've got to be kidding me! Really now? These guys are bonking right here, outside. That guy must be strong! He's literally holding her in the air! Wow! "Go away", the guy says in a groaning voice. I laugh and walk on. Kids! I'll have to pee elsewhere I guess. The other side of the library will do. There's no one there but I can still hear that girl screaming. She's having sex outside for crying out loud! She needs to shut up.

What to do now? I'm getting cold and there's no hope of finding Ndivhu. I also need to lie down, I'm tired. There's only one option left. I really shouldn't be doing this shame. But what option do I have? I'm just going to ask for a phone, call Ndivhu, get my stuff and go home.

I knock as gently as is humanly possible. I knock again. This is absurd. I should just go. I'm freezing out here. The door opens and he's rubbing his eyes. "I'm sorry. Can I just use your phone? I can't find Ndivhu and he has my keys and phone", I whisper. Maybe if I whisper I won't fully wake him up. Wait, so people sleep in boxers now?

"Come in", he says and gets the light. He's looking at me and I can see him waking up. I've seen that look before. He pushes the door with his foot and it bangs shut. 'Just give me the phone dude! I'm getting feelings I shouldn't be getting right now and I think it's best if I leave. I'll make the phone call outside even', I say in my head. Bunke steps towards me and he has that look in his eyes and I feel a shiver run up and down my spine. I should have known this little red dress would get me in trouble!

I think he wants to see if I will walk away. I don't. He's so close now and I know I'm wanted. I shouldn't be doing this, I have to leave right now. But my body always goes against everything that makes sense! I lift my hands and pull down his neck. These heels have borrowed me height, I'm not so short today. My dress is on the floor in no time and I'm holding on to the edge of the bed and probably waking up the neighbours.

CHAPTER 11

I'm hopeless. My wrist watch says it's 10 am! Did I really over sleep that much? I tiptoe and find my dress on the floor. I dress up as quickly and as quietly as I can, not wanting to wake Bunke up. I can't find my other shoe. Maybe it's on his side of the bed. I tiptoe gently. His eyes are open! He closes them and pretends to be sleeping but I already saw that he's awake. I find my shoe and walk out. No more need for tiptoeing, he's awake mos.

I walk to the opposite wing and knock on Ndivhu's door. He opens it just barely and peeps. He doesn't even greet, he closes himself in and me outside. I hear giggling inside. He's comes back out and closes the door behind him. He really doesn't want me to see whoever is inside. "What happened to you last night? I couldn't find you!" he says handing me my keys and phone. "I...ah...I couldn't find you. So I went and crushed by a friend's place". Thankfully he doesn't ask which friend. I thank him for a great yesterday and go my way. I need a shower and some more sleep. I feel so exhausted. I get home and shower then I'm not so sleepy anymore. I clean my flat, do laundry and I fold my clothes. I cook rice, prepare some mixed vegetables on the side and roast chicken in the oven. I have enough food for the whole week now. I'm now thoroughly exhausted so I sleep.

When I wake up, it's 7 pm and there's no hope of falling asleep tonight. Maybe I can watch all Lord of the Rings movies, I can use some Legolas awesomeness right now. I get ice cream and sit on the bed with my laptop. This laptop is the one

constant thing in my life. I'm halfway through The Fellowship of the Ring and I feel so bored. I think I'll go for a drive.

I put on pyjama shorts and a T-shirt so that I'll be ready for bed when I get back. I turn into Durban Road. It's pretty quiet at this time of the night. I turn left onto Voortrekker then right onto Robert Sobukwe. I proceed onto Symphony Way and I'm by the gate. "Good evening", I say to the camouflage clad security guard. These guys look serious, they have guns even. "Can I see your boot", he says. A good evening will do sir! How rude! I open the boot for him and he checks then bangs my boot so hard, I cringe. "Student card", he says. I show him and show him the campus parking disk as well, because I know he will ask to see it. He nods and opens the boom gate and I drive in. I park outside the postgrad rez. I'm walking bare footed. I know it's illegal to drive without shoes on but I wasn't planning on driving this far. Besides Cape Town traffic cops have better things to do at night, like sleep, than wait on the road to check if I'm wearing shoes or not.

What exactly am I doing though? I knock once and then again. The door opens and I walk in past him. He looks surprised but doesn't stop me. I literally throw myself at him and thankfully he receives me. That could have been very embarrassing. I want to kiss him but he's too tall, even on tiptoe I can't reach him. It's as if he reads my mind because he lifts me onto the bed and now I'm the taller one. We don't talk at all we just attack each other then pass out exhausted.

The next time I open my eyes it's 2 am. I slide out of bed so I can go. "Stay", he says and pulls me closer. I stay. Like what exactly am I doing with Bunke? I need

Jesus. I think I'm possessed. I leave early morning before the church people see me and start judging me. Bunke was still 'sleeping' when I left, it's better that way though, we get to avoid the awkward morning after.

It's Monday, I'm in the lab at 7 am. I did nothing productive all weekend so I feel guilty. I have to work hard this week otherwise I'll do my PhD for 10 years like some people we know. Brain is already in. He asks about my weekend, I say it was good. I ask about his and he says he had a good time with his friends. I'm happy for him.

"Fierce", he says as I hand him a cup of coffee. "I'm not good with these things but I love you and I want you to be my wife", he says. He looks so sincere, I'm not sure what to say to that. Brain. Why? He is a decent guy, good looking and intelligent. He undoubtedly has a bright future and his work brings in the most funding to our centre. But I don't know, I'm just not attracted to him at all. He doesn't have that thing. He would treat me like a queen I have no doubt about that but no. Never. "I have so much going on right now Brain. My life is a mess. I don't have room for a man", I say. I feel bad. I hug him from the back and he nods. "I love you", he says. "I know". I know he does and in future I might regret friendzoning him but the heart wants what it wants and unfortunately for me, my heart wants things that are already taken and things it can never truly have.

But it's not my fault though. I'm a good person. I'm 25 and have only slept with 2 guys. Besides, Elik married his wife when he was already with me so we can't technically say I went after a married man. And Bunke, I don't know what's going on there. We don't talk about it, we just do. Besides, is he still married if he hasn't seen his wife in over 3 years? Speaking of which, Bunke must never happen again. It's been fun but it has to stop before things spiral out of control.

Bunke walks in with Ndivhu. I high five Ndivhu and I don't know what to do with Bunke. So I just say hi. "Good morning madam", he says with a smile. He's still calling me that! "Ndivhu, come and help me with something here", I say. He comes. I'm on the VFS website and I can't quite figure out the details they require in some section. "I don't know. I'm still using a study permit", he says. This boy is not serious about life. "Why? Apply for a Critical Skills Visa Ndivhu!". He shrugs. I don't think he's taking this serious so I drop it.

"Anyway. My mother tells me there's a cash flow problem back home. She said she went to the bank 3 days in a row and was told there was no money. Is there another way I can send money home?" I ask. "Use Ecocash. She will even get it in US dollars or she can go and buy groceries like at Greens and get cash back. But the cash back will be bond notes", he says. We talk about home and I realise just how much I miss my parents. I send my mother an "I love you". She calls back immediately and I have to go outside. She thinks I'm dying because why else would I be saying things like I love you to her. Growing up we never said such things, it was obvious that our parents loved us and we loved them, there was no reason to say it.

I'm working today and I don't need any disturbances. Bunke brought me a toasted chicken mayo sandwich for lunch. He is sweet. Brain hasn't said much to me and Ndivhu is on serious mode today. I actually think I will pull an all nighter. I'm behind schedule. My Gantt chart says I'm 3 weeks behind. Ndivhu leaves at 23h00, Brain follows shortly after. At 01h00, Bunke wakes me up. I had fallen asleep on my desk.

I feel so sleepy. I think I'll go up to the canteen and then take a power nap on the couch then come back to the lab. "You can come and nap in my room you know", Bunke offers when I tell him my plan. I'm skeptical but a bed is better than a couch. "Ok I'll be there shortly. Leave the door unlocked", I say. He nods. I copy some data to MS Excel, apply Power Law and plot my graph. It looks very nice. I will have a very good article from this data, I can feel it.

I'm off to take my power nap. Bunke is asleep when I get to his room or pretending to be. I can't sleep in jeans, so I take those off and slip in under cover with just a T-shirt on. He turns towards me. I knew he wasn't sleeping! He puts me to sleep in no time. I'm getting addicted to this.

Bunke is not there when I wake up. It's already 8 am! I'm upset with myself. This is so not on. I just wanted at least 2 hours of sleep but now I've been knocked out for 6 hours! That's not life. I find a new toothbrush in the bathroom, I use that, I get into the shower and dry myself with his towel. We are tight like that now, we are sharing towels.

“What happened to pulling an all nighter?” Ndivhu asks as I walk in. This boy is too forward! “I slept in the car”, I lie. “Good morning madam”, Bunke says. I blush and say hi. I greet Brain and I get to working. I've decided to pull all nighters this whole week and sleep on the couch in the canteen or in my car. But clearly I wasn't prepared yesterday so I will do better from today.

My first stop is at the technician, he does something on his computer and tells me my access card is fixed. I drive home and pick up clothes and toiletries and snacks. I've done this so many times before, I'm a pro at functioning with minimal sleep. On my way back, I make a stop at MKEM and pick up ginseng and turbovite for energy. Now I'm ready for the week.

I spent the whole week working hard and I have made so much progress, I'm proud of myself. Tuesday through Friday, I had a fixed routine. I would start working at 7 am, take a break at 1 pm, work till around 2 am, go to Bunke's room, Marvin Gaye and get it on, sleep, be up at 6, be in the lab at 7. Repeat. Every morning I would walk out of that room convincing myself that it was the very last time but the brother is putting it down so good, I find myself returning every night. Besides, it really helps me sleep so much better.

From that first night in Doha up to today, Bunke and I have never discussed what's happening here. I don't even know what's happening. He still calls me madam

when we are outside and we go through every day like nothing ever happens when the lights are off and campus is dead.

You would think I have forgotten Elik by now! But I keep comparing Bunke to him. With Bunke we just have sex, dirty and raw, no emotions involved. With Elik we made love, we connected, we would cuddle and talk afterwards. It was just different. Yes there were times he would just fuck me stupid but even then, he would hold me close afterwards and tell me he loved me.

CHAPTER 12

I'll be going home next month. It's hard because I really don't have much money to take home with me. My mother won't say much but her look will say it all. And my step mother will start saying, "People say they are in South Africa but they are just suffering like us! We are better off here in Zimbabwe, at least we are home". That woman!

I need money but I really don't know where I will get it at such short notice. I have to go to VFS and apply for a renewal, my permit is expiring end of year. Applying at Home Affairs was so much easier because you could just show up but now with VFS you have to set an appointment. Dates are scarce and I've been waiting for my appointment for a month.

I'm sitting in the queue at VFS. I have been here for 3 hours already! What they don't tell you is that when they say your appointment is at 12 they mean they will

give you a number at 12 along with 100 other people and then let you queue inside the building. It sucks. These people who come here with immigration agents seem to be holding the line. I've never understood why you would pay someone R10 000 to submit your documents for you, then come with them on top of that! Like can't you submit for yourself? It makes no sense.

I just hope my battery sticks it out, it's already at 27%. Only at 16h30 does my number get called. I have everything and I go from checking documents to submissions to biometrics then I'm done. It's kind of too late to go to campus now. I will work from home. I end up sleeping at 2 am having done nothing, I just went on YouTube and watched stupid videos. I'll do better tomorrow.

I'm in early today. I've decided to detox my body for a week, starting today. So I'm just eating fruits only, drinking 4 litres of water and having my coffee black, without sugar. I let the guys know as soon as they are all in so that they don't surprise me with refined food. I go through my emails, mostly it's junk or ResearchGate showing me how many people have cited my past articles or Facebook telling me that my friends are missing me because I haven't posted in like forever. The one email is from the HOD, inviting the whole department to a farewell lunch of Bunke on Friday, and thanking him for his time with us and wishing him the best life can offer. I look at Bunke and I'm confused. He looks quiet and chilled as always, in a hoodie. When did this happen? Where is he going to? He's not done with his PhD mos.

I don't feel good at all. I need to know if the Bunke mentioned in that email is this one that I know. "Can we go to your room at 1 and talk?" I text him. He ignores his phone. "Bunke!" I call him and throw a folded paper at him to get his attention. "Sorry madam, are you saying something?" he says taking off his earphones. "Look at your phone" I snap. I think my tone was borderline commanding.

I'm halfway through my second litre of water and I've eaten 3 apples and a slice of watermelon since morning and I have been going to the bathroom every 10 minutes it's starting to annoy me. "Cool. I'll meet you there", he texts back.

I let Bunke get up at lunchtime and I give him a head start. I follow 10 minutes later via the bathroom. I think I will just walk across. Campus is buzzing with students. It's November and exams will be starting soon. I kind of miss those days because back then you had a set date of finishing. Now you just work your behind off and results show you flames and you just don't know when you will finish. I pass a group of guys sitting on the grass and sharing a Vienna Gatsby. It looks divine from where I stand and I feel very hungry.

I make it to postgrad rez and open Bunke's door. He's sitting on his bed and he looks big from this angle with those broad shoulders and muscled arms. I'm not sure whether to sit or stand or what to say. We never talk or sit in this room. We just take off our clothes. Ok, I think I'll sit next to him to avoid eye contact.

"Fierce", he says, breaking the silence. He just called me by name! You know sometimes I forget that he knows my name! I keep quiet. I don't know why I'm so upset.

"So you are leaving? And you didn't think to tell me?", I say.

He looks down and plays with his fingers.

"I was going to tell you but I didn't know how", he says. I keep quiet, I'm listening.

"I will be going away for the rest of next year to University of Florida as an exchange student. I'll finish my write up there", he explains.

What? When did this happen? Why didn't he tell me? Did I mean so little to him?

So this unspoken chemistry between us was nothing?

Tears just start falling and I'm trying to hold them back but I can't. I'm hurt. I can't explain why exactly I'm hurt but I am. "Fierce please", he says trying to reach for me. I shrug him off and stand up. I'm stupid yet again. He's trying to explain but I'm not listening. "I hate you!" I let him know, calmly. That's my signature break up line. Although I don't know if this constitutes a break up, I mean we weren't dating in the first place. I walk out of the door and he follows me just up to the steps then he goes back.

My heart is just breaking right now. Like, why didn't he tell me? I can't go back to the lab like this. My phone rings, it's Bunke, I put it on silent and head to the pool house. I sit on the grass near the fountain where I once tried smoking weed with my friend in 3rd year. I had choked so bad, it was funny. I let my tears fall as I watch students sitting in groups and laughing. I miss that undergrad life. Let me go home before anyone who knows me sees me in this state.

"Please bring my bag and the keys on my desk. I'm outside", I text Ndivhu. He comes out sooner than I expected of him. I don't get why he loves these colourful tight skinny jeans that don't make it to the ankles though. They look weird. "Fierce", he hands me the bag, keys and my water. "Are you crying?" he asks. Duh! You can see tears running down my cheeks and you can hear me sniffing, you are an Engineer! Do the Maths! "No, I'm fine. Something got into my eyes. Thanks". I walk to my car and lock myself in. I clear my eyes enough to see then drive off. If you ask me why I'm so hurt I wouldn't be able to tell you. Bunke never promised me anything or said anything at all. And I was the one who made all those late night trips to his room, all on my own. How do I always find myself in these situations though?

I get home, cry some more, find my scissors and cut off my hair through the braids. It's a mess when I'm done. It's as if a praying mantis ate my hair. I need to find a barbershop in Bellville to fix me. I gave up that detox fruit diet and I bought fish and chips at Frydays. The chips are drowning in vinegar and the fish is drowning in oil. I go back to my flat and I feel so much better after eating.

I had left my phone charging and I have 36 missed calls from Bunke and a long list of WhatsApp messages. He says he's sorry and didn't mean to hurt me and is sorry again and is asking if I can come over tonight. I block him and put his number on auto reject. I'm going to bed now. I'm so done with men. When did I catch feelings though? I thought I had everything under control! Guess it's true

that you can't keep having sex with a guy and not get attached. Research is already hard enough as it is, I don't know why I go looking for these extra stresses.

I'm not going to campus this week. I know myself. I'm weak. I will end up lying in that bed at postgrad rez if I do. I will give myself this week to just heal. I'm going through my contact list to see if there's any of my friends who can do coffee or maybe go clubbing in Longstreet with me. I can't find anyone. All my friends are either married with kids or working long hours so can't really club on a Wednesday or working and broke and without a car so can't meet up or are in other cities.

Elikplim. There's him. And now that I'm so hurt, I just miss him. I unblock him on WhatsApp and he's online.

"Hie Elik", I type.

"Hi beautiful", he responds. I panic. He responded so quick. What am I doing? I should block him!

"How's Joburg?", me.

"It's alright. Work as usual and you know exam time is crazy", Elik.

"I know", me.

"I miss you babygirl", Elik.

I will ignore that.

"So what you up to?", me.

"I need to finish setting this paper. It's for a 9 hour simulation test and I need to submit at exams tomorrow. I still need to do the Memo as well when I'm done", Elik.

"Oh ok. Good luck with that. How far are you with it?", me.

"I'm getting there", Elik.

"Ok was just checking up on you. I'm glad you are alive. Let me let you finish preparing that paper", me.

"Thanks babygirl. I will be home by 11 pm. Can we chat then?", Elik.

"Sure", me.

"You know I will always love you right?", Elik.

I'm done talking. I don't feel like doing anything. I paint my toenails, clip my fingernails, watch a YouTube tutorial about how to wear makeup for beginners, watch another clip about how to make your own wig, watch an episode of Cheaters and eat. My phone vibrates. It's 11 o'clock on the dot and Elik is back to bothering me. Well I started it but still.

"Fierce!", Elik.

"Elikplim Mawufeasi Nkrumah", me.

"Fierce Nkrumah", Elik.

Ok that has a nice ring to it.

"Don't start!", me.

"I miss you baby. I've never stopped thinking about you. You should have been my wife", Elik.

Wow! We got there so fast! What is this guy smoking. Should have beens are pointless!

"You made your choice baby", me.

I wish I could delete that baby, I didn't mean it to be there. Let me quickly change the subject and hope he doesn't see it.

"What are you up to?", me.

"Besides talking to you?", Elik.

I send a 'rolling my eyes' emoji.

"I'm making 2 minute noodles", Elik.

"Why isn't your wife cooking for you?", me.

Frankly it's none of my business.

"She's not around. She went home with the kids", Elik.

Ok. I don't know what to do with that information.

"Oh. Enjoy the noodles", me.

"Please come over", Elik.

"You are crazy. I'm in Cape Town!", me.

"So? Isn't that why they created airplanes?", Elik.

I need to stop this conversation before I find myself falling for Elik again.

"Goodnight Elikplim!", me. I add a sleepy emoji just for dramatic effect.

I put my phone on silent and put it away. I'm lying in bed with my thoughts now. I'm not sure what to do. How could my soulmate be a married man? And why does the universe keep drawing me towards married men? I see 10 missed calls from Bunke. Because they are automatically rejected, my phone doesn't ring. So now he wants to talk? It's a bit too late isn't it? He must call his wife in Abuja and talk to her if he wants to talk and leave me the hell alone. I eventually drift off to sleep.

CHAPTER 13

The problem with going to bed stressed is that you have nightmares and run out of sleep and you have to get up and you don't know what to do with yourself. It's 4 am and I'm up. I could go to campus but I honestly don't want to see Bunke anytime soon. I pull out my phone from under the pillow and go through WhatsApp. I have over 200 unread messages. I really need to exit that "Satan in Trouble International Ministries" WhatsApp group. Those people are harassing me. I went there once because some woman in the department begged me to. I had found the name of the church intriguing so to feed my curiosity, I went.

That church was chaos, I tell you. The pastor would not stop dancing with his shiny suit and pointed shoes, he spoke right into the mic sending vibrations into our ears. The singing was too loud and mid song people would just start screaming. The girls wore very short and tight dresses and heavy make up. Each time the pastor pushed the air to our direction, people would fall backwards onto the floor. There were three offerings and the sermon before the offerings was pure religious blackmail. I felt like if I didn't offer all the money I had in my purse, Jesus would never talk to me again. It was utter chaos! I remember, I tried to sneak out after church but the ushers got me. They led me to a room at the back where they prayed for me and took my contact details. That's how I ended up in this WhatsApp group.

I keep the group because when I'm bored I go through the messages. The people give funny testimonies. The other day, that lady from my department wrote in the

group that she had been so broke she had prayed and fasted. The next day she woke up to an sms saying R10 700 had been deposited in her account. I couldn't stop laughing. She had prayed on the 23rd and on the 24th got the money. But the 24th was payday and that R10 700 was her salary! People are so gullible! I close the group chat and my unread messages have dropped to 64. There are 4 messages from Elik.

"Komla and the kids will only be back next week Monday", the first message reads. I hate it when he refers to his wife by name. It makes her more real and makes me feel terrible.

"Are you sleeping already? I wish you were sleeping in my arms. I really miss you, you know".

Strangely, I wish that too.

"I know I messed up. I should have never let you go. You are the best thing that ever happened to me".

Yes you did! Big time!

"Here are your flight details. I can't wait to see you sweet thing".

What flight is this man talking about now? I open the attachment.

It's SAA tickets. Cape Town to Johannesburg, departing at 15h05. Tonight! What? How controlling does someone have to be to book you flight tickets without your consent? I can't deal. I just unblocked him yesterday and he's already all up in here acting like he never left! Hell to the no!

I could use some time away though and if I need to get over this Bunke situation I need to do this, right? After all, the best way to get over one man is to get under another, right? Besides, it's Elik, our souls are married to each other. I ought to be ashamed of myself. But Elik has always had this hold over me that I can't shake. He is poison! I think I'll just go.

There's so much I need to do before tonight. It's 5 am now and I'm packing! All my lingerie goes into the bag, yes, those suspenders need to get in there too, 2 pairs of high heels should do, I never really wear them these days. I pack a bikini just in case we end up in a pool.

I pull out my laptop and send an email to Prof. I need to explain to him why I will be AWOL this week. "Hi Prof. I urgently need to go to Zimbabwe. My grandfather passed away last weekend and I'm going for his funeral. I will be back next week. Kind Regards. Lastborn". I'm sure my grandfathers just turned in their graves. One died before I was born and the other when I was 10 years old. Prof responds almost immediately with condolences and wishing me journey mercies. What are journey mercies?

By 9 am I'm ready to face the day. I call Sorbet and get a 12 O'clock appointment to do a Hollywood wax and to wax my legs and arms. Their nail technicians are fully booked so I call Dream Nails and they say I can come at 9:30. I drive to Tygervalley and get there a few minutes late but they accept me anyway. I do my nails then go for the wax. That thing hurts like a mother! I can never get used to it.

But no pain no gain. The results are always worth it. And when it comes to Elik, I always put the extra effort.

I go back home and get ready. I still have some time so I go through my emails and respond to the important ones. I also send Brain a list of chemicals to order. I head to the airport, work a bit while I wait then I'm off to Johannesburg.

The woman sitting next to me says she's visiting family because she needs some fresh air. She says she's going through a nasty divorce and the husband took everything. She says just yesterday, their neighbours came to collect her washing machine, the last thing in the house, because the husband had sold it to them. I can see the pain in her face as she tells the story. She also says she's the manager at Panarottis in Cape Gate and I should come through sometime and I won't have to pay anything. She says she'll even give me a free Bar-one waffle. I'm a lucky girl.

She asks me why I'm going to Joburg. I could say 'Well, I'm visiting my ex-boyfriend, because his wife is away with the kids. And I need time out of Cape Town because my sex buddy broke my heart', but instead I say, "It's just work. I have a seminar that I need to attend in Midrand".

She goes back to telling me what a horrible person her husband is. How he cheated on her and how she doesn't understand why people cheat in the first place and can't respect the sacrament of matrimony. I tell her she will be alright, she should just hang in there.

The conversation goes to her husband cheating on her to cheating in general. She says what's even worse these days is that some girls will know a man is married but still be with him, finishing his children's money for school fees. "Do you know the pain you feel as a wife when you know your husband is sleeping with someone else? When he comes home smelling another woman's perfume? When you see unexplained moneys in the bank disappearing?", she says. I shake my head, I don't know that pain, I'm not married.

"Do those girls really think he would leave his wife for them? His children?" she says. I find that a bit ironic because her husband left her! I don't say anything though. This conversation is making me feel bad. She says she wishes the worst on those type of girls and wonders who will marry them when the married men are done playing with them. I swallow hard. That really hit a nerve.

There's some turbulence and I remember that flight to Venice with Bunke. I had held onto him and he had held me. I quickly brush the thought aside. Bunke was supposed to be just a stress reliever, nothing more. I was never supposed to catch feelings at all. But I guess you don't sleep with someone that many times and feel nothing for them. We finally land in Johannesburg and I stop thinking about Bunke.

I find Elik waiting. He looks good in sweatpants and a black T-shirt. This man looks good in anything or without anything for that matter! I guess I'm still on that love tip, where I think he looks perfect. Love does that to you, or is it infatuation? But I

don't think infatuation lasts this long. We hug and he keeps me in the hug longer than normal. He still wears that Tom Ford Tobacco oud cologne. He smells divine.

It's too late for me. He has reminded me of what once was and I can't back out now. We look like the perfect couple to someone who doesn't know us. We laugh like we have talked every day. I only resumed speaking to him yesterday and a day later I'm already here with him. Something is seriously wrong with me in the head.

"You look good!" he says, as he plants a kiss on my forehead. I know! It took me changing 5 times to settle for this dress and I'm glad he noticed. I even had my make up done in those pop up places at the airport in Cape Town! So I'm really glad he noticed because I put a lot of effort.

He has a new car now, a Ford Ranger. I kind of loved the Audi better though, I have many memories on the back seat of that car. This one looks like we going to drive through farms. I get in and we drive off.

OR Tambo airport is so far! We have been driving for a long time now and we are still not there. Finally, we pass Sandton and make it to Morningside. He drives into the driveway of a nice house with a neat garden, manicured trees and a swimming pool.

He comes to get my door and I smile. I step out and it's like he just can't help himself. He pins me to the car and kisses me so hard. I have to stop him. I don't feel comfortable, it's broad daylight and the guy trimming the tree next door is

looking at us, no doubt judging us. Elik reluctantly stops and gets my bag. I follow him into the house.

I look around the living room. It looks spacious and beautiful. There's a large portrait of his wedding picture on the wall and a few toys on the floor. A figurine of Optimus Prime sits near the TV! He introduced me to Transformers when we first met and I have been hooked ever since. I even spent days explaining why Megatron was justified in his badness and why Bumblebee was the cutest Transformer ever. Does his wife know I bought him that figurine?

I feel depressed now. This is so wrong. I just sit on the couch and the wife is looking at me from that wedding portrait. This is just wrong. He gets me a glass of Coke zero with ice and takes off my heels and rubs my feet. He knows me all too well. "What's wrong?", he asks. He can see that I'm not happy. I point at the portrait and he nods. "Ok let me take it down", he says. He takes it and heads towards the bedroom and returns without it. That's much better. I feel so much better now as he's teasing my feet and I'm laughing as he tells me the drama of the students he teaches.

We have had enough catching up and I want to lie down. I go past the bathroom. It's got his wife written all over it from hair products and make up, to face scrubs and face wash, to toners and masks. This woman has so many face products she could open a shop!

He leads me to the main bedroom. Surely, he doesn't expect me to sleep here! "No baby, I can't", I say. "It's ok, we will sleep in the guest room then", he says. We throw the clothes that are on the bed on the floor, I'm not about to fold another woman's clothes! I still can't believe he had really planned that I sleep in the bed his wife sleeps in!

In no time we are on the bed. I need this. I need to erase Bunke from my brain. It's just as good as it was the last time. I trace my fingers over his body and he takes his time with me. He loves every piece of me and is so gentle my whole body, mind and soul are aroused. I grasp the sheets as he swallows my moans. He looks me in the eye as he makes me feel things I didn't know one could feel and I hear myself telling him how much I love him. He has to cover my mouth with his hand when my screams get too loud.

I'm still trembling after we are done and hearing him tell me how beautiful I am and how much he loves me just makes my brain explode. I can't get enough. I roll on top of him wanting just a little bit more and he grins. "Someone missed me, I see", he teases.

He leaves for work in the morning and I'm left not knowing what the hell to do. He didn't even give me a tour of the house so now I have to figure things out on my own. He calls and says there's car keys on the table and a credit card. I can pretty much do whatever I want. I shower and find myself using the wife's products,

what's the point of unpacking my toiletries when there's a whole shop here? I sit by the garden with my laptop and a cup of chamomile tea. I've given up trying to figure out what exactly it is I'm doing with Elik and I don't want to overthink it because I don't want to be sad and feeling bad all day. I get bored then decide to drive out.

I grab the keys, put the credit card in my purse and head to the garage. It's a white Fortuner! So Elik bought his wife the exact same car he bought me! He's so messed up. And I'm going to drive another woman's car? To what end though? I'm sleeping in her house, with her husband, bathing with her products, eating her food and now I'm driving her car? I'm messed up and so is Elik, so maybe we deserve each other after all. But at least I'm not sleeping in her bed right? She can give me credit for that.

I get into the car and search for Mall of Africa on Maps. Everyone has been raving about this Mall of Africa, I want to see what the hype is about. The roads are confusing as hell! It's nothing like Cape Town! I missed my off ramp and had to drive another 5 km before I could get off the highway.

The mall is just another mall. It's just like Century City because it's big but I don't see anything special about it. I have a weakness for H&M, I always feel the need to buy something there so I buy a casual dress and boots. I go for an express facial, I need to glow, I get a nice dress at YDE, buy a Brazilian hair wig and I'm done. I buy a smoothie at AngelBerry on my way out then I head home. It's wrong for me to call it home I know. But home is where the heart is, right?

I wish I could call one of my friends and tell them about this hole I'm digging myself into, but none of them would understand. They would judge me and crucify me and leave me feeling ten times worse, then gossip about me. So no can do, I'll keep my business to myself.

I find Elik at home. He says he came back early to be with me. I throw myself at him. I'm living on borrowed time here and every minute counts. See, the problem with not getting it often is that when you finally get it, you want to maximise and make up for all those times you slept alone.

When our little steamy session is done, we go for a swim in the pool and I'm glad I packed this bikini. He can't take his eyes off me. The swim is refreshing and he rubs lotions down my body afterwards. This is life.

We go back into the house. I change into one of his T-shirts and he cooks dinner while I talk his ears off and tell him stories of people he doesn't even know. When we finish eating each other's food, we go and sit outside on the lawn watching the stars. This moment reminds me of the nights we would spend on Signal Hill watching Cape Town lights from above. This could be my life. My perfect life! I feel tears in my eyes and I try to sniff them back but it's too late.

"What's wrong baby? Talk to me", he says holding my hands.

I cry a bit more until I'm able to talk.

"Is it me?" he asks. I nod.

"What did I do?" he asks.

"You are... amazing. You are everything I want but can't have", I confess.

He holds me closer and lets me cry.

"I'm sorry baby. I will always love you and I will always be here for you. You know that right?" he says. I know. But that's not enough. We return to watching the stars and I cheer up in no time. We end up on the grass making out. I think I'm an addict!

"We can't do it here outside. What if the neighbours see us?" I whisper. "They won't see us if you don't make too much noise", he says. I giggle and roll on top of him. If I put as much energy into my school work as I do on Elik, I would have three PhDs by now!

I really work out and I'm exhausted by the time we finish. I don't want to get up. He carries me to bed and puts me under the covers. I fall asleep almost immediately and he wakes me up in the middle of the night for some more loving that puts me right back to sleep. Trisha Chikoho

CHAPTER 14

He wakes me up with breakfast in bed. I could get used to this life! I honestly never get the whole breakfast in bed concept. Food is not the first thing on my mind as soon as I get up in the morning! I need to shower first, brush my teeth, drink warm water with lemon to kick start my metabolism then maybe we can talk

food. But this is a romantic gesture and I can see he went all out shame. He even added tomatoes and cucumbers! The eggs are a bit too hard, the bacon too oily, there's too much butter on the toast and the tea has too much sugar. But the effort is priceless. I enjoy every bite and tell him stories of Ndivhu's drama in between mouthfuls.

I jump into the shower afterwards and minutes later, he joins me so we can talk and plan the day. He is not going to the university today, he's supposed to go to site later around 11 for that consulting gig of his. He actually co-owns the company. He was already monied in Cape Town but he's made so much more since coming to Johannesburg. Their consulting company is an Engineering company so they do Mechanical, Civil, Electronics and Electrical. They got a government tender to wire a prison extension in Pretoria. They are just drowning in money now. I don't know why he even bothers with lecturing! He says he enjoys it and it's his way of playing a role in the community. I just think he should start an NGO if he wants to impact the community, he doesn't have to spend endless hours marking! But well, it's his life and I'm not his wife, I can't tell him what to do.

He would be a billionaire by now if he didn't have so much black tax. He has to send money to his family in Ghana and pay his sister's kids school fees, his mother's medical bills, his brother's University fees, support his uncle's farming and he has also inherited his wife's black tax. It's too much. I know exactly how he feels. The only difference between me and him is that he can afford it and I can't. I feel so terrible everytime I go home and see how bad things are. I'll change that one day.

He's in the main bedroom and he calls me so I can help him pick out what to wear. I reluctantly go. I don't feel good about going into that room. I find him chinos and he puts those on and I find a shirt. He stands there with the shirt in his hands as if something just crossed his mind. He suddenly drops the shirt and pushes me against the wall. I bump and it hurts. He looks very upset.

That caught me off guard! I don't understand what's going on. "You hurting me Elik. Let go!", I say, trying to peel his hand off me, but his grip is too tight. I've never seen him like this. "There's been someone else, right?", he snaps. I'm confused. What's going on? What is he talking about? Someone else where? "You slept with someone else, right?", he clears it up for me.

He's still holding me against the wall and it hurts but I've given up trying to wriggle free. I nod. He loosens his grip. I don't get it. What's the big deal, it's not like we were together then. "Where's that coming from?" I ask. I'm a bit taken aback. I'm afraid that he might just snap again. "You shaved your head. I know you do that after a breakup!", he says and lets me go. Damn! Never ever tell a man everything! I used to tell Elik everything, he knows me in and out. I look down, I refuse to feel bad about this. The reason I ran off sleeping with someone else was him. He has no right to be upset and act like I cheated on him or something. If anyone should be upset here, it's me!

"You did this to me Elik! You chose someone else over me! You left me! Not the other way around, you left me!", I'm the one who's angry now. I slouch and slide

down against the wall until I'm sitting on the floor. "You broke me. You hurt me so bad yet I still keep coming back to you. Have you ever stopped and thought about what this thing I have with you does to me? How knowing I wasn't good enough for you to marry makes me feel? How I felt that night I watched that video of you getting married? Why I'm even here right now with you? Do you ever stop and consider me?", my voice is broken now and I'm worked up. I think I'm going to cry, but I'm not done. "So yes I slept with someone else to try and forget you, but it didn't work did it? I'm right here, in your house!", I scream at him. He no longer looks upset now, he's looking down. "Look at me! You think this is the life I want? Really?", I scream and the tears just start flowing.

I can't deal with this. I get up, leave the room and go to the guest room. He follows. "Look baby. I'm sorry ok. I didn't mean to upset you. It's just. Ok fine, I'm jealous", he says. "I want you all to myself". Ok now he's lost his mind. I give him the look but I don't think it's as threatening through teary eyes. "I'm sorry", he says. "And everything you said there, I never should have done that to you. You didn't deserve any of it. And thank you that you here with me. I'm truly sorry. Please allow me to spend the rest of my life making it up to you", he says.

He doesn't get it. He can never make it up to me, unless he has the ability to turn back time. He hugs me and keeps apologizing. "Let's take a walk. Tell me what he did to you for you to dump him. He's such an idiot! He has no idea what a gem he just let go", he says and I walk out of the house with him. I'm ok now but I'm glad I told him what I felt inside, I feel so much freer now.

I tell him about how I had been seeing Bunke for a short while and that now he was leaving for Florida and didn't tell me. I don't mention that we were in an undefined thing, I make it seem like we were dating or something like that. "Did you love him?", he asks and looks me in the eye. "No, I didn't. I just needed to get over you silly!", I say and push him a little. It's the truth. I answer all his questions but careful to leave out a lot of things. He wants to know when we started dating and I'd be crazy if I told him the truth. I need him to see me as a victim in all of this and also to blame himself.

I really can't believe I'm here telling Elik about my problems with another guy! He's listening though and he agrees with me that Bunke is an idiot who never deserved me. We go back into the house as he has to get ready to go. He's wearing chinos, a shirt and a jacket with his consulting company's logo. He looks too good for someone going to do hands on work.

"Baby. Don't you want to come with me to site and see what your man does when he's not teaching?", he says. Ok, I think I'll go. It's better than being here alone anyways. We are also living on borrowed time so I have to spend every passing moment with him. "What should I wear?" I ask. "Preferably nothing", he says. He's too silly. "Wear jeans and closed shoes, we'll be doing real engineering work not that chemical science you are used to!", he says. He always teases me by saying that Chemical Engineering isn't really engineering, it's more of an applied science. See, people with PhDs in Robotics think they are better than the rest of us!

I put on jeans, a shirt and AllStars. I don't think I have any jeans that are not ripped, I should buy some. Johannesburg roads are not as good as Cape Town roads. They look like they need some painting and some deep cleaning and those potholes really! Someone needs to do something about them! And the people drive nonsense! And I don't get why they have so many tolls when they don't fix their roads! Geez!

I know he works on site sometimes and on the field sometimes and at the university sometimes. I don't know how he manages to work so hard and still look this good while doing it. Since I'm going to be helping out, I use my limited knowledge of electrical engineering to ask questions. He outlines the scope of the project and I ask him for details. He looks pleasantly shocked that I know so much about electrical. It turns out that the prison was extended and therefore extensions on the electrical installations are required, obviously.

We make it to the prison in Pretoria and we get geared up in protective clothing and with helmets. Like how does a helmet protect you from being electrocuted? Elik says the helmets are to protect us from the scaffoldings because he doesn't trust civil and building engineers. I told you he is silly! I'm so excited, I haven't done work outside university in a very long while. I'm probably going to just follow Elik around anyway not knowing what he's doing.

"Babe. Please bring that file at the back, it has the plans from the City council", he says. I do as asked. We meet Lumka, a friend and colleague of Elik. "Don't worry baby. He knows our story", Elik says. I don't know how to feel about that. "Hi

bhudi", I respond to his handshake. We meet the other guys and he introduces me to them as his wife's young sister, studying electrical engineering in Rhodes and is here to shadow him for a project. Wow! Of all people, he says I'm his wife's little sister! I won't say anything. They are all carrying folders, with designs and measurements I assume, and work kits.

They decide to work in twos on different blocks. They need to confirm the designs before they can hand over to the contractor. Elik is with Lumka and I and block E is ours. The wing is empty, I'm a bit disappointed because I thought there will be prisoners. I don't know why the thought of seeing prisoners fascinates me. I should really have my brain checked sometime, I think there's a loose screw in there somewhere.

Elik and Lumka are full work mode and I'm helping with calculations and holding the folders. They make markings on the wall, take pictures and continuously jot down numbers. Watching him work is sexy as hell, I guess it's true that when you love someone your brain overlooks their flaws, leaving you staring at a perfect person.

We break for lunch and join the other guys outside. Lunch is vetkoeks with liver and drinks. There's a can of Coke zero for me. There's also a KFC bucket of fried chicken. I'm humbled. These men with hundreds of thousands of Rands in their bank accounts are sitting here on the grass eating amagwinya! I know broke students who wouldn't be caught dead eating a vetkoek!

I don't know what to do with this drink. There's no straw. Do you know how dirty the outside of cans get in storage and how they then clean them up with dirty cloths in shops before selling them to us? Drinking this directly without a straw is just gross. Elik is looking at me, looking at the can. It's as if he reads my mind. "There's straws somewhere in the back seat", he says and tosses me the car keys.

One of the guys stands and walks with me to Elik's car. He says his name is Musa. "So, give me your numbers, so we can meet and me and you can work out something", he says. Men don't waste time ne! He says I look beautiful just like my sister, Elik's wife. Like whaaaaaaat? Firstly, she's not my sister and secondly, I look nothing like her. Elik just had to go and tell people I'm his wife's sister. Just great.

I find the straw and we walk back with Musa. He is hitting on me strong but I'm not interested. I'm taken. After lunch, we get back to work. Elik wants to know what Musa was saying to me and I tell him. He says I must stay away from him and I roll my eyes. By the time we are done it's 4pm.

Before we left, Musa asked Elik for my number. It took everything inside me to stop from laughing at Elik's facial expression. We sat for 3 good hours in traffic from Pretoria to Morningside! We got home, showered and dressed up for dinner. Elik said I had been a good girl and deserved to be spoiled a little.

I have on a little black dress and red bottoms and my 28 inch Brazilian wig. We drive down to Nelson Mandela Square, Sandton. I'm glad I'm dressed the way I am because the girls in this Mall are dressed to the nines. I'm seeing fashion I didn't

even know exists but it's hard not to feel sorry for some of the girls struggling to walk on high heels. I firmly believe that walking in high heels should be introduced as a subject in school and made compulsory for all girls! We have a table reserved for Mr & Mrs Nkrumah at Pigalle. Like seriously Elik!

The restaurant is at the Michaelangelo Towers where the rich people stay. Maybe one day I'll be rich enough to also afford an apartment in this building. The food is ok but the ambiance is perfect. I'll have bruschetta as a starter. I fell in love with bruschetta in Italy but I haven't quite found the right one here in South Africa. I'm well pleased when I'm presented with olive-oiled grilled slices of garlic French bread, topped with cured meat, tomatoes and kidney beans. This is how I remember bruschetta to be like, not that nonsense some restaurants serve in the good name of bruschetta! We have a good evening and leave after they close.

We stroll around the mall and all the shops have closed. We walk down the diamond walk lined with designer shops. I laugh at a Gucci dress by the window. It looks ridiculous and I don't see why anyone would pay 50 grand for that ugly thing! We pass Louis Vuitton, Prada, Dolce & Gabbana, Alexander McQueen, Giorgio Armani and all those shops I never really go into. It's dead quiet at this side of the mall.

"I'm not wearing underwear", I say to Elik, out of the blue. "You lying", he says. "Wanna find out?", I giggle a little. He reacts almost immediately and the next thing I'm leaning against the glass of Jimmy Choo with Elik's hand running up my thigh to find it if I'm telling the truth and his tongue in my mouth. I'm moaning softly

and trying to keep my jelly feet standing when someone clears their throat behind us. It's a security guard patrolling. I pull down my dress quickly. I'm embarrassed. The man is harshly judging me with his eyes. "You can't do this nonsense here!" he says. I look away and just want to run. Elik doesn't seem to mind as he takes my hand and we walk on. The security guard shakes his head and says something inaudible.

We decide it's too early to go home, besides it's the first Friday we've spent together in a long time. We drive down to Taboo, a fancy exclusive club in Sandton. There's lamborghinis, Aston Martins and Ferraris parked here. It must be really fancy. I'm glad I dressed the part because this place is too upper class and slay queens are killing it. When did walking around with your boobs literally spilling out and your butt cheeks peeking under shorts for all to see become fashion?

I'm holding Elik's hand and looking at old men smoking cigars with young girls on their laps. It just looks wrong. I haven't seen anyone drinking cheap liquor. It's Moets and Cirocs all the way. I'm still judging those girls for letting those old men touch them.

I think I'm actually enjoying myself. Elik convinces me to try a strawberry daiquiri and it's pretty good although I can taste the bitterness of liquor under the sweetness. I'm on my second one now. I'm laughing at something he just said when this girl walks up to us. She completely disregards me and sits way to close

to Elik. I'm just looking at them. She slides her hands down Elik's thigh and kisses him. He pushes her off him. My eyes pop open.

"Baby. You never called me back!" she says. What is she talking about?

"Please leave Mbali. You must know when you are not wanted!", he says.

Ouch. That's cold!

"But baby, you said you would call me!" she says. She sounds hurt.

"I told you it was a mistake. I was drunk. Now, just go, please", he snaps.

The girl stands up, looks at him and leaves. That was quite awkward. I gulp down my strawberry daiquiri. I'm not sure how I'm feeling right now but I think I'm angry! So Elik slept with her? Well, he doesn't answer to me but still. He can't cheat on someone he's cheating on his wife with! He just can't.

I get up to leave and he holds me back. "Baby, she's nothing. She doesn't even know my name!" he says, like that makes it ok. That doesn't make me feel better. I'm thinking of all the things he does to me, did he do them to her as well? "Come on Fierce. Don't let her spoil our night. Please", he says. It's too late, our night is already spoiled by his inability to keep it in his pants! I think I need fresh air. I look at Elik and walk out, leaving him standing there.

There's people smoking outside and it's so cold. I smile at the bouncer but he doesn't smile back. He's probably thinking I'm one of these girls in here hunting for men with money. I don't remember where we parked and I'm a little tipsy. Elik finds me before I go anywhere.

"Sorry. I had to settle the bill", Elik.

"I want to go home Elikplim", me.

I don't even know why I'm calling it home. It's not my home.

"I can explain about that baby girl. Let's talk about this", Elik.

I don't want to hear it but I want to hear it.

"Explain!", me.

"Look. We were at a party with Lumka sometime last month. She practically threw herself at me. I was drunk and horny and she was well, available. It was a meaningless once off thing. She stalked me for a while after that but trust me, you have nothing to worry about. I'm not going back there", Elik.

I look away. I'm freezing. I wonder if he said the same to his wife when she asked him about me. He's doing one night stands now? Seriously?

"I love you!" he says.

"I'm cold Elik. Can we just go to the car? I wanna go home", I say. I'm here having relationship problems with another woman's man. It's sad.

He kisses my cheek, takes off his blazer and drapes it over my shoulder and we walk around the corner, past a few cars then make it to ours. I can feel the alcohol churning in my brain.

We decide to sit in the back seat until we feel warm enough, then we can return to Taboo. I have already forgotten that I want to leave. I swear something is wrong with me and Elik. We solve our problems with sex. I quickly brush aside Mbali and we start making out. My dress comes off. It's just that I'm tipsy and not thinking

because there was no need really to take all of it off. There's so much space at the back of this Ford Ranger!

In the middle of it, I hear a loud tapping on the window and I see flashlights. I'm panicking as Elik gets off me. The windows are all misty but there's no mistaking the blue lights flashing next to the car. It's the police! The tapping persists and Elik fixes himself up and gets out of the car. The car is now unlocked so the police officer opens the door and shines the light on me. I try to cover myself with my hands as my dress is nowhere to be found. I'm not quite sure what exactly to cover. My face, my boobs or down there? And in my confusion and moving my hands from one place to another, I give the cop a good show.

"No man, close the door and let her dress up", I hear Elik saying. The door closes and I fumble for my dress. I put it on but because it's so tight, it's hard to fit it in. I stay put in the car, I don't know whether to get out or what. I'm going to jail for public indecency! How embarrassing. Elik gets in the passenger's seat, opens the glove compartment then gets out again. He returns later and we drive off.

"Are they not going to arrest us?" I ask.

"No. I gave them a R1000 so we good", he says.

I just start laughing and he joins. "Elik! The things you make me do though!", I say.

"No baby, the things you make me do!", he says. We get home and whatever alcohol had been going to my head is gone. I'm sure the fear instilled in me by those cops dealcoholised me. Elik jumps in the back seat with me. "Where were

we before those idiots so rudely interrupted us?" he says. Damn his voice! I giggle and I lose the dress again. I told you I'm an addict.

CHAPTER 15

Did we really sleep in the car? I wake Elik up and we drag ourselves into the house. I shower and make breakfast while he sleeps on the couch. The intercom sounds and I don't know whether to wake Elik up or not, he hates being woken up. I'll just answer, it's probably a delivery or something. It's no big deal. It's a woman and she says she's at the gate. Without thinking it through, I open the gate.

"Baby, I think you have a visitor. Plus, I made you breakfast", I say. I wake him up as gently as possible. He grumbles but wakes up and thankfully he doesn't snap at me. I go to the kitchen to bring him coffee. A strong cup of black Jacobs will fix him up in no time and we can see what to do today. There's a knock on the door. He gets up and I put his coffee on the table.

Elik looks shocked and a woman strolls right in. This can't be good. She reminds me of those round aunties I was always scared of in the village. The kind that talks loudly and is not afraid to humiliate you in public. She scans me up and down with her lips pursed and she does that long mxxxxxm sound. This can't be good, whoever she is.

I now feel naked in these buttriders and the sports bra I'm wearing. "You know Komla asked me to come and check on you, to see if you needed any help and

maybe cook for you! But I see you are doing very fine", she says then claps her hands. How dramatic! Elik steps towards me and stands in front of me. I think he's shielding me just in case this woman does something crazy.

"Who is this Baba Paul?", she asks. Paul and Peter are Elik's twins. "Who is this? What is she doing here? You really don't respect your marriage this much?", she says. "You know Komla told me about these little prostitutes of yours and I told her to leave you. But she wouldn't! She loves you. She deserves much better than this. She deserves respect Baba Paul!", the woman yells. She's visibly upset and I keep thinking she will smack Elik upside down any second now. Did she just say these little prostitutes? Like there are others? Not that I'm a prostitute but, you know what I mean.

Woman, just go! I want to scream. "Baba Paul. Marriage is a sacred union. You have to respect your vows and honour your wife. She's the mother of your children and you can't bring these hoochies here", she continues. Is this woman really going to stand here and preach? Who is she anyway? Can she go please. She's making me feel guilty and I don't need that today.

"And you", she looks behind Elik. "Who are you? Don't you have any respect for yourself? Sleeping with a married man? You think he loves you? Let me tell you something, he doesn't! He loves Komla. You are just a chewing gum that he will spit out when it loses flavour", she stares daggers at me. My eye catches hers for a second and I look down, she looks mad as hell. That actually got to me.

"You are a prostitute!" she says. No, I'm not! I say in my head. "But even prostitutes are better than you because at least they own what they do and they get paid for it! Look at you, standing naked in another woman's kitchen. Have you no shame? Mxm", she says. Every word sinks in and I feel sick to my stomach. "MaBrenda please leave. That's enough now", Elik gently pushes her towards the door and locks her out. She protests and screams insults at us. Eventually I hear the car drive off and Elik opens the gate so she can exit.

"Are you ok?", he asks. I'm still frozen where he left me and I'm a bit shaken. I'm hugging myself tight. I nod though.

"I'm sorry baby. She's crazy!" he says.

"Who is she?", me.

"That's Komla sister. Don't mind her", Elik.

"What if she tells your wife baby?", me.

"I'll deal with it. Don't worry", Elik.

She might be crazy but there was truth in her words and how can I not worry? I shouldn't have opened the gate!

I know Elik says it's no big deal but he looks worried. He's been pacing up and down and rubbing his hands together. He does that a lot when he's nervous or agitated. He manages to relax me though and I'm able to brush that woman aside and we have breakfast. I can see that he's deep in thought but I'm sure he'll be fine. His wife is not going to leave him. We laugh about being caught last night and we wonder what we were thinking anyway, in a parking lot!

We are having a lazy day and we actually get to talk.

"Cybertron!" I say.

That used to be our 'please switch to serious mode' code. It's to say we need to talk now, jokes aside and no lies. Cybertron is the planet where Optimus Prime and the autobots in Transformers come from, so as lovers of all things Transformers, that had been an easy choice.

"Cybertron" he agrees and sits more up straight.

We both sit facing each other.

"Elik. The other day, why were you upset that I was with someone else?", me.

"I don't know. I just don't want you with anyone else. I love that I was the first with you and I really don't want any other guy touching you", Elik.

"That's not fair though", me.

"I know. But I can't help it. I just want you all the time and all to myself", Elik.

I keep quiet for a moment.

"Do you love me Elik?", me.

"More than anything. And I will always love you", Elik.

"I will always love you too", me.

"Are you seeing someone else right now baby?", Elik

"Nope. I'm as single as they come", me.

He looks pleased with my response and we both stay quiet for some time.

"Please have my baby Fierce", Elik.

"What?", me.

Maybe I didn't hear right.

"Please have my child. That way me and you will be joined for life", Elik.

I laugh at that. He can't be serious.

"Maybe I can have twins", me.

"Yes, a boy and a girl. And the girl could be as beautiful as you", Elik.

"And the boy can have a big head and big ears like you", me. I can't help laughing at myself for even considering it.

"My head is not big! It's the perfect size!", Elik.

"Yeah right! It's big and you know it!", me.

We laugh. He stops laughing and is serious again.

"So? Will you have my child, Fierce?", Elik.

Wait! So he's actually serious about this? I close my eyes and search for an appropriate answer. He has to be serious because we are in cybertron mode right now.

"I'll think about it", me.

I get off the couch, force his legs apart and fit myself in. I'm sitting with my back on his chest and his arms around me.

"I'm serious baby!", Elik.

"I said I'll think about it", me.

I'm here planning babies with another woman's man. How did I sink this low?

"I love you", me. I don't tell him that often. I'm afraid to hear myself say those words.

We end up talking about my family. He knows my situation back home. We live in a village and my mother doesn't work and my father makes money from fixing people's roofs and building houses. That doesn't make much money and sometimes people pay in grain or goats or a cow, depending on the amount of work. My elder brothers left home to continue their lives and they don't do much to help out. I have 2 younger siblings and I use my bursary money to buy them uniforms and stationery. But I'm really struggling, I don't have enough money for all that. My mother says I'm her only hope and that just puts a heavy burden on my shoulder. It doesn't help that my brother in Hilbrow always needs me to bail him out of situations. I feel overwhelmed most of the time. But I try not to think about it or talk about it. It's too stressful.

Elik says he'll get me \$2000 at the bank. At least I'll have money when I go home and my mother will be happy. So as much as I'm not with him for his money, it helps that he has it. It comes in handy. "And baby, you must say whenever you need help ok? You know I'm always here for you", he says. I nod but I probably won't. It's hard asking for money!

"Elik. You hurt me so bad though. Why did you do that to me? What did I do wrong?", I ask. I'm suddenly feeling emotional. Like, this could have been my life! But he just had to go and marry someone else! He knows when I start sounding like this I'll start crying any second. So that's his cue to hold me tight before I start throwing tantrums. But he knows how to calm me and before long I stop resisting and allow myself to destress. This house now knows me thoroughly. We've literally

done it everywhere! Young Jeezy had me in mind when he wrote his part for Usher's "Love in the club".

"I'm what you want, I'm what you need,
He got you trapped, I'll set you free,
Sexually, mentally, physically, emotionally,
I'll be like your medicine, you'll take every dose of me.

I'll bag you like some groceries,
And every time you think about it,
You gon' want some more of me,
On the couch, on the table,
On the bar, on the floor.
In the car, on the grass, on the bed, against the wall, against the car.

We didn't leave the house today and I have even forgotten about Elik's crazy sister in law. We order in and have some Chinese. For the longest time he's been trying to teach me how to use chopsticks but I just can't master it. I give up and use a fork and spoon instead, Asian style. This tom yam kung is kinda hot but it's nice.

This is my last night here and I'm sad as I cosy up to my man outside spotting constellations and listening to his stories about growing up in Ghana. He says he'll take me there someday and he thinks I'll love it. I think he will love Zimbabwe. It's not as bad as the media makes it out to be. We are a happy people and we are

kind, so he will definitely love it. It's a beautiful evening and I'm so at peace. How can something so perfect be so wrong though?

We then get into a debate about the ex-planet Pluto. I think Pluto was unjustly stripped of its title as a planet. He thinks it deserved it because it has not yet cleared the neighborhood of its orbit in space. I think the International Astronomical Union shouldn't have changed the definition of a planet in the first place. He thinks it was long overdue and that Pluto doesn't even deserve to be a dwarf planet, it should just be referred to as a celestial body. I don't think so. I still maintain that Pluto should be a planet! It is round and it orbits the sun! That should be enough. Actually, I think Makemake, Haume, Eris and Ceres, should be granted full planet status too! I don't care that their gravity has not swept and cleared the space around it of other objects! He says, "Yes baby" and I know he's giving up on the debate.

"Do you want to go out?", he asks. I don't. I'm good here. His phone rings and he has to go into the house. He comes back minutes later.

"Lumka is asking if he can bring his girl over and we have drinks", he says. Is he asking for my permission? That's cute.

"Isn't Lumka married baby?" I ask.

"He is", he says.

"Oh ok. So by 'his girl' you mean he wants to bring his wife over?" I ask. I don't know if I need the company. I can't hang out with a married woman. What if she know's Elik's wife? And obviously she'll judge me for this relationship of mine with Elik. She won't understand. People never do.

"No, not really. It's complicated. He wants to bring his girl, Thando", Elik says. I don't understand so I ask for clarity. Turns out Lumka is seeing another girl called Thando. So he's going to tell his wife that he's having a boys night out with Elik and friends and since Elik's wife is not home, they can do whatever they want.

"So Lumka is cheating on his wife baby?" I'm shocked. He looked like a decent guy, but who am I fooling, don't they all? We start judging Lumka and this Thando side piece! You'd swear our situation was different! I think our main problem is that we think we are dating. Elik doesn't think he's cheating and I don't think I'm a side chick and that denial just takes most of the guilt away. I agree to Lumka coming over with his girl.

After a phone call to Lumka, we have to go and pick him up at his house as proof to his wife that he really will be with Elik. We go. I think my conscience died a long time ago, the things I let myself do surprise me sometimes. I had to kill that village girl that went to Cape Town all those years ago because she wouldn't survive this. She was too weak and had morals.

We drive all the way to Roodepoort to pick up Lumka. I see the wife from where I'm sitting. A thick yellow bone with locks neatly plated on her head. She walks with the guys towards the car and kisses her husband. I duck and thankfully she doesn't come any closer, she just closes the gate.

“Molo Fierce”, Lumka greets as he jumps in at the back seat. “Molo bhudi”, I say. He asks me about life and school and I tell him. The guys chat and laugh as we drive. We headed to Tembisa. We stop at a garage and Lumka leaves and returns shortly with a girl, wearing a too tight dress and carrying an overnight bag. She jumps in at the back seat and we head home. Thando makes the guys drinks while I watch and learn. Now I know how to mix Hennessy and coke and serve it on the rocks. We learn something new everyday.

I'm warming up to Thando. She's a bubbly girl with a larger than life personality. She has eyebrows on fleek, although I can clearly see the concealer surrounding the eyebrows. But maybe it's supposed to look like that, I don't know. Her nails are long and yellow. When I asked about their shape she said they are coffin shaped because she didn't want the stiletto shaped this time. Coffin? Who shapes their nails like coffins? Maybe I need to keep up with the trends. Her Brazilian weave goes all the way down to her bum. I'm probably looking like the maid next to her with my short hair, short shorts and tank top. But Elik said I look cute and I'm lucky there's people around or else I'd be naked right now, so I'm sure I look good.

I drag Thando out towards the pool so we can chat. She leaves her heels behind and walks barefooted with a drink in her hand. She speaks isiZulu and my Zulu is not that bad. I can hold a decent conversation when I mix it up with English.

“So Thando. How long have you been with Lumka?” I start.

“About 3 months now. How about you and Elik?”, she says.

“Well. About 3 years now, I think”, I say. I also leave out the on and off and the whole drama that comes with it.

“Wow, girl! That’s impressive!”, she says, as if it’s an accomplishment.

“How old are you?”, I ask, just to divert the conversation. She looks at me. “27”, she says. She goes on to tell me about how boring her job at a call centre is and how she wants to quit. She says Lumka is going to leave his wife soon because she's controlling and he doesn't love her. I can't believe she'd fall for that tired line! I'm just glad Elik has never tried that on me. He doesn't want to leave his wife and I don't want him to either. Well, I don't know what I want really.

She says Lumka will take care of her. He buys her hair, nails, perfumes and takes her out to fancy places. She just complains that she sees him like 4 times a month and only gets to spend a night with him once in a blue moon. I want to tell her to leave this life alone. I want to tell her to go back to school and get a degree so she can be her own woman. I want to tell her that nothing good will come out of this. But I think she loves Lumka and that will be her detriment. Besides, that would be very rich coming from me!

She asks about me and I tell her I'm 25 and doing a PhD in Engineering. I explain that I will be a doctor by the end of next year, hopefully. She says she's proud of me because we need more female doctors because at least they have a heart. She says she took her 2 year old child to a public hospital the other day and the service was terrible and at least with more female doctors who understand what it's like to have a child, it will be better. I reserve my comments.

After a few drinks, she starts giving me advice. "You see girl, when you go out with Elik ne, make sure you order the most expensive meal on the menu and buy the most expensive things. We deserve it and at least when he breaks your heart, it will have been worth it. Not that Lumka would ever break my heart you know. He totally loves me! Look at me, what's there not to love?", she says. I feel sorry for her. Just to feed my curiosity, I want to know what she means by buy the most expensive things.

"What's the most expensive thing Lumka has ever bought you?", I ask.

"This hair. Inches baby! This is 30 inches and it cost R5000!", she proudly flips her hair. It's beautiful I must say but R5000 is nothing to Lumka.

"It's gorgeous", I say and she smiles at me. She's adorable.

"What else does he buy you? Does he pay your rent and stuff?", I ask. I saw a documentary on TV about blessers and blessees and I'm trying to find out more.

"Well, he doesn't pay my rent 'coz I live at home you know. He buys me a lot of things though like groceries some time and I never run out of data!", she says. Data? Like seriously! How can data be enough to have you opening your legs! Anyways, who am I to judge.

"And how about you girl? What's the most expensive thing Elik has ever bought you?", she asks. Well, let's see, I have Victoria's Secret lingerie, red bottom heels, a genuine Louis Vuitton bag, expensive dresses, that watch he got me for graduation and a lot of other things, I just don't keep count.

"A car. He bought me a car", I say. Life just dies from her face and she sips on her drink.

Elik gives Lumka and Thando 'our' bedroom. The other two bedrooms are for the kids and each one has a small bed in it. That leaves the master bedroom. I have reached a new low as I get into the bed Elik shares with his wife. "Please close the door baby", I ask and he laughs. I'm traumatised by listening to Lumka and Thando going at it so loudly.

CHAPTER 16

I can't believe I'm waking up in another woman's Egyptian cotton! I don't even feel bad. Apparently Lumka left in the early hours of the morning with an Uber because his wife would not stop calling. Tonight, I'll be back in Cape Town and sleeping in my own Sheet Street cotton.

We go and shower and then I volunteer to make breakfast. "No baby. Let me take you out for breakfast. I won't be seeing you in a long time. And you might just block me on WhatsApp and decide you hate me. So, let me love you while you are here", he says. He's right. Damn, I love this man.

Thando is still here and she looks different without her makeup on. She's surprised that Lumka left her here alone. I take her by hand to the bedroom for a woman to woman talk.

"Look Thando. Let me be honest with you. Lumka doesn't deserve you, he doesn't love you, so stop putting your heart on the line, because you will get hurt! Trust me", I say.

"Did he say that to you?", she asks.

"No, but I know these men. And I'm sure deep down you know I'm telling the truth", I say. She looks at me blankly. I'm not sure what she's thinking.

"Look Thando, I don't mean to tell you what to do, but trust me. Let go now while you still can", I say. I need her to hear me. The pain that comes with these relationships is not worth it and if she's weak like me, she'll find herself glued to Lumka for life.

"What's your name again?", she says to me. Ouch! She forgot my name, just like that?

"It's Fierce!", I say.

"Ok, listen here Fierce. I just met you yesterday ne. We are not friends, so don't get confused. Just because you have failed to make Elik marry you for the past 3 years doesn't mean Lumka won't marry me. Where do you get off telling me what to do or what not to do anyway?", she says. My jaw drops. I wasn't expecting that at all. I thought I was being nice and saving her heart ache.

She's not done. "So do me a favour and butt out of my business. Can you do that? I can see you think you are better than me because you are a doctor what what! I couldn't give a rat's ass about that! You are no better than me! We are both side chicks here, in case you haven't noticed!", she gets up and walks out. I'm shaken. I didn't expect it to go like that at all. I go and find Elik, I could use a hug right now.

Elik gives Thando R100 and opens the door. I genuinely feel sorry for her as she walks down the driveway towards the gate with her bag.

"Just R100 baby?", I say. He could have given her R500 at least so she can Uber and still have some change.

"Hey. She's not my girlfriend so she's not my problem!", he says.

"Well, I was just saying", I say.

"So what were you two talking about in the bedroom? What did she say to you?", he asks.

"Nothing really. She's just so rude though! I don't want to hang out with her ever again", I say.

"Mmm", that's all he says.

Was Thando supposed to tell me something? Does she know something I don't? Is it about Elik's other 'prostitutes'. Damn it! Now I will never know but there's no point in stressing over the unknown hey.

"Let's go get food, I'm starving!", he says.

"Can you leave your ring at home? Please?", I ask. I hate it when people see us together and he has a wedding ring and I don't. He takes it and leaves it on the kitchen counter and we leave.

I decide against a restaurant and so we head down to Fourways Sunday market. It's packed. Its Sunday! Why are people not in church? We go from stall to stall, hand in hand, looking for something to eat. He steals a kiss each chance he gets

and I'm just so in love with him right now. We find a smoothie stall and I bare always wanted to try these green smoothie with spinach, kale and cucumbers. But I've never been willing to pay my own R40 on something I'm almost sure I won't like. I get one and it tastes as terrible as it looks. I throw it away and buy a mixed berry smoothie. Life is good when you are not the one paying. We then find a stall selling sandwiches and breads. We get whole wheat paninis with pulled pork and then find a bench by a small lake and enjoy our breakfast.

"You should have been my wife!" Elik says out of nowhere. I lean over and kiss him on the cheek then return to eating. I'm not going to waste such a beautiful morning on wishful thinking. I'm determined to enjoy the now. We stroll around stalls, when we are done and I buy a nice pencil case, a pocket notebook and a glow in the dark pen. I'm such a student!

"Let's go home so you can show me how much exactly you will miss me", I whisper to him. I've had too much sex in the past few days, I don't think it's healthy. He flashes me a naughty smile and we walk to the car.

His wife is arriving later today. He made an online booking for 3 cleaners from SweepSouth to come to the house and do everything from laundry to changing the bedding to doing the dishes.

We drive past the Mall because I want jeans and new running shoes. By the time we get home, the cleaners are waiting so there's no time to make out. He helps me pack my bag and we go and sit outside while we wait for the cleaners. When

they are done, all signs of me are erased. There's nothing that says I was ever there. I don't know why that is making me sad. The wedding portrait is back on the wall.

We then drive to the airport. It's past 3 now and my flight is at 5:30 pm. My fingers are intertwined with his left hand as he drives and his wedding ring is giving me that cold metal feel. I need prayers.

So he will drop me off at the airport and pick up his wife and kids. They are landing at 4:30. I know many would judge me for this but it's not that easy. I wish I could just log into my brain, select Elik and press delete. But it doesn't work like that. The heart wants what it wants.

We check in and I drop off my bag then we go to ABSA and thankfully there's no queue. 2 people later Elik hands me an envelope with the US dollars. "That's for home. I transferred yours into your account", he says. I thank him. At least my trip home won't be so bad, I'll have money for my mother.

I'm not ready to go through the security gate yet. I want to be right here with him. I think I'm going to cry. I've had the most perfect 4 days and now I have to go back to my lab life. I don't want to go.

I'm standing in between Elik's legs, playing with his hair and he's sitting on these metal waiting area chairs. "You know I'm always here for you baby. If you ever need anything, just ask", he says. I know. I sit on his lap, I'm tired of standing.

These heels are killing me and I can't wait to get on the plane so I can take them off. He says he should walk me to the end where the security gates are since it's 4:30 already and his family will be arriving shortly. I insist that I should walk him to arrivals rather and leave him there. I don't know what I'm doing. I just know I'm not ready to let go of him.

"Please don't cut me off this time. Let's try and make this work. Can we do that?", he says. Make what work? There's nothing here, except another inevitable heartbreak. But he asked so nicely so I say ok. "Promise you won't go blocking me and refusing to talk to me", he says. "I promise", I say. I'm not sure if I'll keep that promise there. My conscience returns to me sometime.

I'm holding on to him with both hands. I truly love him with all my heart and I can't even help myself. I'm here waiting for his wife! When it comes to Elik, I don't understand most things I do. We still talking when he pushes me off him so quick, I stumble and the only reason I don't fall is the bench in front of me. I don't understand what's going on, and he's walking away.

Maybe I should follow him but then I freeze. Elik hugs and kisses a woman. I know her from that night I stormed into her house looking for her husband and from her wedding portrait. Two identical mini-Eliks hold onto his legs, screaming 'daddy'. Peter and Paul. They look so adorable, maybe I should seriously consider having his baby, you know. He squats and hugs both of them. I just find myself sitting down and I can feel my heart breaking. I'm reminded that I'm just a side. He

throws his hand around his wife's waist and they walk. He glances my direction quickly and I drop my eyes. I can't look.

I board my flight, sleep all the way and when I get home I just throw myself on my cheap bedding and try and find peace with myself. I'm only seeing the sms now from my bank. R10 000 in my account. I count the money in that envelope. It's US\$3000. Wow Elik! Thank you. My mother is going to be so pleased. But I wonder if she would still be happy if she knew how I got it.

CHAPTER 17

I woke up this morning to a WhatsApp message from an unknown number. It was from Elik's wife saying 'leave my husband alone bla bla and name calling'. I'm sure her loud sister already told her about me being in her house. I wonder where she got my number from. Did she go through Elik's phone? For her own sanity I hope she didn't do that. She wouldn't want to know half the things Elik and I text each other. But where did she get my number from?

She wrote that Elik doesn't love me, never did and never will. She's delusional. Why do people keep saying he doesn't love me? I think he loves me just fine. I'm still angry with Elik's wife though. Her message was very rude. Who the hell does this B think she is? For that reason only, I won't leave Elik alone! She must know her place and play nice, sharing is caring.

That message is still bothering me as I drive to campus. Maybe I should leave Elik alone after all. Is all this worth it? I wish I could but I don't know how. I need Jesus.

I will go to that church next to the Mall next week. I forward that message to Elik quickly before the traffic light turns green. He needs to check his wife!

Finally I make it to campus. It feels like forever since I came to this lab. The guys hug me and give me their condolences. The department even got me flowers and a basket with nuts, nougat, cookies and sweets. Yikes! Prof must have told them about the 'death' of my grandfather. At least now I can sulk all day and blame it on my grandfather dying when I know it's my own issues.

Bunke looks nervous and uneasy as he offers his condolences, but I don't have the energy to deal with him. Isn't he decided to go to Florida without telling me! He must deal with it. Besides, I don't need him. I had enough sex to last me a year! So there's absolutely nothing I want from him.

I have a lot of work to do but I'm distracted. My desk is so disorganised and I can't find my lab note book. Only coffee and disturbing my lab mates might be the only way to cheer up. Brain is my first victim.

"Brain. How are you? I haven't seen you in a while!", I say, sitting on his desk.

"I'm good. How have you been?", he says.

"Well, you know me. I'm always good", I say.

"How far are you with your write up?", he says.

"I'm getting there", I say.

"You need to stop galavanting and focus, otherwise you won't finish!", he says.

Oh wow! We throwing under the belt punches now? Before I can give him a piece of my mind, Ndivhu comes to my rescue.

"Dude! Her grandfather just died. Cut her some slack!", Ndivhu says.

"I was just saying. She's not focused. She just disappears every time!", Brain says.

"Brain I don't have time for you. I just came back from a funeral, please don't try me, not today", I say. He puts on his ear phones and ignores me. Just wow!

Since I don't want to talk to Bunke, that leaves me only Ndivhu to talk to so I go and sit on his desk. He's on YouTube so it's not like I'm really disturbing.

"What's his problem?" I say, pointing at Brain.

"He likes you too much, it's driving him crazy!", Ndivhu laughs.

I know Brain likes me but let's not go there.

"Why do you say he likes me?", I play dumb.

Thankfully, Brain has his earphones on so he can't hear us, not that I'd care if he could.

"Dude! Have you seen how he stares at you!", Ndivhu says.

"You are imagining things wena! He doesn't like me!", I say.

"Ok whatever you say", he says.

"Why are you guys so grumpy today? You annoying me", I say and get up.

"No you are always grumpy. Tell me, when was the last time you got laid?" he says.

That was so random!

"Really now Ndivhu?", I say, I can't believe he just asked me that.

"What? It's up there on the Maslow's hierarchy of needs!" he says.

"That hierarchy was written by a man for men! Women don't need sex!", I say.

"Not the women I know!", he says. "If you ever need a hook up, let me know, I have many available friends", he says. I can't deal. So I go back to my desk.

My phone has been going off all day. Elik's wife is harassing me and I don't know what to do or who to tell. She has sent me like 20 messages today. I don't even

know why I haven't blocked her yet. She's threatening to divorce Elik if I don't break up with him. That doesn't even make sense. Shouldn't she be saying that to Elik? Her hateful messages are annoying but I read through them when they come, I don't know why.

It's been over a week since I got back from Joburg. I'm depressed. Elik's nowhere to be found. Maybe he blocked me I don't know because my messages to him only have one tick. He hasn't called or anything since I left and that's very worrying. I've left him a dozen voicemails and messages. But nothing.

We are in the first week of December. I'm going home next week and my mother is so excited. She keeps reminding me of her dress and shoe sizes! Like, I will buy them. I get the hint already.

Bunke and I haven't really talked. He tried to apologise so many times but I'm dealing with my own issues, I don't have the energy. I know I'm being unfair, we were not dating. But it is what it is. He hurt me. I need Elik but I can't reach him.

I'm so depressed, I think I'll drive over to Bunke and distress. It's Saturday evening and I'm sure he's in his room. The drive to campus is very short at night when there's no traffic. I knock and he lets me in. I try to throw myself at him like old times but he stops my hands and makes me sit on the bed. He pulls a chair and sits across me. Why doesn't he want me? Am I not attractive to him anymore? I take off my T-shirt. Maybe if he sees these twins he'll stop resisting. Nothing. Now I'm really embarrassed.

"Fierce please. Stop. Let's talk", he says. What? Since when do we talk? "Look. You are a great girl and you are amazing. But you deserve so much better. You deserve a man that will love you and care for you, and that's not me", he says. Wait. Is he breaking up with me? We are not dating! We never did!

"You are beautiful and I want you to be happy. Please go forgive me", he says. He's holding my hands too tight. I don't believe this! I'm sitting here topless in front of my lab mate and he's dumping me! I drove all the way from Durbanville to be told I'm not wanted! This is very awkward. But mama didn't call me Fierce for nothing. I stand and literally shove my boobs in his face and pull my shorts off. Let's see him resist that!

"No Fierce. I can't. I respect you too much to do this", he says. What? Now you respect me? Where was the respect all those other times? Quit playing with me Oga! I can hear that his mouth is saying no but his eyes are saying yes. Eventually I win and he picks me up and throws me on the bed. Yeah, that's more like it.

This sucks though because he just took off my pants without looking at them. They are from La Senza and where bloody expensive! He was supposed to look at them at least and a compliment about how sexy they look would have been nice too. But anyways. We go at it like it's the last time. Mostly because it is the last time. I know I literally begged for this but I it's no big deal. It's not like I have never slept with him before.

I'm doing things my way tonight. I curl up in his arms when we are done and he strokes my tummy. I know he is as glad as I am that I didn't leave. I feel so guilty though. I get up and find my phone and type "I'm so sorry Elik" and send. It

doesn't deliver, but I have apologised. I promised Elik I wouldn't see anyone else but here I am. I get back into bed and like facing Bunke.

“Look Bunke. This has been good. It has been really good. I don't regret anything and you shouldn't either. I wish you the best in Florida. I'm going to miss you so much”, I say. He smiles and kisses me. I feel so sleepy and I doze off eventually.

I leave very early before anyone sees me. I kiss Bunke and for the first time he doesn't pretend to be sleeping. I wish him well again, kiss him one last time and go. I need to go home and get ready, I'm going to church today. Hoe life is over! The service starts at 9:30. I'm ready to go by 8:30. I'm there by 9 and go just to make sure I'm in the right place. I'm here to find redemption, my life is such a mess, only divine intervention will help.

Yes, I'm in the right place. First I hear the multitudes praying all at once then I see the white cloth written in red, 'Fire from Heaven Ministries'. Who names these churches though? And why do they like fire so much? But it came highly recommended by the lady who does my braids in Bellville. She said it will change my life as it changed hers. I go up the steps and peek in.

“Welcome sister”, a brother in a shiny purple shirt greets me with a big smile. This usher just had to lead me all the way to the front. I had to force myself into row three because it looked like he was taking me to the pulpit. I feel lost. I don't know what to do. Everyone is praying in tongues. I close my eyes and make a simple prayer, just letting the Lord know that I'm in church today and I'm ready for change.

The praise and worship team starts singing and everyone joins in. They then ask all new people to stand and be greeted. I stay seated until the woman next to me elbows me so hard, I stand and join the two other newbies that are standing. They ululate, hug and shake my hand in welcome. I'm tired of smiling and saying thank you now.

Offering comes and goes and I 'plant my seed' as the pastor said I should do. He said if you don't give an offering then no blessings for you. And I'm in desperate need of blessings these days. The main service starts. I honestly thought it had long begun because we have been here for 2 whole hours!

The sermon might have touched my heart had I understood it, but all I heard was that next year is my year and I will kill Goliaths and that I should give all my money and receive all of it back. FNB is already doing that for me but ok.

The pastor is overzealous and is sweating profusely, I feel like offering him a tissue just to dab his face. Then it's time for the sick and those with special requests to go to the front. They go and everytime the pastor touches their foreheads they all seem to fall back on the ushers behind them. The praise and worship team sings a song I know and I join in for the first time. When the sick are done, it's time to cast out demons.

"There's someone here, who suffers from back pains. You feel a pain in your back sometimes. If you are that person, healing is yours today! Come to the front, come and receive", the pastor says with a shaking voice and dramatic hand gestures. Back pain? Are you kidding me? Are we going to ignore the scientific fact that 80% of people will feel back pains at some stage in their life? And judging by the cars

outside or the lack of them thereof, it could mean most members here work jobs that strain their backs!

Half the church stands and goes to the front. I don't believe this! Just sit up straight people and stretch your back every now and then and you will be fine, I want to tell them. He does a group prayer and asks us to help him cast out the demons of pain. Maybe I should leave now because when these demons are cast out, where do they go? I don't want to be their next host mos, we all know my faith is weak! Luckily, I don't feel any form of possession and the people go back to their seats. I'm seriously considering starting my own church. I can name it 'Fierce Fires To Burn Satan Ministries'.

The pastor is not done. "Yesterday as I was praying, I saw a girl come to church. She was wearing a green dress and has black hair on her head (Seriously? Black hair?). My sister, if you are here today, come to the front, I have an urgent message for you!", he says. I look around and I'm the only one who fits the description. I slide down the seat to hide but the ushers have seen me and are coming for me. No. I don't want to, I don't want to go to the front. What if they feed me grass or make me drink petrol? Maybe I can survive grass but my body is not evolved enough to handle petrol.

The ushers literally drag me to the front. The pastor lays his hands on my head and is pushing me as he sends invisible fire my way. I'm trying to stand my ground but he's pushing me so hard I'm stumbling backwards. "Please be careful with my head. That's a wig", I whisper, but my voice is lost in the noise of the song. I'm too late because the wig is on the floor now and I have a black pentihose on my head. The pastor stops and I cast him a baleful look. I pick my wig up, stride to my seat,

pick up my bag and walk out. I'm done here. The pentihose is still on my head but I don't care. Everyone is looking at me like I'm mad, but I really don't care. I'm so out of here. I always pick the wrong churches!

A woman runs after me and catches me by the steps.

"Stop sisi. Come to the backroom. We will pray for you. This is just a demon making you like this. Don't worry, the pastor will cast it out", she says.

This woman is wasting my time.

"Who are you again?" I ask her.

"I'm Mama Gladys. I will be your spiritual mother", she says.

She said she'll be my what now? Maybe I didn't hear properly.

"You will be my what?" I ask, pulling my arm away from her grip.

"Your spiritual mother. I will mentor you and help you with things of the spirit", she says.

Ya ne! I should have never come here.

I have a biological mother, then when my father decided to take a second wife, I earned a stepmother, then when I was born, my mother's friend was made my godmother, when I was baptised in the Catholic Church, I had another godmother! Now this woman wants to be my other mother! I think I have more than enough mothers. "I'm sorry ma'am but I really have to go", I say. "But...", she calls as I run down the steps. But nothing. My Fortuner is waiting and I drive home.

That wig embarrassed me, I need to do something about my hair situation. I'm going to Bellville to do braids but it's Sunday and the salon I always go to near Britos is closed. But there's many women along the street holding out cardboard boxes advertising all sorts of hairstyles. I normally don't go with these ladies

because they always say they can do something then they go ahead and do whatever they want on your head. "Sisi. Come let me do your hair", a lady says. I recognise her shona accent, so I will go with her. Zimbabweans do braids very well.

We cross the road towards the taxi rank to a container, I don't even know why they bothered putting a zebra crossing here because cars just drive by and pedestrians wait. The lady ushers me into the container and there's three other women in that small space.

"How much is twist?" I ask.

"The big or the small?" she asks.

"Medium", I say.

"How long?" she asks. I show her with my hand. I want it just over the bum.

"Oh ok. It's R350", she says.

"I have R300", I say.

"Ha iwe", she says laughing.

I'm about to leave when she says ok. Not that I was going to leave anyways!

I have four women on my head combing me roughly and pulling my poor head in all directions. They are talking about some woman's husband and how he loves girls and how the woman is stupid for staying with him. He drives a gonyet and so has money, that's why she stays. Apparently he beat her up yesterday that's why she is not here today. It's rough out here guys! People must just be single like me.

I find myself telling these ladies about my experience at church today. They say I should never go there because the pastors are satanic and put snakes inside people's bodies. I think that's a bit exaggerated but all four of them seem to agree.

I leave Bellville at 5:30 pm and my head is so sore. They made these braids too tight. "Just put a warm towel on your head when you get home", the lady who recruited me says when I complain of the pain. It will take more than a towel if I'm to get any sleep today. I'll need a couple of panados as well. I pass by the train station and buy a bundle of chomolia vegetables. I'm making pap, stew and vegetables today

CHAPTER 18

I woke up early as usual and went to campus. I need to wrap things up before I go. Brain eventually stopped asking me out and accepted his friendship status. Ndivhu has girl problems once again, nothing surprising there. Bunke and I are good friends now and we've promised to keep in touch when he's in Florida. I even teased that I'd visit him sometime and he blushed.

Elik called me last night and he apologised for his wife's unruly behaviour. He also said he's sorry for not being in touch because things were hectic. I tried to play hard to get and be harsh to him but he got through to me and as always I gave him one last chance. So the plan is that I'll spend Saturday night with him because his wife and her friends are going on a "girls trip" then go home the next day.

I spent this week packing, moving my stuff to storage and all. I'm not coming back to this apartment, I didn't renew my lease. I'll be at rez next year. I told people that I just want to be close to the lab but the truth is that I can't afford the rent. I'm all packed and ready. I don't know why I packed so many clothes though because it's

December and I will be working hard in the fields. I will just go to campus to make sure my work station is clean and I didn't leave anything important lying around. When I'm done in the lab, I go to Bunke's room.

He invites me into his room but I refuse because I'm kinda back with Elik now and I'm planning on being faithful. Faithful to another woman's husband! Crazy I know. We then decided on going to the pond behind rez to just talk. He's leaving on Wednesday and I won't see him the whole of next year. We reminisce on days gone by and laugh about how we ended up continuously sleeping together. We both agree that it was awesome. He says it's the best he ever had and I laugh. I can't say the same, Elik is my best I ever had, but it was good none the less. He confesses that he always thought I was hot from the day he first met me.

I feel so sad that he's leaving. I really think I have serious abandonment issues. I think I was beginning to love him, I need to learn how to let go. We hugged for a very long time before he walked me to the car.

So long Cape Town, see you next year. The plan is to fly to Johannesburg, spend the night with Elik then continue by bus to Zimbabwe. I arrive at 2 pm and Elik is waiting at the airport. As always, we behave like we last saw each other yesterday. I don't care about much, I just want to get home and get some. The kids went with the wife, thankfully, so we'll have the house all to ourselves. I ask about his job

and he tells me the details of the prison project and stuff. He says he's glad to be talking to me about it because his wife has no clue what he does.

We get home and decide to leave my suitcase in the car since I'll be leaving tomorrow morning anyway. Elik is still Elik. Sweet and panty-droppingly sexy as hell. I'm just going to spend the rest of the afternoon enjoying this forbidden dark chocolate of mine.

The day goes by so quick and we are in bed playing cards when I think I hear the sound of a car. It's probably the neighbours, I think. I keep playing, I'm losing but I'm not going down without a fight. I think I heard a key turn by the door. I stop and listen. "Did you hear that?" I ask. "Hear what?" Elik says. "never mind", I say. I decide it's nothing and play my joker so that he doesn't close with that last card he's holding.

I swear I have no idea what's going on but there's shouting and I'm slapped so hard across my face and I'm being pulled off the bed by my braids. In between dodging these fists, I see Elik's wife and her sister, that one who found me here last time. His wife warned me in one of her texts that she would rearrange my face if she ever saw me anywhere near her husband. I didn't know she was serious.

Elik's T-shirt that I'm wearing tears. I cover my face but the blows keep coming. These women are screaming, it's hard to hear what they are saying and I can't

really see Elik. I think he's trying to stop them or did he run away and leave me here? I fall off the bed and literally crawl towards the door.

“How dare you! You little prostitute! On my bed? In my sheets? You will learn today!”, she screams at me. And boy am I learning! She kicks me and I stumble. I get to the door and run. I grab the keys on the kitchen counter, open the gate and just keep running.

It must be around 9 pm now and I'm on the streets, in nothing but a torn T-shirt. My head is aching so bad from all the hair pulling and my whole body is sore. Those women really got me shame. A car passes by and slows down, I look away and I'm glad it drives on. I walk back to the house and stand near the gate hoping Elik will come and I'm also ready to run should those two crazy women decide to come after me. I can hear the screaming from here.

The bunch of keys in my hands is Elik's. So if I can make it to his car, I can drive off, look for clothes in my suitcase and make a plan from there. Surely he won't mind me taking his car. I take a deep breath and brave it. I open the gate and walk towards the garage. That crazy wife parked right in front of the garage! I can't open it.

I walk back out, to the streets. My phone, handbag, everything is in that house. I don't know what to do. I don't know anyone here. I have an uncle in Berea and my brother in Hillbrow but that's just too far away, besides I have no way of contacting them. Even if I did, they would tell my parents about this and I would

lose my golden status. I walk down the street and turn. I think I saw a garage somewhere around here last time. A passing car hoots at me and I look away. I'm so embarrassed. I should have known though that this day would come. I just didn't think it would be today.

I see myself under the streetlight. I'm practically naked, just barely covered by this thin, torn T-shirt. There's some blood on my arm but I'll worry about that later. The garage is further than I thought because I'm still walking. I have heard horrible stories of human trafficking in Joburg. It's not safe for me out here alone. I walk faster and eventually I see the Engen garage. I approach and the lights are too bright, just exposing me. Everyone is looking at me now, even the petrol attendants have stopped fueling the cars. I pull my braids to cover most of my face. I just hope no one is taking pictures.

"Excuse me", I say to the guy at the first pump. I'm trying to hide behind a bin in the meantime. His name tag reads Tichawona, so he must be from Zimbabwe. He looks at me. "Sha ndokumbira kuti undibatsire" (Please help me), I say in my non-shona accent. I'm hoping that me speaking to him in his language will soften him up. I think it does because he takes off his jacket and hands it over to me. "Chii chakaiitika kwauri?" (What happened), he asks. I feel like crying but the tears just won't come. "Ndakabirwa" (I was robbed), I say.

I'm holding his jacket around my waist but it's only covering the back. But it's better than nothing. "Ndokumbira kushandisa phone yako" (Can I use your phone), I ask. I promise to reimburse him. I lie to him about how I was mugged.

“Let me call mapurisa” (police), he says. I tell him not to. How do I explain this to the police? Although I could lay a charge of assault against that woman! But no, it's not worth it. I was in the wrong.

I go and sit at a darker side of the garage and some how he lets me go with his phone. He has a Huawei something. The only useful number I know off my head is Elik's. I dial that and it rings twice. “Elik”, I say. “Who is this?”. I hang up very fast. It's the wife. She took his phone? I don't know what to do now. I hope there's data on this phone. I log in to my email, copy Bunke's number from Google contacts. I call and it just keeps ringing. I really don't know what to do now. I'm crying now.

Two female petrol attendants come to me and ask what happened. People really love things shame. I tell them I was robbed. I go back to my email and find Tindo's number. These ladies don't look like they are going anywhere. I dial Tindo and thank goodness he answers. “Tindo. It's Fierce here. Listen.....”, I start. ‘Your airtime is exhausted, please load airtime’, the automated voice on the phone says. You can't be serious! The universe is really punishing me for my crime against people's marriages!

The ladies are asking me details of my robbery. How many guys were there? What did they take? Where were you going? Did they rape you? Where you alone? Did you call the police? Where do you stay? Did they steal your clothes as well? I make up answers as I go. Tindo calls back and saves me from these FBIs!

“Fierce. You don't sound ok. What's going on?”, Tindo.

"I'm in a situation bro. I need a huge favour", me.

"Name it", Tindo.

"I need you to pull up a cellphone number of a guy named Lumka", me.

"Ohhh kay. What did he do?", Tindo.

"It's a long story. I'll tell you tomorrow. For now please do this for me", me.

"Ok spell it for me", Tindo.

"L.U.M.K.A", me.

"Ok. What's his surname?", Tindo.

"Eish I don't know", me.

"What else can you tell me about him? Where does he work? Where does he stay?", Tindo.

"He works at Pristine Engineering Consultancy and stays in Roodepoort, Johannesburg", me.

"Ok let me see what I can do. I'll call you back", Tindo.

"Thanks Tindo", me.

"No worries", Tindo.

These ladies are looking at me. I'm sure they are trying to decipher my phone call. I ignore them but they don't leave! The owner of the phone comes to check up on me, he even brought me a paper cup with water. He leaves again as a car pulls to the pump.

Tindo calls. He is so resourceful, I could hug him if I could. He found three phone numbers matching my description. I ask him to send me R10 Vodacom airtime

and he sends R25. It's almost 11 pm now and I'm freezing and sore all over. I call the first number and it goes through. A man answers.

"Bhud' Lumka. Is it you?", me.

"Yes. Who's this?", Lumka.

"It's Fierce. Elik's Fierce", me.

"Oh yes sisi. How are you?", Lumka.

"I'm not well. I was with Elik, then his wife came home and she beat me up and she threw me out. I'm stranded now. I don't know what to do", I say and start crying.

"Calm down. Where are you?", Lumka.

"I'm by the Engen garage on Rivonia road in Morningside", me.

"Ok. Calm down. I will be there now now", Lumka.

"Ok", me.

I hang up. These two women are looking at me with wide open eyes. I can feel them judging me and saying I deserve it. I forgot they were here. They talk to each other and laugh then walk away, to update everyone else I guess. I don't care really, I have no pride left.

A good 40 minutes later, Lumka pulls up in his Range Rover. I recognise it easily because there's only one car in the parking lot. The garage is empty. I take off the jacket around my waist and see Tichawona standing with three other guys. I approach and see them judging me harshly and laughing at me. I thank him and give him his phone and jacket. My thighs are all out there and my bum is barely

covered but I stopped trying to cover myself with my hands. I really have no pride left. Besides I'm pretty sure everyone here has seen a naked woman before! He nods and wishes me luck. Lumka is standing outside his Rover looking around for me. I run to him and throw myself in his arms and cry, really cry for the first time tonight. He holds me until I calm down.

We walk around and he opens the door for me. The whole garage is gathered around now and staring at us. Maybe they think Lumka is the man I'm cheating with. I don't care. "Do you have cash on you?" I ask wiping the tears off my face. He digs in his back pocket and pulls out a wallet. He pulls out all the notes there and they add up to R870. I walk to the group and hand the money to Tichawona. "Maita pasa", I thank him. I genuinely mean it. He thanks me back with a huge smile. Lumka looks at my bare thighs and then looks away as he holds the door open for me. I get in the car and we drive off. I just want to sleep and try to forget.

"What happened?" he asks. I tell him everything. "But you know Elik loves you right?" he says. I'm not quite sure about that right now. "I need my stuff from Elik's house. Please", I say. He looks at me. I'm afraid that that woman will destroy my things. My passport is in there! We drive to Elik's house and I remain in the car. Lumka is gone for a good hour! I wonder what he's doing in there. He comes back with my suitcase, laptop bag and handbag. I quickly go through it and all the essentials are there. Passport, phone, wallet with my license and stuff. I left my sweater and sneakers in the living room. They can stay.

We drive off. Lumka says Elik packed my handbag but his wife wouldn't let him leave. Apparently she bleached his clothes and threw his shoes in the swimming pool. I don't think I care right now. Lumka keeps telling me that Elik loves me. I'm just too hurt right now, I don't want to talk about it. I change the subject and ask him about that girl, Thando, he once brought over and he says 'it finished'. I ask if he has another one now and he laughs and says no. I don't believe him.

"But look Fierce. Unlike the rest of us who don't care about these girls, Elik genuinely loves you. For us it's just fun. We have the money and the girls want the money, so they give it up to us and we give up the money, it's a win win. But it's different with you and Elik. He loves you. You guys will work this out. Ok? Don't cry now", he says. I sniff and look out of the window into the night. I realise I have no idea where he's taking me.

We arrive at his house, he says his wife and kids are sleeping. That's perfect because I don't think it would be ideal for the wife to see her husband bring a half naked girl home. He ushers me to the guest bedroom and brings in my bags. I hug him again, maybe longer than I should and thank him. He really saved me. I don't know what I would have done without him. I ask for the bathroom and he shows me. I toss off the torn T-shirt and examine my body. I'm bruised for days. They really beat me up shame.

I go and take a quick shower then dig for my pyjamas in the suitcase. I had packed them far away because I didn't think I would be needing them tonight. I also need to charge my laptop, phone and powerbank for tomorrow's journey. I wish I knew

where my painkillers were so I could knock myself out. I try Elik's phone but it goes straight to voicemail. I hold my phone, looking at his picture, which I made a screensaver after I lost a bet in the afternoon. It now feels like a long time ago. I get into bed and feel so ashamed of myself. I pray. I can't find the right words but I just ask for forgiveness and mercy.

CHAPTER 19

Mrs Lumka woke me up early to say she was leaving for work and that she had to take the kids to school. I have never met this woman before, yet I'm here in her house. I saw her from a distance last time when we came to take her husband so he could go and sleep with his side chick. I feel bad about that now. She seems like a very nice person. I still don't know who Lumka told her I was. I thank her for allowing me to stay at her house and she says I'm always welcome. Ok! She leaves saying she needs to go before traffic gets too bad.

I'm already awake, I might as well go and make myself coffee. I make a quick stop at the bathroom to examine my face for a black eye, busted lip or any swelling. I look fine, I have a few scratches but it's nothing foundation can't take care of. I did well by covering my face with my arms, at least my face is not rearranged. With my body, it's another story. Everything hurts and some parts of my thighs have turned a dark green.

Lumka is making eggs in the kitchen and I jump on the kitchen counter. I'm still wearing pyjamas. I don't know him like that but after last night, I think we are cool

now. He really came through for me shame. I could be lying dead in a ditch somewhere right now. This is Joburg!

We say our good mornings and he asks if I have spoken to Elik. I tell him I tried his number last night and this morning but it wouldn't go through. He says I shouldn't worry, Elik will call me. I ask him why he cheated on his wife yet she's so sweet. He looks at me like I have crossed a line. Maybe I have crossed a line. He goes back to making his eggs.

"How many sugars in your coffee?", he asks. "3", I say. He makes me a strong cup and hands it to me as I'm still sitting on the counter top. He stands across me and crosses his arms. "You want to know why I cheated", he says. I nod.

He clears his throat. He says it's because men were not designed to have only one woman and women don't seem to understand that. I'm trying to read his face. I'm not sure if he is joking or serious. I ask if he loved Thando. He laughs and says hell no. I ask why then he was with her. He says just for fun. He says when men cheat they can do so without loving the other woman, it's just sex, but women just catch feelings and complicate everything. He says if women knew their place, the world would be a better place. I wonder what place that is as I sip on my coffee. He quickly adds on that Elik loves me and to him I'm not a side chick because he genuinely loves me.

His mentality about women is deeply disturbing but I'm a guest so I won't voice my opinion. Besides I'm proof that men need more than woman, so who am I to speak?

"What time do you guys get home?" I ask.

"I'll be home late today but my wife will be here around 5", he says.

"I need to be gone then. My bus leaves at 6. What should I do with the keys?", I ask.

"Lock all the doors then get out through the garage. Come let me show you where to put them", he says and I follow him to the garage.

"Will you need help getting to Park station? I can come and take you", he asks.

"No, don't worry, I'll be fine. I'll Uber", I say. I don't want to inconvenience him more than I already have.

I give him a big hug when we get back to the kitchen. He's as tall as Elik, just a bit broader.

"Thank you so much for coming through for me yesterday", I say.

"It's no problem. Elik would have done the same for me", he says and kisses me at the top of my head.

"Don't worry. You and Elik will be fine. He will call you", he says. I don't think I want me and Elik to be fine!

He gives me R1000 for transport and leaves for work. I'm reminded of that time Elik gave Thando only R100! I spend the whole day in bed, in a stranger's house. I leave at 3 pm for Park Station, although the bus departs at 6 pm. I can't risk being

stuck in traffic and missing the bus. The Uber driver dropped me outside the Park Station gate because he says if meter taxi drivers see him they will attack him. Maybe if Uber drivers didn't love Toyota corollas this much, it wouldn't be so easy for taxi drivers to spot them!

I pull my suitcase and make my way into Park Station. This place is so crowded! There's people everywhere. A guy in a reflective vest pushing a trolley offers to help with my suitcase but I don't have loose change so I say I'm fine. Besides rule number 1 of Johannesburg is, don't let your bags out of sight. I find a place to sit and guard my bags with my life. There are thieves here, you can just tell.

At 5:20 pm I join the queue for the Intercape bus to Bulawayo. I'm going home. I feel so drained and my body aches. I can't wait to get into the bus and sleep. What's sad is that I'm going to Zim now and I have to pretend like I'm this educated church-going girl with morals. I have to wear long skirts and look decent and just pretend. I'm a role model to most girls in my village. That is just sad. If my parents or anyone else for that matter ever found out about this, I think I would kill myself. They have horrible names for girls like me back home.

"Baby", an urgent voice says behind me. "I'm so glad I found you!".

I turn around and it's Elik. He pulls me aside, out of the queue. He looks so out of place here with his nice suit.

"Elik?", I'm kinda surprised to see him here.

"Can we talk?", he says.

"I'm leaving in a bit. Besides there's nothing to talk about", I say.

I know what happened is not his fault but I can't help blaming him. He says he didn't know his wife's 'Girl's trip' was a trap that we had fallen into blindly. That doesn't stop me from blaming him though.

"I'm so sorry about yesterday baby", he says. He says his wife threw his phone in the pool that's why he couldn't call me and he says he was worried sick about me. I swear, if I got R10 for everytime Elik told me he's sorry, I would be a millionaire by now!

"You didn't protect me!" I snap.

He seems shocked by that. He says he tried but his wife had locked him in after I ran out.

"I walked all the way to Rivonia road and spent hours at a garage, naked! With people laughing at me Elik!", I say. He didn't know that, I see. I realise I have raised my voice and some people are now looking. I drop my voice and go on a rant about how embarrassing it was to keep pulling down a torn T-shirt to cover my bits and he keeps apologizing.

He keeps asking me to stay. I think Elik only thinks with his penis sometimes! How can he honestly ask me to stay after last night? For what? For who? I'd have to be a special kind of stupid to agree to that. We have attracted a mini crowd and deep down I just hope no one here knows me. It's December mos and everyone is going home. The last thing I need is to be seen by someone I went to high school with or did undergrad with, and give them gossip for their reunion stories with their friends.

Time is ticking as Elik and I go back and forth. It's the typical scene of girl about to leave and boy shows up at the last minute and is begging her to stay. I keep looking up at him. You know Elik has those eyes that I just can't resist. Everytime he looks at me, I feel like he's looking deep into my soul. So I'm trying by all means not to hold the stare.

"Baby please. Stay. I'll get us a room at the Hilton, so we can talk about this and work it out. I can't let you leave like this. Please baby, I'm begging you!", Elik.

"Elik. I had to sleep over at Lumka's house! I don't even know him like that! This. Us. This is just not working for me anymore. I can't live like this", me.

"I know baby. I know I messed up. I always mess up. But I can't live without you. You know that!", Elik. He's downright begging.

No, I don't know that! He's right though about always messing up.

"I'm sorry. I can't. I really can't", me.

"Please Fierce. I'll do anything. What do you want me to do? Ok I will leave her. I'll divorce her!", Elik.

Great! He had to say that out loud! Now people know I'm a homewrecker. Just great!

"I'm serious. I'll file for divorce", Elik. He doesn't seem to care who's watching or listening.

Wow! Did he just play the classic card every married man plays each time to keep the side piece? I'm not going to fall for it.

"Look at me Elik. Look. I was beaten and I'm probably trending on Black Twitter right now! What's going to happen next time? Huh? That crazy wife of yours will kill me mos. Just go home and fix your issues. I should've never let it get this far!", me. I show him the bruises on my arm that I've hidden under the sleeves of my jacket. I wish I could show him the mental and emotional scars that were inflicted on me.

"Please. Stay. Just one night so we can talk", Elik. It's as if he's not listening to me. I already know how that night would unfold. He will say sorry, I'll say no, I'll cry, he will comfort me, then we will be making love all night and tomorrow morning, I'll have forgotten the pain I felt when his wife's shoe landed on my back.

"I just want to go home Elik. I want my mother", me.

"I'm really sorry baby, come on now, don't do this", Elik.

I'm out of time, I really need to go. Intercap is forever punctual. He begs some more as he walks me to the gate and they weigh my bag and tag it then they let me through. They let him through too, I don't know why because they always refuse to let people who are not passengers through. I guess looking good has its perks!

It's time for the truth now. If this is the last time I see Elik he needs to at least know that I loved him.

"I love you Elik, I've never stopped from day one and I probably always will. But this is not life. It's unfair to me. I need to move on and find my own path. I need stability. It's been nice and I'm addicted to you for whatever reason but I need to

find myself again. You made your choice years ago and I should have respected that!", I say.

I can be deep when I want.

He listens and clings to every word. He then takes my hands and kisses them.

"Don't do this baby. Don't leave me, please. I need you. I will kneel down if you want me to", Elik.

I honestly don't know what this man wants me to do right now. Why is he making this so hard? Can't he see I'm broken already and really need to piece myself together? The driver asks if I'm going with them and I say yes, I just need a minute.

"Goodbye Elikplim", I say. I give him a hug. It's for the last time. This time I'm done with him for good. He smells so nice and being in his arms is making me want to change my mind. I know I will probably never forget him but I have to let go and now is the time.

"I love you Fierce and I'll always love you. When you are ready, please come back home. I'll be waiting for you", he says.

The drama in this man! What home should I come back to? Except if it's a metaphor and he's referring to his heart as a home.

"I will always love you too baby", I let him know. He hugs me and keeps kissing me. I let him, even though I'm sure righteous people in the bus are saying awful things about our public display of affection right now. I need this.

The bus is going to leave me now, I really need to go. "Baby. I'm really sorry and I love you", Elik says. Doesn't he get tired of saying sorry? His eyes look glassy. Is he going to cry? Since when does he cry? Please Lord don't let him cry now.

He blinks fast and pulls out his wallet. He takes out all the notes in there. "Here, I only have about R3000, take it. You can have this credit card too", he says. I take the money and leave the card, I don't think it will be any use to me in Zim. "Bye Elik", I say. He looks hurt and has both hands on his mouth, as I go up the second step and the door swings shut behind me.

The bus is already moving as I try to make my way to the upper deck. "My child, you can't trust a man in a suit! They spell trouble!", the second driver who's playing conductor says to me. That can't be true. "Stay away from that man. I don't trust his eyes! You can tell he's bad news just by looking at him!", he adds on. What? When did he see Elik's eyes enough to read them? Because those eyes are just beautiful! What's he talking about!

The problem with our people is that just because they are older than you, they automatically think they are your parent and have the right to lecture you! Which is quite weird because the same men always come and say inappropriate things to you. I don't have time for this right now so I step on.

I make it to my seat and have to argue with the guy who's perched by the window. That's my seat. He says a seat is a seat. He checks his ticket, tries to say it's his seat

but I'm not in the mood for games right now! I have so much stress right now and if he doesn't move I swear I'll go off at him and take out all my frustrations on him.

Thankfully, he comes to his senses and moves to his aisle seat. I just want to sleep. This guy next to me is trying to start a conversation with me in distorted, exaggerated Zulu. All I hear is 'mara ne'. I really don't have time for this right now. If you want to say something to me, then speak in Ndebele. You can't tell me you have forgotten your mother language! Most people do this and I never get it!

I put on my earphones and open the playlist named Elik. Yes, I have a playlist called Elik. And I have another called Bunke, which I should rename by the way. That one is full of songs by the likes of D'Banj, P-Square, Yemi Alade, Wizkid and Davido. I scroll down to 'No more you - Akon'. I always loved Akon, he and Elik share the same dark complexion I love in a man. Elik had fallen in love with his songs as well, mostly because I used to be in charge of the playlist in the car and he was forced to listen to whatever I put on. This particular song 'No more you', Elik had sent it to me on one of our many break ups and as I listen to it right now, I relate to every single word. I recline my seat, lean back and let the lyrics sink in. Sleep please take me.

The song is on repeat and I sing along inside my head. It's as if Akon wrote this song for me, for this very moment.

"Just one look in the mirror

And I know I don't look the same being alone

I don't walk the same without you on my arm, I lost my charm
I don't know how I made it before
Coz you are my future for sure
And now that it's over I don't know how I'm gonna get by

With no more you. With no more you.
What am I gonna do? With no more you
To see me through. With no more you.
What am I gonna do? With no more you
Can't believe there's no more you

I look at my passenger side
And there's nobody to ride with me for life
It feels like the end, I lost my friend
I can't sleep at night, because your side ain't occupied
The hurt in my eyes, won't go away
I'M IN SO MUCH PAIN

Don't know if I can make it or not
Everybody sees that I'm going through a lot
It's hard being alone, when you used to be on top
Call for you, there's no more you
I stop for a minute then I pinch myself
I can't believe I'm here by myself
I can't do anything without your help.

Call for you, there's no more you"

The song plays on and on and I can feel tears running down the side of my face. What am I going to do with no more Elik? Sleep evades me. I'm just lying there battling a million thoughts in my head. I'm wondering how such an intellect like me had made such stupid decisions in life. How an engineer like me had failed to detect the problem upfront and solve it. How my heart had just chosen the path of least resistance over and over again. How I had let myself be reduced to those girls who get beaten up by people's wives! How I became just another THOT (That Hoe Over There).

I sit up as my thoughts seem to intensify when my eyes are closed and plan to read a book on my phone. I wipe off the tears and I go to my Aldiko library and open Steve Harvey's Think Like a Man. I have never been one to read self help books but clearly I'm bad at making life choices, so maybe I'll find answers about men in this book.

CHAPTER 20

I must have fallen asleep because we are at a pit stop in Musina now. I'm not hungry but I'll go out and stretch my legs anyway and buy water. I hate garage prices. The same water I buy for R5 at Shoprite is R10 here! Why do prices always seem so high when I'm the one who's paying? 500 mL is R10 and 1.5 L is R14.50. I'll take the 1.5 L. I get three energy bars as well, stimorols to clear my breath later, biltong and dried mango strips.

We get to Beitbridge boarderpost, at the South African side, it's almost 12 midnight now. We get off the bus. We will be here the whole week mos! There's buses as far as my eyes can see, and gonyets (big trucks), and cars and people, so many people! We join a queue that looks like it's winding forever and disappearing behind buildings.

We've been here a whole hour but we haven't moved an inch. I sit on the pavement and put everything that's in my handbag in my backpack. It's too heavy now but it's better than carrying two things. My battery is dying, I connect it to the power bank while I listen to music. The sun comes up and my feet are now killing me. The sun came out already burning and there's no shade here. It's tough.

That Zulu-speaking guy that's sitting next to me in the bus is now talking normally so I hold a conversation with him. He says he works at Virgin Active. Clearly, he's not an instructor, there's no sign of muscle on him! He's telling me about how awesome his life is and how he can't stand Zimbabwe and how he should have brought his Jeep instead of taking this stupid bus.

Homeboy is clearly a big dreamer shame! There's no way he drives a Jeep with those fake AllStars from Small Street! And he's still using a Samsung S2! Do those work still? We are at S8 now and counting! I let him go on, maybe it will make him feel better about himself. I just urge him on. It's 11 am and we are still here! But at least I can now see where we are going. I just want to get to the shade that's all, this sun is roasting me and my water is already halfway.

He asks what I do for a living. I tell him I'm a student in Cape Town. He says he left school because education is pointless! He says he makes so much more money than all people who went to school. He's so delusional it's not even funny. I know students who survive on tutoring money on campus who wear better watches than that joke he has on his wrist. It's a Rolax! When buying it in China Town, didn't he see it said Rolax and not Rolex? If you going to fake it, you have to research the real thing first so that you buy something that looks as close to the real deal as possible. And don't go for obvious brands like Rolex! But you learn research at school, something he dropped out of.

It's 2 pm now and my brown skin has turned black. I'm exhausted, remember I was beaten not so long ago. And these shoes are not comfortable, my running shoes are somewhere in Elik's house, although I'm sure they are bleached and drowning in the pool by now. Homeboy looks suddenly agitated. I give him an energy bar and he thanks me. I keep asking him if he's alright and he tells me that he's overstayed by a year. A year! Like 12 months? He's so not coming back, Home Affairs will ban him for a good 10 years I'm sure. How can a Jeep driving, big money spender not have made a plan about his immigration status though? But I'm a nice person and I'm very empathetic and I know the tricks of the trade. So I advise him to go and talk to the driver and prepare at least R500. He nods and goes off to find the driver.

By the time I get to the front it's 4:13 pm and homeboy is still not back. I don't know what happened to him. The lady behind the counter is doing her nails and

she tells me that I should move back because her shift is done and I should wait for her replacement. Ya ne! That shift change takes 45 minutes, but I wait, what can I do? I finally get that stamp and go back to the bus. Homeboy is sitting there. He says 'it's sorted' and I don't ask too many questions. I just want a quick nap.

When everyone gets back we drive on to the Zimbabwean side. Within that 2 minute drive, I can see the atmosphere changing. It's like two different worlds. The South African side was clean and their buildings were intact. Ours here look like a shed of cows and it's so dirty. Even the air is different. It was fresher on the other side. Well, at least the queue is moving. My water is almost finished now but there is no way I'm buying the water being sold by hawkers here. It's in recycled water bottles. I'm told that the people pick up the bottles, go home and wash them then fill them with water and sell. The last thing I need is a stomach ache, so I will pass.

There's people selling juice cards and money. They want to buy Rands and sell you Bond notes. I decide to buy a packet of coloured maputi, I know \$1 for a packet is overpriced. I could buy 10 of them with that amount in a shop but I really want them so I buy. I give the lady R50 and she gives me my change as US\$1, 10 Pula, \$5 bond coin, R7 and 50 Thebe. I look at her confused and she says the rate is 7.5 today, as if that's supposed to explain things. I just take my choice assorted of currencies and thank the lady.

In 3 hours we are done. As I walk back to the bus I see people standing with their luggage waiting for custom officers to come and search them. Next to this one bus alone there's a double bed, fridges, stoves, microwaves, generators, kitchen units

and a bathtub! Is that one bus able to carry all those things? And people have huge Shangaan bags. I thought we were no longer allowed to bring groceries from South Africa. That's what my mother told me!

We only leave the border at 1 am! I just spent a whole 24 hours trying to cross less than a kilometre of land! That music drained my battery. I recline my seat and sleep. Home boy still wants to talk but I'm sorry, I'm too exhausted. Besides his make-believe stories started getting boring. He wants me to believe that he's going to be a pilot next year when earlier he told me he dropped out of school? And how was he training to be a pilot at Virgin Active? Was he flying treadmills? I don't have time for this, I have real life problems.

The bus broke down in Gwanda and we had to wait for another bus from Bulawayo to come and get us. I was not bothered because I was sleeping. That was a blessing in disguise too because we would have arrived in Bulawayo at night.

Of all places, Intercape chose to stop at N1 hotel, so far from everything nogal!

"Taxi", a man says.

"How much?", I ask.

"\$3", he says.

"How much in Rands?" I ask.

"R60!" he says.

Life is about to get very real. R60 for a 5 minute drive! I haggle a bit and he agrees to take R50. If it wasn't for my suitcase, I would have walked. I get to eGodini and drag my suitcase to Nkulumane 12 kombis. I get one and pay for my suitcase as a passenger. I really hope my aunt is home. The potholes have me jumping up and down, reminding me of Elik's wife's blows. I drop off esihlahleni (by the tree) and luckily aunt's home.

My aunt is a nice woman. She never married and has two grown kids. She made one mistake of getting pregnant by a boy she loved. She quickly learned that love doesn't pay the bills and found herself a rich man who built her this house. He was married and he left her eventually but at least she had a house. Her siblings hate her because she's 'loose' and is a 'homewrecker' but they are just jealous if you ask me. I think I'm following in my aunt's footsteps. I'm going home tomorrow.

She is so happy to see me and before long we are talking about men. That's an uncomfortable topic between me and an elder. But she has always enjoyed telling me about sex and men. She always says a pretty face is not enough to keep a man. You have to be a freak in the bedroom and bring on your porn star game if you want to keep that man. I tell her I'm single though and she says single people are the ones who have sex the most. I'm defeated.

She makes me tea and I wish I could stay longer. She has stories for days! But if I'm to catch the bus to the village I have to leave. Besides, I have to pass by town and buy groceries, I can't just show up at home empty handed. I get to town and

there's a lot of cars. Since when is there traffic in Bulawayo? Ex-Japanese cars of all shapes and sizes are everywhere!

I go about my business and by 12 I have everything from 50 kg mealie meal to 10 kg rice to 50 kg sugar. I'm glad Red Seal now makes 50 kg sugar, maybe my mother will stop going to ask for sugar from her neighbours with that Kango cup that I hate. I get a Scania (big trolley) to eRenkini (Major bus station) and buy a bus ticket. I'm ready to go home. I cringe as the conductor throws my suitcase on top of the bus. I bought that bag in Italy with Elik's money! He should handle it with care.

This is not Intercape, there are no seats allocated and it looks like I'm late. "Come sit with us baby", a woman signals to me from the back. How nice of her. I go. There's two big women and they have filled the whole 3 seater! "Come. Squeeze in here!" she moves but doesn't really move. I jump over her and there's no space really but I squeeze in anyway. "I'm glad a thin person came to sit with us! I was worried that that fat woman behind you would come here!", the other woman says. Well, I don't think thin is a word that can be used to describe me. Elik says I have the right amount of curves in all the right places. "Oh look, the baby loves you. Look at how he's pulling your braids. Take him", she says. What?

This woman dumps her baby on my lap. I'm barely even sitting as I balance on the thighs of these two women and now I'm carrying a backpack and a drooling baby. It doesn't help that my body hurts. What did I do to deserve this? The woman on my left is drinking coke from a 2 L bottle and eating a full chicken with chips. The

one on my right has her rice with seven colours and she's chewing too loud. The bus hasn't even left! When did these people get hungry?

We have only travelled 100 km but we passed 5 road blocks and a VID (vehicle inspection department) inspection point! Wow, Zimbabwean cops really love their job and want to make sure nothing passes unnoticed! A man gets off at a bus stop and I get up to go and occupy the now vacant seat. This squat sitting I'm doing here isn't working for me. "No, don't go girly. Are you not comfortable here? Sit", the woman on my left says. Comfortable? What do you think? She just wants me to carry her baby, I'm sorry. My body is too sore for such, Elik's wife got me bad.

I get off at a bus stop near my home and it's as if the whole village is here to meet me. My mother called all her friends to come and meet me. Even my stepmother is here with those kids of hers that look like me. They even brought a scorch cart! Thankfully I have 50 kgs of sugar so they can all have as much tea as they want plus I bought 2 dozen loaves of bread. My father can be dramatic though! Who puts a number plate on a scorch cart though?

My mother doesn't let me do anything today and I go to sleep early. I'm genuinely tired. I cry my eyes out because everytime I close my eyes I just see Elik standing there begging to work things out with me. Did I make mistake by letting him go? If it was the right thing to do why does it hurt so much? Why do I feel like getting on the bus first thing tomorrow and find my way back to South Africa and to him. I miss him so much, it hurts.

I'm woken up at 5 am to go to the fields. I wasn't ready. I told mother that my back hurts and I can't bend over to work the fields. She laughed at me like I'm crazy and said "A child never suffers from back ache. You are back home now, you have to work like everyone else! You forget that it's this field that put you through high school!". She continued talking alone long after I had accepted my fate. Talking about how in her days they used to wake up at 3 am and work the fields and still do all the other chores without complaining.

I have been working all morning and I'm slow because my body hurts but mother thinks I've become lazy and too urbanised. She says I should give her just one week and she will wipe South Africa off from me! I don't know what that means but I'm scared. Mother has been complaining about everyone and everything all morning. It turns out my little sister, Replacement, is pregnant.

My parents suck at giving names though. So, I had a baby sister who passed on when she was 3 years old and my parents had another child and named her Replacement. That's just wrong! But her name is better than my youngest brother, Inflation! He was born in 2008 when Zimbabwe's economy took a dive. I remember, I tried talking them out of giving him that awful name but mother had said I must go and make my own child and name him whatever I wanted.

Replacement is pregnant by a herdboys! Of all people my sister chose a herdboys! As beautiful as she is! Yes I know when it comes to choosing men, she's in the

same situation with me. I'm at university so I date there and she's in the village so she dates here. I don't understand though. She could have gone for the son of a bottle store owner at least or the chief's youngest son! He's cute and everyone knew he had a crush on Replacement!

Besides she's only 16, where did she learn to sleep with boys from? I only learnt men at 22! Anyway, mother was saying I must take her with me to Cape Town but what am I supposed to do with a pregnant 16 year old without even Form 4? At rez nogal! I can't. I'm so disappointed in my sister, I can't even talk to her right now. Now I have to think of ways to buy pampers because I know no one else will.

Mother cried when I gave her that \$3000 Elik gave me. I was deeply touched. The moment made me so vulnerable that I almost got carried away and almost asked her for advice.

"Mama. What do you think about dating men from Ghana or Nigeria or those countries?"

She looked at me like I have lost my mind.

"Yho! Are you dating one of them? Are you even dating?", she stopped and put her hands on her waist and looked at me like I had killed someone.

"No mama", I say.

"So why are you asking me that?", she says.

"No, a friend of mine is dating a guy from Nigeria!", I say.

“Oh! Stay away from that friend. She’s will die soon. If you sleep with a man from another country you die. The ancestors don’t like it! You should only marry a man from your own country, don’t you know that? What if he gets you pregnant and leaves? Where in Nigeria will you find him?”, she says.

I look at her. I know that’s not true. I’m still here, very much alive. She listens to too many stories.

“Really?”, I say.

“Yes. You know MaMoyo’s daughter? We buried her last month because she wouldn’t listen to her mother. She was just running around with men from all countries! But at least I’m not worried about you. You are virgin! You are not like that sister of yours Replacement!”, she says.

Me? Virgin? That’s funny.

That conversation got dark so quick and she wouldn’t let it go.

“What do you children know about men anyway? You have to wait till marriage! You think anyone will marry you after you have slept with the whole continent?”, she says.

I could tell her I know a lot about men and marriage might not be happening for me anytime soon. But I don’t have a death wish, so I keep quiet.

CHAPTER 21

I’m in the fields every single day. My mother has no mercy! I went to the shops to buy salt yesterday and the storekeeper asked me to be his girlfriend. When I said

no, he said he would find me and beat me up because I think I'm better than everyone else now. What's wrong with some people though?

I'm so sunburnt, my hands are blistered from holding a hoe every day and my feet are beginning to crack now. If Elik could see me now, would he still want me? I wonder. Christmas is in a few days and I need to take the kids to Bulawayo to buy clothes. Father convinced me to take my half siblings as well.

Coming to Bulawayo on the 23rd was a bad idea. It's packed and I had to hide when I saw a girl I did undergrad with. I look too horrible right now to meet anyone I know. I bought the kids pizza and I was shocked by how small it was and there was barely any topping on it! I also got them Mazoe. I was glad to see that Mazoe now makes ready to drink juices. After eating we walked down towards the City Hall and stopped at Greens to buy Maheu and coloured maputi. Those are the two things I buy every time I'm home. There were people selling beads and I bought myself a custom-made bracelet written "Fierce Nkrumah", I don't know why I just gave myself Elik's surname but well. Inflation asked me what Nkrumah means and I ignored him. I don't know. We had to sleep at aunt's place in Nkulumane and the kids slept on the floor in the sitting room while I shared the other room with my aunt. She insisted.

I'm breaking apart inside and I need to talk to someone before I self-distract. My aunt is the best person to talk to. I told her a summary of my situation. I told her

that I have a friend who has been seeing this married man for a long time but now the wife found out and she doesn't know what to do. My aunt understands and talking about men is her specialty. "Your friend needs to decide what it is they want from the relationship. If it's money, she should stay with the man. But if it's love, she might not find it there. The man will always leave her and go back to his wife", she said. "If that 'friend' is you Fierce, you know you can talk to me right?", she said. "I know. It's not me auntie", I said. I want love, so I guess I did well by breaking it off with Elik then.

We left the next day, on Christmas eve and I had so much cleaning and preparing to do when we got home. My little sister and I stayed up late around the fire after everyone had gone to sleep. I told her I understand her situation and that she will be just fine. Pregnancies happen. "Just have the baby and finish school ok. By the time you finish high school, the baby will be almost 2, so you'll leave him here and you can come and stay with me in Cape Town and we'll get you into University", she nodded and hugged me. I need her to open up to me, I can't imagine what she's going through. I ask for details about her boyfriend but she's so shy she doesn't give much. All I know is they did it once and she got pregnant. That's just sad. Poor kid. She will be fine though, I'll make a plan for baby things.

Then it's Christmas. Everyone seemed to have a good time but I didn't. It wasn't fun cooking in the fire all day long and serving endless visitors tea and bread with jam and butter. This grocery was supposed to last till around March but since my

mother has decided to show off and send my young brother to all her friends with a plate full of cookies and chocolate eclairs, I don't think it will last past New Year. Then she will be crying to me again about how they don't have food! No man.

Replace and I went have decided to go to the stores at night for Christmas. When we get there, the atmosphere brings back so many memories. The generator is too loud and I hope they have enough diesel because it's going to be a long night. Some men are sprinkling water on the ground, to reduce the dust caused by people dancing.

I look so out of place with this bodycon I got from Foschini. Girls here are dressed to kill in jean skirts, caps, takkies, and socks written 'cool or sport'. They are getting down, dancing Borrowdale to Ndolwane super sounds and Chase Skuza. I could never dance Borrowdale, my knees were always too stiff. Two drunk men are fighting now at the back because they were sharing a calabash and the other drank too much. Home sweet home!

Replace pulls me to go with her to see her boyfriend/soon to be baby daddy behind the shops. I must say, I'm very disappointed in my sister. With those bomb looks, she could have done so much better. This boy is wearing a cap backwards and has a huge belt with a skeleton on his jean and he dropped his jeans so low, I'm afraid they will fall. How on earth did Replacement fall for this? I know I'm not one to give relationship advice but at least my men look good and have a decent fashion sense! I'm going to leave them here, I don't care what they do. It's too late to protect her, she's already pregnant!

I walk around just admiring the scene and reminiscing days back when I was that kid with legs shining with Vaseline and dusty ankles. I was never allowed to come to the shops at Christmas nights because mother always said I was too young. There's two cars parked at the back with GP number plates and the men standing next to them are acting like kings. One of them whistles at me as I pass by, but honestly, if you trying to impress me, don't show me a Peugeot. Do they even make those anymore?

I bump into a group of guys. I remember them from high school. They have grown and have beards now. I say hi and they are happy to see me. We shake hands and they say I look good, one of them even buys me a Fanta. I take it, I would have preferred a Coke zero, but they don't stock it here and Fanta won't kill me really. I chat with the guys until their girlfriends find them and I'm left alone again.

An old song that I used to like by Lovemore Majaivana comes on and I almost jump up but I calm myself and act classy. I can't be dancing alone now. A guy approaches and sits next to me on the rock I'm sitting on. He says he heard I was around and has been looking for me. I didn't know I made the news here in the village! His name is Thulani and he looks shorter than I remember. Thulani was in Form 4 when I was in Form 2 and we kind of had a thing. I don't know if I can call it that because all we ever did was send each other flowery letters. We were so tight that not even the teachers at school could separate us. Once, my Maths teacher confiscated a letter I had meant to send to Thulani and read it at the assembly point in front of everyone.

I was called in front and had wished to just die when my teacher read my "I would rather fill River Nile with a teaspoon than lose you. You are my bottle of oxygen and without you I will perish. I love you like hot chips love vinegar". I had then written a song dedication at the end: Irreplaceable - Beyonce. I had no idea that it was a breakup song, I thought it meant he was irreplaceable. I had then sprayed my mother's perfume, erasing some of the words on the letter and could not wait to give Thulani's friend during break time.

I used to hide when I see Thulani but would daydream about him all the time. So I really don't know if we had a thing or not. I remind him of the time we were punished for dating, together with other couples. We had stood at the assembly point and the headmaster had called out a list of people who were at school not to learn but to play 'Husband and wife'. The punishment was to dig a hole as big as yourself and then cover it up when you are done. It had taken me three weeks and Thulani would always come and dig for me. That was love then.

Had I not left for South Africa I would probably be with him and I wonder what life would have been like. Looking at him now, he's nothing like the men I find attractive. He's not tall enough or dark enough and he's quite skinny. I tell him about school and he tells me that he's now teaching at the primary school. He says jobs are hard to find and that he had no choice but to do temporary teaching. He says it's ok though and he wishes I was back here at the village for good.

I buy us Coke and Schweppes lemon, vanilla creams, lemon creams and chompkins. It's Christmas after all. He says he wishes to visit South Africa and maybe get a job there and I'm not sure whether to tell him that it's not as easy as people make it seem. I decide not to because I don't want to kill his hope.

He asks if I'm seeing someone and I say no and he says we never really broke up, I just left. He asks if we can pick up from where we left. That was 8 years ago! So much has changed since then, and I don't think there's anything to pick up. I tell him it won't work because of the distance. I need to be nice.

We are joined by three other guys that I know and they are tipsy and keep making jokes. I had to buy them a round of beer because they kept saying, "Buy us beer Lastborn! You are from South Africa, where money is made!". One beautiful thing is that my name is not funny here at home. There's worse names like Do-it, Try-Again, Kissmore, Surprise, Sometimes, Howcome, Have-a-look, the list is endless. Before long I'm dancing and cheering with the crowd. I feel so at home and forget all my troubles.

CHAPTER 22

It's January now and it's time to go back to school. My suitcase is half empty because Replacement took most of my clothes. I hope she treats them well, most of them were quite expensive!

My new year's resolutions include:

1. No Elik
2. Finish PhD
3. Cut down on carbs
4. Be selfish (Take care of me)

I feel like crying as I stand at the bus stop with my mother, father and siblings. They keep saying how proud of me they are and can't wait until I'm a doctor and wish I will do better than my brother. My father says I should get married soon, and I should know that I'm expensive so I must choose a husband wisely. He needs those cows!

I'm carrying mangoes, caterpillars, cerevita, mazoe, maputi and all things Zimbabwean. I also have like 10 packets of Lobels lemon creams. South Africa doesn't make lemon creams quite the same, I have to bring my own. You would swear I'm going to boarding school! But I really miss these things when I'm in Cape Town so I'm carrying a fair supply.

The journey back to South Africa was longer than expected. We were supposed to arrive in Johannesburg around 12 noon and I would take the GauTrain to the airport then fly out at 4.30 pm. We only arrived at 8 pm because we had trouble with the police on the way. Turns out the bus had an expired permit. I only got to the airport after 9 and I could not find an available flight to Cape Town. Everyone is going back after the holidays.

My only choice is to book a room in a hotel and fly out tomorrow. I find an ATM but my card doesn't work. It keeps saying, 'Account suspended'. I try my internet banking, maybe I can eWallet myself. That too is not working. I remember now that since my last visa expired end of last year, my account would have been frozen, so I need to go with the new visa to the bank. But the banks are closed already. I don't know, it looks like I will sleep at the airport today. But the thought of someone stealing my bags while I'm sleeping is unsettling.

I go through my phone list and I can't find anyone I can ask to send me R1000 at least. Bunke is in another continent now, I'm sure he would have sent me that money. I try Ndivhu but he says he's broke. I try Brain but he doesn't pick up his phone. Why does life keep putting me in these situations though!

I call Lumka, I'm sure I'm a nuisance to him now and since I broke up with his friend I'm not sure he will help me. I call him anyway. He says I should call Elik and sends me his new number. He also says Elik's wife is not around. He assures me that she's out of the country for real so I don't have to worry. Why me? Why do these misfortunes keep happening to me? But what option do I have? I call.

"Elik. It's Fierce", I say. I feel so nervous. I don't want to talk to him.

"Oh! Yes baby! I'm so glad you called! How are you? Where are you?", he says.

"I need to borrow R1000", I say.

"At this time of the night? Where are you? Are you ok?", he says.

"I'm at the airport. I missed my flight and there are no more flights and my account is frozen", I say.

"I'm coming to fetch you right now", he says.

"No ...", I start to say but he's hung up.

30 minutes later he calls and says he's here. He jumps out of the car when he sees me and holds me so close, I can't breathe. I just stand there and don't hug him back. All I need is R1000 so I can get a hotel room. He gets the door, then my bags and I jump into that Ford Ranger. He says he's taking me home.

I don't feel good about this. But I know Elik will never make me do anything I don't want to, so I will sleep in the guest room alone. All the way, he asks about home and my holiday and he apologises for what happened before I left and he promises that he will do better this year. I'm not really listening. I'm wondering what I'm doing. He can see that I'm not paying attention so he puts on Akon's music and skips till he gets to 'Love you no more'. I can't help but smile as he sings along. He's too precious.

He makes it a point to sing out loud some parts. I think he's trying to talk to me through the lyrics. It's working. I'm listening to him and I'm falling in love with him all over again. He sings loudly when the song says:

"There's no direction, where do I go?

They wanna see us let go but I'm sure you know

That I will never walk out that door, and I'm sure you know

That I will be there to fight for you and will look out for you

Even though you were letting go

You will always be my only. No I'll never leave you lonely
You're my friend, you're my homie
I'm coming home-y

I just wanna be a better man.
I'm far from an angel or reverend
The streets tryna make a brother sell again
But I just wanna hold hands with you again
Why, why would you think I don't love you no more....."

He lets the rest of the chorus play and he keeps stealing glances at me. I think he's looking for a reaction. Although I'm smiling inside and I'm feeling the song, I wear a straight face. He resumes singing and is louder this time:

"Wanna let you know that I'm like your shadow
And no matter where you go my heart will follow
Even though you've seen a lot, heard a lot
One thing's for sure is we all we've got
Hope to ease the pain by telling you just one thing
That I'll always love you".

That's officially my new favourite song!

We get to his house and I blatantly refuse to get in. I'm traumatised by this house. It takes a lot of begging and apologising from his side to convince me. I shower,

have the chicken wrap we bought on the way and I let him know that I will be sleeping in the guest room. He says ok. I'm sticking with my new year's resolution. 'No Elik'. He goes and sleeps in his bedroom. He says his wife went to Ghana for her father's unveiling and the kids are with her sister. I go to bed alone and fall asleep almost immediately because I'm so exhausted.

I woke up so proud of myself. I finally managed to resist that Ghanaian sexiness. I go and join him for breakfast then remind him that I need him to book my flight. He says it's Saturday today so I might as well leave on Monday! I say no. He begs. I say no. I want to leave today.

"Fierce, I can see that you don't want me anymore and that's ok. I respect that. I want you and I love you, but I respect your decision. Can you just stay today then, please? So we end this on amicable terms?", he says. I shake my head no. I can't.

"Please, baby. I know I always ask too much of you but can you do this one last thing for me?", he says. He looks so sincere. You know he has those brown eyes that you just want to look into all day and those lips that you just want to kiss. And when he's begging like this I just start making babies with him in my head. "Please Fierce. Come on, we've been through a lot me and you, let's not just end things like this. Spend today with me. Please", he says. Man, he looks so cute when he's begging.

“Ok fine. But let’s book the flight for tomorrow!” I say. I’ll leave tomorrow evening then. That’s a fair compromise. We spend the whole day chilling by the pool and me drinking ice tea. We cook lunch together and get lost playing God of War. He says I cheat when we play video games but he’s just a sore loser. By evening we are laughing and he joins me in the shower uninvited. I let him come in. Nothing is going to happen and I’m so glad he’s not pushing it. He can look but he ain’t getting none. He asks to dry me and lotion my body and I let him. He takes his time with that but no I’m not budging. We have lunch left overs for supper and cuddle on the couch as we watch Star Wars: The Force Awakens. I have this under control.

After the movie, I feel like sleeping. He lifts me up and carries me to the guest room, my room. He asks if he can stay the night with me. The answer is a big no. He just sits there looking at me as I take off my clothes. Sleeping naked is good for your health. “You sure you don’t want me to sleep here? I’ll just hold you, nothing else, I promise”, he says. “I’m very sure. Go to bed. I’ll see you tomorrow”, I say. “You know you miss me”, he smacks his lips. I do. But I won’t admit it.

I stand between his knees and kiss him, just to say goodnight and thank him for a beautiful day. He kisses me back and I literally feel spasms running up and down my spine. I feel so weak. His hands grope me and we are kissing and he’s standing up and his clothes are coming off. Damn, he smells so good! He pushes me on the bed and lies on top of me, kissing me with so much ferocity, I can’t back out now. His body feels so warm and his weight is crushing me but that’s not a problem right now.

“You sure you want this?”, he whispers just before nibbling on my ear lobe. I nod vigorously. I do. I want this. I hold on for the rocky ride and he keeps saying “I’m sorry baby” as he picks up momentum. Isn’t it obvious that I’ve forgiven him? Love making turns to downright fucking and I’m screaming my voice away. The neighbours surely know his name now. “I love you”, I say when our eyes meet. I can’t believe I said it first. It’s that good. “I love you”, he says. His voice! His body! His eyes! Everything. I love everything. I feel so connected to him when I cuddle up to sleep afterwards.

I wake up at night and watch him sleeping and snoring softly. I want him. I want some more. I can’t get enough of him. He’s sleeping so I guess I have to be creative in how I wake him up. He hates being woken up. But I have a mouth and I’m not afraid to use it. He wakes up. “Fierce”, is all he says before holding down my head so I can keep working. He lets me go on some more before he helps me get on top of him. I’m following my aunt’s advice. I’m bringing my porn-star game to the bedroom.

That ‘No Elik’ resolution can now officially be deleted. I’ll try again next year. I really don’t learn shame. We wake up in the same bed the next morning and it’s way too late to be saying this is over. It just restarted. I join him in the shower and we decide what to do today. I’ll be flying out tonight. Now I wish I had said yes to leaving tomorrow rather.

We go out for brunch in the mall in Doppio Zero in Sandton, then sit by the benches outside watching the water works and people. I think the whole Mandela Square concept was imitating St Mark's Square in Venice! But they didn't quite get it right. I sit with my head on his shoulder and his arm around me. I'm at peace. For the first time in a long time, I don't regret this. I'm taking care of me this year and concentrating on what makes me happy. Everyone else should wait for next year. I don't even care who sees me.

We go home and he's like, "so last night. That was amazing".

I'm like, "if you want some more, you know all you have to do is ask right?", I wink.

"Can I have some more?", he says, making a puppy face.

"If you ask nicely, I might just consider your request, Prof", I say.

"Please Ms. Fierce, can you give me some more", he says.

"Is this what you want?", I take off my dress and let him take me in.

The way he's staring at me right now is so hot.

"Follow me", I say. I take him by the hand and lead him to the guest room.

"Lie back and let me take care of you", I command him as soon as I finish taking his clothes on.

I'm feeling quite daring today. I'm not holding back and I ride like I'm getting paid for it. His dark skin and my brown skin contrast so perfectly. He rolls me over and attacks me like he hates me. Sometimes I wonder if we just love each other for the great sex!

We cuddle afterwards and he keeps saying he loves me. I know he does and I love him too. Too bad we don't have all day to cuddle though because I have a flight to

catch. He gives me R5000 cash since I have no working bank account. He says he'll send me more when I reactivate my account.

As I fly back to Cape Town, I'm good. I don't feel bad at all. I've spent too much of my time feeling bad about my relationship with Elik. But since I'm still here, I might as well do myself favour and just own it.

It's a new year. I'm back in the lab with Brain and Ndivhu. It feels empty without Bunke though. It's like the brotherhood is incomplete, you know. We actually sat down and made a pact that we will finish our PhDs this year and graduate together. We swore to work hard, to support each other and to have the highest research output in the Department. We wrote all this down and signed. It was so intense. I'm just happy that we are back. I'm yet to see Ndivhu hold his end of the bargain though!

I need to go and register so I can clear my bursary money. That bursary I applied for last year, I got it. Being a foreign student sucks because you can't register online so I have to go and queue with first years in the IT centre! That's not on. There should be special queues for postgrads. We bring a lot of money into the university for crying out loud!

I'm so bored in the queue but I eventually get to the front. I don't know why year after year they need copies of my passport and academic record. Don't they have

an online system where they can file these things? Can't the registration system not be synced to the exams department so that I don't have to go and pay R50 for my results and bring them down to IT? Also, why do they keep forcing us to get medical aid? I never use it but I pay every month! I need to write an email to SRC seriously, these are things to toyi toti (protest) for.

I finish registration and this year they decided not to give us new student cards, they will just stick this year over last year. I pass by security and pick up this year's parking disc. I'm now officially ready for the year. Bring it on PhD, I'm ready! I have to go to the bank, buy groceries unpack and tidy up my room so that tomorrow, I can be in full school mode.

I also have to fill up the car tank and pay insurance. Why do men buy us cars and not pay the insurance and give us fuel cards? There should be a law about that! You buy someone a car, you pay their insurance and you are responsible for their fuel! It's only fair.

CHAPTER 23

It's end of March already and campus is empty. It's semester break and students have gone home for Easter holidays. Unfortunately, a postgraduate student does not have the luxury of a vacation.

I'm sitting on the bench outside the Department, eating a chip roll and drinking Coke zero. Those ducks are still here! I watch a girl wearing a nightgown, going to the cafeteria. I've never understood the concept of wearing sleepwear outside!

I'm sitting with my thoughts. It's been a good year so far and I have been a good student. I'm up to date with my work, I've sent out two articles for publication, I'm at the lab every single day from early morning till after midnight, I chat to my mother as much as I can and I send money home whenever I can. I'm still very single though and I think I'm happy. That 'I'm owning my relationship with Elik' thing didn't last very long. I started feeling guilty again and blocked him for a while. I guess he also got tired of keeping up with my tantrums so he let me be.

I found out that blocking Elik and ignoring him was only hurting myself so I unblocked him. It's the best decision I ever made. He calls me when he feels like it and I call him when I feel like it, we chat every other day but our chats are less lovey dovey now and more 'Hi there, how was your day'. I send him nudes every now and then. He sends me money when he feels like it and I thank him and send it home. We are in a good space. We haven't spoken in over 2 weeks though and I don't know what's up but I don't really mind. His picture is still my wall paper though, I just love looking at his eyes. They are so dreamy.

Bunke has only emailed me twice, he says he's settled in well and is doing great. I'm happy for him. Back here, Brain has a girlfriend now and finally left me alone. She's a first year journalism student who wears crop tops and leggings, and has a tongue ring. She comes around sometimes to the lab but Brain knows to respect

our space so she never stays too long. I'm actually shocked that he fell for her considering he was always preaching decency!

Ndivhu has a stable girlfriend too. They have been going strong for 2 months now! Brain and I made a bet on how long they will last. I gave them 3 months tops and Brain gave them 4. We will see who will win. As for me, I'm still me, single and eating chip rolls and drinking Coke zero with a straw.

My mother called me this morning and she was hysterical and crying. It took a very long time to understand what she was trying to say. My little sister Replacement is dead! I don't have all the details yet and my mother wasn't making much sense but all I know right now is my beautiful sister is dead. I think I'm still in denial because I don't feel anything. It's just like a very bad dream that I'll soon wake up from.

Replace? Dead? No way. She was fine when I saw her in January before I came this side. She was stressed about the pregnancy but she was alive and fine. I've been trying to call mother back but the phone is not going through. Network is a problem back home. I need answers. I try my father's phone and thankfully it rings and he answers. He sounds sad but at least he's not crying.

"Baba. How are you?", I say

"Oh! my child. A dark shadow has descended over us", he says.

"So you telling me it's true? What exactly happened?", I say.

I'm hoping with all I have in me that it's not true. That she's sick maybe, but she'll be fine. She can't be dead. Or maybe mother meant she's dead in the sense that she did something wrong and she will 'kill her dead'. I mean she always screams 'I'm going to kill you dead' everytime we do something wrong. I hope that's the situation here.

I sit down on the floor as father breaks the news down for me. He says Replace died trying to abort her baby. Apparently, she was teased at school, even by the teachers, for being pregnant, until she couldn't take it anymore. So her friend had found her a sangoma who could remove the baby. It had gone bad and she had bled to death. From my calculations, she would be about 6 months pregnant now. That's way too late to abort a baby! Worse still not in a hospital.

At least I'm feeling something now. I'm angry. Angry at my parents for not supporting her. I remember how mother was shouting at her in December and making her feel ashamed for being pregnant. I'm angry at my step mother because that woman always has the most hurtful words and I'm sure she didn't hold back when it came to Replace. I'm angry at the school for not protecting my sister. I'm angry at that sangoma, I'm angry at Replace's friend. Above all, I'm angry with myself. I wasn't there for her, I didn't help her.

I failed her when I didn't talk to her about sex and contraceptives. But she had been so young so I hadn't felt the need. But I should have stepped up when she got pregnant. I should have been her sister and supported her. I got so caught up

in my own life that I forgot about her and I don't know if I'll ever forgive myself for that.

The anger is slowly turning into pain and I don't know what to do. I should have been there for her. I should have taken her away from that village and brought her here to Cape Town. I should have made a plan. I didn't and now she's dead. I wish I could talk to someone but I really don't have close friends, so I'm here all alone. I need to keep it together and make a plan for the funeral.

I call my eldest brother and he doesn't answer. I call the other one and thankfully he answers. "Butho, we need to come together and see what to do about Replace's funeral", I say. I assume he has heard the news.

"Have you spoken to Zi yet?" he says. Zi, short for Zibulo, is my eldest brother.

"No, I can't get hold of him. Please try him as well", I say.

He keeps quiet.

"Butho, father said the funeral is this coming Saturday. I need you and Zi to bring your money together and we see what to do. When are you going home?", I say.

"Going home for what?", he says.

I feel like pulling off my hair right now.

"For the funeral! Geez Butho!", I say.

"I can't go home Fierce, I have a job you know, and it's mid-month, I don't have the money so I won't make it", he says. He was my only hope. He's the doctor in the family.

I literally look at my phone! He can't be serious right now.

"Butho, your sister is dead. Do you understand? DEAD! And you telling me your work is more important? What the hell is wrong with you?", I scream at him and he stays quiet. I don't think he cares really.

"Ok fine then! If you won't go at least send me your contribution and I'll make a plan", I say. I'm not going to waste my energy on him.

"I told you nje Fierce that I don't have money right now. You have to wait till month end!", he says. Wait till month end? The funeral is in 5 days! And why is he talking like he's doing me a favour?

"Are you even listening to yourself?", I say. He can't be serious.

"Don't they have funeral cover?", he says.

I give up. For a doctor, he's pretty stupid! Funeral cover in our village? Seriously? Mother was right that he has forgotten where he comes from.

"You know Butho, to think growing up I actually looked up to you!" I say then hang up. I've never seen such. I add one more person on my list to be angry at.

I've left Zibulo a dozen messages but he hasn't gotten back to me. I don't expect much from him because he's broke I know. I send him money sometimes. My only hope was Butho. I will just try my other brother in Hillbrow, I know he's broke but surely he'll make a plan to go home. Maybe we can even go together. I just need to talk to him. I hope he's still using this number. Thank heavens he answers.

After exchanging greetings, I ask if he's heard about Replace and he says yes.

"I'm glad you called my sister, you know I need R400 urgently", he says.

"What do you need it for?", I ask. If it's to go home, I can send it to him.

"No, you see I'm short on rent man. Please. Just R400", he says.

I honestly don't believe this. This can't be happening!

"Get a job like everyone else! Where do you think I get the money to keep supporting you from? What's wrong with you people? Your sister is dead and you don't care!", I scream into the phone.

"Eeish!", is all he says before I hang up.

My brothers are the most useless people in the world. I don't know how I'm going to do this. I've never even been to a funeral before but I know it costs a lot. I call my father again to find out how much money he has. He really doesn't have much, he says all he can offer is a cow to kill for the people to eat. He says it's fine I shouldn't worry, we don't need a coffin, we'll bury her wrapped in a blanket and we will make samp and meat for the people. I can't have that. Replace deserves better than that. I'll find the money somehow.

I could sell my car but where am I going to get a buyer in such a short space of time? I could sell my Brazilian wig and maybe get R3000 for it. I could sell my dresses and shoes. But I know students are broke. What am I gonna do? I'm stressed, I'm hurt, I'm angry and the pain keeps building. I do the only thing that works for me. I need time out. I find my painkillers, pop 5 and let myself drift away. Maybe the pain will be gone when I wake up. I need to invest in sleeping pills and stop abusing pain pills.

I woke up around 5 pm with a throbbing headache and a dry throat. That's the worst side effect of knocking myself out with pills. I keep gulping water to ease the

dryness. Then I remember that my sister is dead and the pain comes rushing back in.

I need to keep it together, my brothers have made it clear that I'm on my own. I'm barely holding on though, and I have less than R10000 in my account. That's nothing because I still need to fly to Joburg and take a bus to Zimbabwe and come back. I won't have much left for everything else after that.

I feel so light headed and I think I'm going to faint. I know I need to eat something but I don't have appetite at all. Maybe if I go to the lab and do some work I might forget and clear my head. Bathing is a nightmare, my whole body hurts so bad and my joints are stiff. I struggle into my jeans afterwards and walk to the department. I feel so alone, I'm just drifting forwards and I think someone greeted me on the way but they sounded so distant. I almost get hit by a car as I cross the road into the Department but I just keep walking.

"What's wrong Fierce?", Ndivhu asks as soon as I get into the lab. He says my face is swollen and my eyes are red. "My sister is dead", I say, and for the first time today I cry. Really cry. Ndivhu and Brain hold me and try to comfort me. They walk me back to my room and force me to eat something. Ndivhu makes me a nice tuna mayo sandwich which I'm sure I would have enjoyed under different circumstances. Right now it's tasteless but I suffer a few bites and drink some water. The guys take off my shoes and put me in bed. They try to cheer me up with stories of some tricky situations we've found ourselves in and I appreciate the effort but it's not working. Ndivhu offers to go back to the lab and get his and

Brain's laptops and some books. They say they will work from my room tonight. It must be 6 or 7 pm I'm not quite sure.

The guys sit quietly with their laptops while I cry into my pillow and struggle to sleep. I keep thinking of a future that might have been. Replace with her baby and me a loving aunt. We had vowed we would do a better job at naming the baby than our parents did naming us. The plan was that she finishes high school then she would come this side for University and leave the child back home. She was so beautiful with that dimple on her left cheek. Everytime I close my eyes I see her smiling at me.

I try and remember the last conversation I had with her. She had told me school was hard. I had told her to hang in there. I hadn't asked for details. I had assumed that she meant the subjects were difficult. I should have asked more. I should have saved her. I wish she had come to me. But like everyone else at home, she probably thought she would be bothering me since I already do everything for the family. Tears just keep falling and Brain stops working and hugs me as I shake and cry into his shoulder.

I know I need to get it together so I can plan to go home tomorrow but I just can't. I can't sleep all night but the crying becomes less and I just sink into a numb darkness.

The guys stayed in my room all night and kept forcing me to drink water. They didn't sleep as well. They just sat there and worked on their projects and talked to

me and tried very hard to cheer me up. I only started dozing off around 8 am this morning and that's when they left with a promise to come back soon after they had freshened up.

I only slept for like 2 hours and I had horrible nightmares. Replace kept accusing me of letting her die and not helping her. I woke up sweating and panting and couldn't sleep anymore. It's Tuesday and I need to start looking at flights. I need to go home today so I can get a night bus to Zimbabwe from Johannesburg and be home tomorrow. That will leave me with Thursday and Friday to run around and see what to do.

My heart is still so sore as I drag myself out of bed. I'm still in the jeans and top from yesterday and I don't have energy to bath or change clothes. I need to keep it together. I drink more water and kneel down to pray. I don't pray often and sometimes when I do, I run out of words. I need strength, that's all I ask for. Strength to get through this in one piece. Strength to hold the family together. Strength to step up because no one else is willing to. I'm tempted to ask God to bring Replace back but I know it doesn't work that way.

I walk towards the student centre. I need fresh air. I find the ATM and check my balance. I have R9860. After return fares home, I should be able to contribute R6000 to the funeral. So I withdraw R6000. I'll use the remaining money to book my flights and bus online. When I get back to my room, I feel myself shutting down. I force my eyes to stay open, I can't faint now. I need to keep it together. I

sit on the floor, against the bed with my phone and send a message.

"Replacement passed away yesterday", I type.

My phone rings almost immediately. At hearing his voice I just start crying uncontrollably. I can't help it. He's my safe place. He stays on the line until I calm down a bit.

"Baby. Listen to me. I need you to do me a favour, ok?", Elik says.

"Ok", I say, in between sniffs.

"I need you to calm down, pack a bag and get an Uber to the airport. I'll get you the earliest flight out of there to Joburg. Can you do that for me baby?", he says.

I nod, forgetting that I'm on the phone.

"Yes", I say.

"Good. We'll get through this ok? I've got you. Let me get you that flight. Pack", he says.

"But I don't know what to do. The funeral is on Saturday and my brothers don't want to help and mother is a wreck and the pain Elik, the pain", I cry to him.

"Shhh. I know it's hard baby. But try and forget all that for a moment. Just come to me, ok?", he says.

"Ok", I say.

"You can do that for me?", he says.

"Yes", I say.

"Good. Call me when you get to the airport", he says.

"Ok", I say.

I hang up and pack a bag. I feel so drained as I drag myself around my room picking things to pack. I don't really care what I'll wear. Ndivhu and Brain return and I tell them I'll be heading to the airport. I'm still wearing clothes from yesterday and the top is creased, but I don't care. I didn't even bother showering or even washing my face for that matter. They hug me goodbye as we wait for an Uber and they assure me that everything in the lab will be fine. Brain offers to do my statistical analysis, he says I should just email him my raw data. I'll do that at the airport.

On my way to the airport I receive the e-ticket. SAA business class, leaving in 1 hour 30 minutes from now. I guess economy was fully booked and Elik just had to get the earliest flight. I look out of the window at clouds floating by as we fly to Joburg. I don't even mind the turbulence. I'm trying my best to keep it together and it's so damn hard. I try and search for happier thoughts in my head but I find none. Every thought leads back to Replace. We finally land in Joburg and I walk out, trying hard not to cry. I see Elik, he's with Lumka. As soon as he hugs me I just break down to pieces. I couldn't hold back any longer.

"Shhh. It's alright. I'm here now. We'll get through this", Elik says. Lumka just stood there shame as I cried into Elik's shirt. We drive off when I'm better and Elik sits in the back with me while Lumka drives. I lie on Elik's lap and he massages my head gently. It's dead quiet in the car. No one is saying anything at all.

We check in at the Hilton in Sandton. I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror and I look horrible. My face is puffy and my eyes are red and swollen. Elik goes

down to the restaurant and returns with butternut soup. My favourite. He feeds it to me and forces me to finish it. It's tasteless.

"Can I have your father's number. I need a list of all the things I need to buy", Elik says. I'm a bit confused. To buy for what now? And I don't think him talking to my father is a good idea in the first place. It's beyond disrespectful. Who will he say he is? He insists though and I give him the number. Lumka does all the talking because at least he speaks Xhosa and my father speaks Ndebele so they can understand each other.

I don't hear the conversation though because he stepped out into the balcony. Elik just holds me and says nothing. I don't feel like talking as well. He keeps planting soft kisses on the top of my head. Lumka returns a few minutes later.

"Let's go Elik. I'll go and buy the things and you make sure you get all your documents for crossing the boarder together. Drop me off by the office so I can pick up my car", he says. I'm not quite following. But I don't have the energy. I'm just there.

"Alright", Elik says.

"Be strong sisi ne", Lumka says to me and pats my shoulder.

"Will you be alright here alone baby?" Elik says. He looks very worried.

"Do you want to come with me?", he asks.

"No baby, I just want to sleep", I say.

"Alright. I'll be back in a bit. If you need anything just call me, anything at all", he kisses me on the forehead and they leave. I get into bed and eventually I manage to fall asleep.

Elik wakes me up around 7 pm. Lumka is there with him. He brought me a beef wrap that I'm now struggling through. I have zero appetite but Elik won't hear it. He says I need to eat. They go on like I'm not there, trying to figure out if they bought everything.

"You sure you'll be fine Elik? I can come with you guys, you know", Lumka says.

"No, I'll be fine. Don't worry. Someone needs to man the office", Elik says.

"And you ok taking the Ford? This journey will really add to your mileage, you know. You can have the Range Rover, at least it's older and I really don't care about the mileage!", Lumka says.

"No really, I'll be fine man. The Ford is fine!", Elik says.

"You got enough US\$ dollars?" Lumka says.

"Ya, I passed by the bank", Elik says.

"Ok then. Let me know if you need anything", Lumka says.

"Thanks man", Elik says.

"Alright then. Let me go home so I can find the kids still awake", Lumka says.

Lumka hugs me, wishes me peace and a safe journey and encourages me to stay strong. He kisses my hand and Elik walks him out.

"What were you guys on about?", I ask Elik when he returns. I tossed that wrap in the bin as soon as they stepped out.

"We needed to get things for the funeral. We'll buy the rest when we get there. And I needed my car papers and stuff so we can cross the boarder with the car", he says.

"We?", I ask. I'm not sure I understand.

"You think I'd let you go alone? No baby. I'm taking you there", he says.

I don't think that's a good idea. I don't need drama at my sister's funeral. But I don't say anything, my face says it all.

"I'm not asking Fierce. I'm taking you and that's it!", he says.

I nod.

"What happened?", he asks for the first time. I tell him everything father told me and I'm crying again when I'm done. "Hey. Come here. We'll get through this together, alright?", he says and holds my hands. I smile at him through my tears. I've never been so glad to have him in my life!

"But what about work?", I ask.

"That's why there's leave days baby. And Lumka will take care of the office", he says.

"And Komla (his wife). She's fine with you leaving?", I ask.

"Don't worry about it, I'll take care of that. Don't worry about anything at all", he says.

I'm so happy he's here with me, I was falling apart on my own.

He runs the bath, helps me out of my clothes, puts me in the tub and scrubs me, then puts me back to bed while he makes phone calls and sends emails. I feel like a baby.

“We have to leave at 4 am so we can hit the road before it's too hot. So get some sleep princess”, he kisses me on the forehead and I try to sleep.

“Will you come and pick me up then?”, I ask.

“No. I'm not leaving. I won't leave you like this. I'm sleeping here with you”, he says.

CHAPTER 24

I had nightmares again and Elik had to hold me so I could sleep. He woke me up at 3:30 am to get ready so we can go. I'm wearing a long dress because we are going home. He's wearing blue jeans (Armani), white sneakers (Adidas), a white T-shirt (Markham) and a black leather jacket (Armani). He looks fine as hell. I know he thinks he looks simple but he looks too rich and that might not be good. I guess it's hard to look simple when most of your clothes cost the same amount as my tuition!

I'll take the time on the road to decide how I'm going to introduce Elik to my parents. I'm actually shocked that my father spoke to Lumka and actually told him what to buy. I wonder what Lumka said to get through to him.

The drive home is long and luckily there aren't so many people at the boarder so it only takes us less than 2 hours to cross over. There were 3 road blocks that we passed between Beitbridge and Bulawayo. Elik said he didn't have energy for cops so he just gave them \$10 each time they stopped us. We stopped in Bulawayo to buy some more groceries then proceeded home. I haven't eaten much since

Monday but I'm not that hungry. He paid off the cops as well on the road home. They want ridiculous things like 2 fire extinguishers and we only have one.

I direct him home and I start getting nervous when I see the huts that make up my home from a distance. When we drive in, I see a red cloth at the gate and a group of people sitting under the tree near the kitchen. So it's really true. She's really gone.

I'm so nervous right now. I don't know what I'll say to my parents. Who will I say Elik is. They will lose their minds and kill me dead today.

"Wear your jacket baby and stay here. I'll go speak with my father", I say to him as he stops the car.

"Alright", he says. He leans over to kiss me and I have to pull back quickly.

"Hey! You can't do that here! You can't even touch me!", I say.

He smiles.

"You are beautiful", he says.

"I'm serious Elik! You can't!", I say.

He really can't. This man though. Can't he see people already got excited when they saw the car and now they want to see who will get out. Imagine now if they see me kissing a stranger. That's an abomination!

I get out of the car and pull down my dress and re-adjust the scarf on my head. I'm literally shaking. My father is going to kill me today. I briefly pass by the tree, shaking everyone's hand then go to the hut at the back. I know that's where

mother is. I walk in and she's sitting on a mat with a blanket over her shoulders. She cries when she sees me and I just hold her. I have to be strong. "They killed my daughter. The witches killed her!", she keeps saying. "It's ok mama, I'm here now", I comfort her. I feel a stab through my heart seeing her like this.

Father is here as well. "Baba, can I talk to you outside please?", I say. I need to get out of here before I start crying too. He agrees and we walk out. "Who's car is that?", he asks when he spots the Ford Ranger parked in the middle of the yard. "Well, that's what I want to talk to you about", I say. He looks at me suspiciously and we walk towards the kraal. He's quiet, I guess he's waiting for me to talk. But I'm still looking for the right words.

"Baba, I'm sorry about what happened to Replace", I say. He squeezes my shoulder briefly. "Death is an initiation to new life my child. It's happened it's happened", he says. His voice sounds so sad and empty. No parent should ever bury their child. "But your mother is making enemies now saying they bewitched Replace", he says. I don't blame mother. We blame everything that goes wrong in this village on witchcraft. That's how it's always been. We even know who the supposed witches are! But this wasn't witchcraft, mother should know that. "I'll talk to her", I offer. I'm the voice of reason in this family.

"So baba, I need to talk to you. You see, ummm, I...I came with a friend. He drove me here. His name is Elik", I say.

I can feel my palms sweating.

"Friend you say?", he says.

"Yes, a friend. He's here to help with the funeral arrangements. He bought some of the things already, I think. His friend called you yesterday, I think", I say.

"Oh yes. Lumko!", he says and smiles.

"Lumka", I correct him.

"Yes, Lumka. Is he here as well?", he asks.

"No, he isn't", I say.

Now I wish Lumka had come along.

"He is such a mannered young man that one. He has so much respect. If this friend of yours is anything like him, then we won't have a problem", he says.

I'm hugely relieved. I know Elik is well mannered and knows how to carry himself.

We are at the kraal now and we stand watching the calves. They stay behind when the older cows go grazing.

"What really happened baba? Why would Replace try to have an abortion? I thought she was fine with the pregnancy", I ask.

"Ey my child. I don't know. I told your mothers to leave the child alone. They kept shaming her. I told them to stop but they persisted. See how that ended!", he sounds very hurt.

I can feel myself getting angry again. I better not see my step mother today because I can't promise not to wring her neck.

"Thank you for coming, my child. You have always held this family up. Thank you", he says and puts his hand over my shoulders.

"I'm sorry that I brought a friend baba. I didn't mean to. He insisted", I say then realise I'm throwing Elik under the bus here.

He laughs, to my relief.

"It's not a problem. We know you young people these days don't follow tradition. When this 'friend' of yours comes to pay lobola one day, I'm going to fine him 2 cows for this", he says laughing.

"Please be nice to him", I ask.

"We will see", he says.

Sadly, Elik will never come to pay lobola for me. He already paid cows in Ghana.

We walk back home so father can meet Elik. We find Elik outside the car playing with my younger brother, Inflation. I specifically told him to stay in the car! Why did he get out! We approach and as he sees us he stands up straight and he suddenly looks timid. He's overdressed for this place, I told him! Now people will be looking at him and seeing a walking bank!

"Go to your mother Lastborn. Your 'friend' and I will take a walk", my father says. Elik looks at me and I think he's scared. I nod at him. He will be alright. My father speaks English very well, he worked as a garden boy for a white family back in the day. I go and find my mother and sit with her. I don't say anything. I can't trust what I'll say. I blame her for not protecting my sister. It was her duty as a mother! She failed.

She asks everyone in the room to get out and we are left alone.

"I hear there's a car outside", she says.

I look at her and she looks back at me.

"I came with a friend. He's talking to father outside", I say.

"So, this friend. Who is he?", she asks.

"He's just a friend from South Africa", I say.

"Who is he? Where's he from?", she says.

"His name is Elik. He comes from Ghana but is lecturing in South Africa", I say.

"Mmm", she says.

I don't know what else to say. I don't even know why we are all pretending here.

They know he's not just a friend!

"Who else has arrived?", I ask, needing to change the subject.

"No one. It's just you my child. Your two brothers forgot about us a long time ago.

Zibulo will come tomorrow morning", she says.

I wonder why Zi never returned my calls though.

"I'll go and help with the cooking mama. If that's ok", I say.

Frankly, I just want to go and check if Elik is fine. I'm very worried.

"Yes, go and make sure no one poisons the food. You know these witches want to finish us all!", she says.

I leave the hut and my little brother runs up to me. I haven't greeted him since I arrived. He looks just fine and is happy. He says father and uncle went to the kraal. Uncle? So Elik has my little brother calling him uncle now? I take his hand and walk with him. He's grown even taller from when I last saw him.

"Mama says Replace has gone to heaven. Is she going to come back?", he asks.

I don't know how to respond to that.

"Yes. She's in heaven now", I say and squeeze his hand.

"Heaven is a good place right?", he asks.

"Yes. It's a beautiful place with golden gates and angels singing and so much food, you can eat all day", I say.

"So, if it's such a great place, why are people crying?", he asks.

I'm stuck. I'm not sure how to respond. Let's see.

"Remember when I went back to South Africa in January and you were crying at the bus stop?", I say.

"Yes", he says.

"It's the same. You were crying because I was leaving, we are crying because I just left", I say.

"But you said goodbye. She just left!", he says.

"Well...", I honestly have no come back to that.

Thankfully we are at the kraal now so I don't have to respond.

As we get there I can hear Elik and father laughing. I'm hugely relieved. I'm even more relieved to see that Elik had the sense to leave his wedding ring behind. He is such a charmer! And people wonder why I'm so hooked on him! They stop when they see us.

"Men are talking here. What do you kids want?", father says jokingly. I look at Elik and he winks. "Umm I thought maybe we can take things from the car before it gets dark", I say. That's not what I thought but I have to say something. They agree with me and we all walk back. Inflation takes Elik's hand as they walk and Elik ruffles his hair. When all this is over, I might just have his child. He's such a great father.

I didn't know Elik and Lumka bought so much groceries! Wow. I can see my father pleased. He knows I broke tradition here but parents love a rich man! So I'm pretty sure I'm forgiven. I have to join the women since father now wants to go to the bottle store with Elik. I know he just wants to show Elik off. I feel sorry for him because they will drive around this whole village so people can see the car.

The day goes by so fast and it's getting dark. Elik and father are still not back. People, who came to pay their respects have eaten and most have returned to their homes. It's just a few women left at the fires and relatives who will be staying over.

I'm so upset with everyone. They didn't start brewing umqombothi (Traditional beer) and now it's too late. I went off at the women who are helping with the cooking. And they made me even more mad when they said 'it's the grief talking'. No it's not grief, it's logic! They know they were supposed to start the fermentation on Tuesday already! My aunt, that one from Bulawayo, tried to calm me down but I wasn't having it. I was just going off at everything and everyone. People don't want to think! Elik and father arrived in the midst of the commotion.

I told Elik not to touch me but he came to where I was standing, going on a rant, and he embraced me. He is the only person who managed to calm me down. He gave me a tight hug and held me in place as I screamed and cried and shouted. "Shhhh. It's ok", he kept saying.

My father just stood there next to us and every one had formed a semi-circle in front of us, just watching.

“What’s wrong? Talk to me”, he asked after I had calmed down.

I had to forget that there were people around. “They didn’t make the beer!”, I shouted.

“Hey. Look at me. Don’t cry. It’s alright. I’ll buy beer tomorrow. Don’t cry now”, he said.

My aunt had to chase people away, she told them this is not a movie and they should go away. We stood there after everyone was gone and he just held me. I honestly don’t care who says what right now.

Elik only left me after I had completely stopped crying, to join my father under the tree. I just hope my father won’t throw him out. Holding me like that in front of him was very disrespectful.

“Fierce, go and give your husband and father their food”, my aunt says.

“He’s not my husband auntie!”, I say.

I take the dish and water jug and go to the tree. I kneel in front of my father and wash his hands then move on to Elik. He smiles at me as he washes his hands. I think he wants to laugh at me for kneeling down to wash his hands. I go back and return with their plates and kneel again.

Elik will sleep in the boys hut and I’ll sleep with mother. I can’t bear to sleep in the hut I used to share with Replace. When they are done eating I go and do the

dishes behind the kitchen and my aunt comes with me. There were more dishes to clean and I thought she would help but she just sat there, talking. Elik and father left again, I think to the bottle store.

"You see there Fierce, ah you chose well my girl. That's a man and a half!", she says. I blush at that and laugh.

"No, don't laugh. I'm serious! You hit a jackpot!", she says and I laugh even more. She's too extra. "You see now, all you have to do is keep him. Listen to me. Men want only 2 things from us. Food and sex. So make sure you cook for him and then do somersaults in bed! Show him what you are made of!", she says. Oh my word! This woman. I don't know what to say.

"I'm serious Fierce, you can't let this man go. We won't forgive you!", she says.

"I saw the way he got worried when he found you here going crazy and the way he held you. He loves you", she says.

"Do you love him?", she asks.

"I do", I say.

"Does he make you happy?", she asks.

"He does, yes", I say.

"Then hold on to him with both hands", she says.

I wish it was that simple.

"So tell your aunt. Is he good in bed?", she says.

I really laugh at that.

"Why are you laughing? Haven't you slept with him yet?", she asks, surprised.

"Well, no..yes, eeish", I don't know what I'm saying.

"Yoooh! Fierce Nkomo! Don't tell me you are sleeping around in South Africa!", she says.

She's so dramatic.

"No I'm not sleeping around! It's just him. There's never been anyone else", I say. It's a lie but she doesn't have to know that.

"Oh! So you have slept with him! I was now thinking you are mad. A man like that and you don't give it up! You will be mad", she says.

"Auntie, please don't tell mama about this. She still thinks I'm a, you know, a virgin", I say.

"Of course I won't. Your mother is too stuck up!", she says. I agree.

"Wait. This man is that one you told me about last time right? The one from Nigeria? When you said your friend needed advice?", she says.

I'm shocked she still remembers that.

"Yes. But he's from Ghana not Nigeria", I say. There's no point lying.

I love this aunt of mine.

"Look, I know your mother will pressure you to marry him but you don't have to. Marry only when you want. Don't force a marriage. You are still young. Just do those 2 things I told you and you'll see!", she says. I still laugh. I don't know what to say.

I feel like telling her how complicated it is but she might not understand. Besides I don't want people knowing how messed up my love life is. It's fine when they see the perfect outer picture. We talk more about Elik. She wants to know where he

works? How old he is? How we met? And she still wants to know if he's good in bed? I tell her all those, except the last one, I laugh at that. She concludes that he's perfect for me.

"So tell me, is it true that men from up Africa are very gifted?", she says. I can't! This woman though. She's too old for this talk. I just laugh but in my head, I'm like "Hell yeah!". She eventually says she has to go and rest but not after corrupting my mind some more. We were outside for a very long time and as I take the dishes into the kitchen, I see lights as the car comes in.

I find my little brother and give him \$2 and ask him to go and tell Elik to meet me at the kraal. He does and I see Elik approaching some minutes later. He sits next to me. There's stones there that I used to step on to watch my brothers milking the cows. Most of the cows are sleeping now but some are still standing and their bells ring softly.

"So. You and father? You are best friends now?", I ask.

"Don't be jealous!", he shoves me with his elbow.

"But how did you win him over so fast?", I ask.

"I told you not to worry. Old people love me!", he says.

"Don't let father hear you calling him old! That will be the end of this bromance of yours", I laugh.

Coming home was good for me. I feel so much better.

"Baby. About earlier. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hold you. It's just, seeing you upset like that, I just couldn't help it", he says.

I find his hand and slide my fingers in between his.

"It's ok baby. I'm glad you did. Thank you", I say.

"Thanks Elik for coming with me. I don't know what I would have done without you", I say, putting my head on his shoulder.

"For you, I'll do anything", he says. He places his free hand around my waist and we just sit there and look at the stars and I try not to think too much of Replace. Everything reminds me of her. The cows, the huts, the trees around our home, the stars, the birds, even sitting here in the silence of the night!

"That kiss you denied me earlier, can I get it now?", he says pulling me closer.

"You are so silly!", I say, but kiss him anyway.

"I love you", I say. His eyes look so beautiful in the moonlight.

It's getting late now and we don't want people to start looking for us. We go back home, one at a time to avoid being seen together. I go to sleep and the nightmares keep me awake.

CHAPTER 25

I only got good sleep around 3 am. I was tempted to sneak out and go and cuddle with Elik, but that would have been just wrong. I woke up around 10 am. I was told Zibulo came and he joined Elik, my father and 2 of my uncles on a trip to

Bulawayo. They went to buy the coffin and everything else that's needed. I really can't believe Elik is doing this for me and my family. That's a lot of money!

I still don't have an appetite and I've been sad all day. It's hard not to be when my mother won't stop crying and I have to hold her. It doesn't help that I blame her for Replace's death. It's making it hard for me to truly be there for her.

The men only returned in the evening and they all can't stop talking about how wonderful and nurtured Elik is. By that I know they mean his wallet is well nurtured. They made this into a shopping spree and made Elik buy them things. Zibulo got a suit, shirts and shoes, my father got 2 suits, shoes, a hat and a plough for the fields! The uncles also got somethings and bought so much alcohol I can't deal. They are even calling him 'mkhwenyana' (son in law) now. The way they are going on about him is insane! Money really rules the world.

Mother has met Elik too and she adores him. He's really a charmer, I don't know how he's doing it. I think it's just money! I wonder if they would be treating him the same if he was an ordinary guy without much money. I wish I could run into his arms right now, I could use a hug. But not in front of the elders.

They bought giant 3-legged pots as well. Usually we borrow from our neighbours but now we have our own. That makes my mother so happy. Because no one thought of brewing beer, they now made Elik buy the whole liquor store.

Then I see the coffin and my heart just shatters. It's beautiful and a perfect resting place for Replace's body but it just made everything so real. My mood is spoiled now so I'll just excuse myself. Elik catches me and asks that we meet at the kraal. I say ok and change my direction.

"They wouldn't let me go! Your uncles are such a handful!", he says, some 30 minutes later when he shows up.

He sits next to me and throws his arm around me. I just stay still and listen to him breathe.

"So how much does your family know about us", he asks.

"Not much. For all they know you are just a friend. But I know they are not stupid, so they just think you are my boyfriend", I say.

We keep quiet.

"Have you prepared your eulogy yet?", he asks.

"No. I don't know if I want to speak. I don't know what to say", I say.

"You have to baby", he says.

"Can you write it for me, please", I say.

"No baby, it has to come from your heart", he says.

We keep quiet.

"I can't believe she's really gone", I say.

"I wish I had met her", he says.

"You would have loved her!", I say. We just sit there and I get emotional and calm down and emotional all over again.

We eventually go to bed way after midnight.

I think I'm sinking into depression. I'm shutting down very fast. I don't want the funeral to happen. It's Friday and the funeral is tomorrow morning. More people have started coming and Elik and his crew (my father, brother and uncles) had to make another early morning trip to Bulawayo to buy more food. I'm just sitting there, trying to make my brain stop thinking. I feel numb. I help with the cooking and make sure everything is in order, but my mind is not here.

I think I will go down to the river. I get there and just sit by the bank, alone. When we were younger, Replace and I used to bath here and I used to be so jealous of her hair. Her afro was soft and used to grow fast and it would grow long and curly. I was so jealous of her hair that I had cut off a portion of it one day when she was sleeping then told her a praying mantis ate her hair. Being as carefree as she was, she had thought it was funny. She hadn't minded at all and had asked me to cut off the rest of it, saying she hated long hair anyway. I miss her so much. There's so much I wish to say to her. I want her to know that I love her.

It's late afternoon and I've been sitting here for a long time. Elik finds me, my little brother told him where I was. I didn't know they were back. He sits next to me and doesn't say anything. I guess he just needs me to know that he's there. There's this pain in my throat that just won't go away and my whole body hurts so bad.

“Why Replace? Why? Why did you do this? You would have been fine. The baby would have been fine. You should have come to me”, I say. I hope she's listening wherever she is. “Why did she have to do this Elik? Why?”, I turn towards him. He hugs me and lets me cry. “I would have helped her”, I keep saying. We eventually go back home just before sunset. Father asked Elik to join in killing the cow. They are really treating him like family, it's scary. Mother is still broken and I can't be around her right now.

There won't be sleeping tonight, the funeral is tomorrow. The men are done killing the cow and I have been doing endless trips from the kraal to the fires and then carrying the roasted meat to the people. Eventually, all the meat is brought home and handed over to the women cooking.

Elik looks a hot mess! He really went to slaughter a cow in a white T-shirt and expensive jeans! He has blood all over his clothes and shoes but he doesn't seem like he minds. He's the same age as my brother Zibulo. They are 35 and they are getting along very well. I'm sure Zi is over the moon. He's a teacher so he can finally put his English to good use!

People are singing sad songs, drinking alcohol, eating meat and I'm still playing waitress. I find Elik sometime after midnight, sitting with my brother, talking politics.

“Bhud' Zi, can I borrow Elik for a minute, please”, I ask.

“Sure. You can have him”, Zibulo says. Elik follows me and we sit on the ground under the tree, in the dark, away from prying eyes.

"You know you can go to sleep right?", I say to him. He doesn't have to abide by our rituals. We are family and we can't sleep the day before the funeral but he can if he wants.

"No, I want to stay here. With you", he says. He kisses me and I let him. I hope no one is watching. I feel so close to him. He tells me about their trip to Bulawayo. He says he enjoyed it but is complaining about the potholes.

I have to leave him to go and sit with my mother, aunt and other women.

The funeral is at 10 am and I feel like a zombie. I'm so numb. I wouldn't even have bothered doing my face if my aunt hadn't sat me down and fixed me up by force. She said if I'm to keep umkhwenyana I have to stay beautiful. "That man is the best Fierce! Can you believe he gave me \$100! I was just joking with him and he took me serious and gave me the money!", she says. I really need to speak to Elik. People here will milk him dry if he's not careful.

As the family, we go to the grave site first. Replace will be buried a few metres behind our home, next to my late sister's grave. The one she was born to replace. I walk with my mother, step mother and aunt, behind my father, uncles and brothers. With each step, I'm losing my mind and I feel sick to the stomach. I think I'm going to throw up.

We stand by the graveside and Elik finds me and stands with me. He looks gorgeous (and rich) in his black fitted suit. For the first time I don't mind that he's holding me, I'm actually glad he is. People arrive and stand around the grave. I have a black blanket around my shoulders and a black doek on my head. I keep feeling like I will faint.

I see Replace's baby daddy and I smile at him and he nods. At least he looks decent today and his pants on his waist! I also saw the chief's son, that one who had a major crush on Replace. He's crying and is not even hiding it. I wish I could give him a big hug.

The priest gives a sermon first, then the chief says some words, then my father, then Zibulo and then me.

"Should I come with you?", Elik whispers.

"No, I need to do this alone", I whisper back.

"You sure?", he says and I nod. He squeezes my hand and lets me go. I need to do this for my sister. I will not fail her again.

I walk to the head of the grave to say a few words. I have so much to say but the words escape me. I clear my throat and speak from my heart.

"I didn't write a speech because when I sat down to, I didn't know where to start. There are so many beautiful things I want to say, I would need a big counter book to write them all down. My life hasn't been easy but this is the hardest thing I've ever had to do.

Replacement was beautiful, inside and out, and that dimple on her left cheek just made her even more beautiful. I promised her I would take care of her and that soon after high school, she could come and live with me. Knowing that will never happen feels like a sword cutting through me. I'm so hurt, words cannot articulate. I'm shattered into a million pieces. It's a miracle that I'm standing here right now.

I know she looked up to me and aspired to be like me. That made me so proud and made me feel like the coolest older sister in the world. She was sweet, intelligent, caring and kind. I remember the first time I held her in my arms after mama brought her from hospital. I was only 9 then. She was instantly the light of my life and I treated her like a doll, dressing her up and playing with her everyday.

I remember mama would shout at me saying 'You will drop my baby Lastborn! Put her down!'. But I never dropped her, I always handled her with care because she was so precious. I begged and cried, asking mama to name her something else. But I'm glad they named her Replacement. She was born after I lost my baby sister, hence her name. She replaced the darkness in our lives with light.

Usually, we forget that those who are happiest in life, hide their pain the best. I wish I had probed deeper, asked more questions and reached out to her. I wish I had saved her. When mama called me saying Replace was gone, I started asking myself questions like, 'What if I'd never moved away from the village? What if I had taken her to Cape Town with me in January? Would she have lived?'. I guess now I will never know.

I can't begin to describe how I feel right now and I don't know if my heart will ever heal from this wound. I always thought I'd be able to see her grow into the beautiful woman that she was meant to be and become an engineer like me, as she always wanted.

Replace. Sis. I know I never told you how much I loved you or what you meant to me. I just hope deep down you knew. I pray you are with the angels now, singing endless melodies. I can't believe I'll never see you again. I can't believe you are gone just like that. Really sis? No goodbye, no warning, nothing? Just gone with the wind nje! Really? I won't say goodbye, so long sis, is more fitting. I love you so much. Sleep well cupcake”.

I'm done.

My knees feel like jelly as I walk back to my spot. I feel like I should have said more. It doesn't feel enough. I stand in front of Elik and he takes my hands. One of my uncles says a few words then he says it's time for the body viewing. People move from our side, view the body then regroup on the other side. I let everyone go until it's just me and Elik left standing. I don't want to do the body viewing.

Elik urges me to. He says I need to pay my respect and say my goodbyes. He says it's the last chance I have to look at Replace. He holds me and walks me slowly towards the coffin ready to catch me if I fall. My whole body is trembling. I'm sure the villagers are already gossiping about me bringing a man I'm not married to

home. But I shut everyone out. I imagine I'm alone in an open field, chasing after butterflies.

Replace looks so beautiful. It's as if she's sleeping. I move a few curls of her afro away from her forehead then lean in and kiss her on the cheek. I failed her. "Sleep well little sis. You look so beautiful and I have no doubt you will be an angel, the most beautiful of them all. I will miss you so much. I love you. I did. I do. You were my only sister", I can't talk anymore, I'm choking on my words. But I still have so much to say.

"This is Elik. I wish you had met him. You would have adored him and he would have spoiled you rotten. Sleep in peace my sweetheart. Till we meet again", I lean in and kiss her again. I don't want to move on, I want to look at her one last time then one more time then just one last time again. I want to get into the coffin and be close to her.

I feel my senses leaving me and I reach into the coffin. I want to shake Replacement so she can wake up. Playtime is over, she needs to get up now. Elik lifts me up and takes me away. I kick and scream at him to put me down but he doesn't. He puts me down at the other side of the grave and holds me tight from behind as I scream and cry. I don't care who's watching. I cry my heart out. I can hear my mother's cries echoing mine but I can't see her.

I cry even more and try to throw myself into the grave when they lower the coffin. Elik holds me firmly, keeping me upright. This can't be happening. "Let go Elik. Let

me go and be with her. Let me go", I scream at him but he maintains the firm hold of me. They cover the grave and with each shovel full of soil covering her coffin, burying her, I yell. It's like someone is repeatedly stabbing a knife through my heart. The grave is soon covered and one by one, people put a stone on the mound and walk away.

Elik remains behind with me long after everyone has left. It's just us two. I'm not ready to go back home and leave Replace here all alone. I want to dig her up and hold her one last time. Elik patiently waits as I keep speaking to my dead sister. Eventually I pick up my stone and he picks up his. We put them on the grave and walk home. My spirit is broken.

I'm sure people now have enough gossip and speculation about who Elik is but right now I couldn't care less. My sister is gone and the void she left can never be filled. I wish I was Inflation. Although he looked worried and cried a bit at the grave site, he is perfectly fine now and is running around. We go and wash our hands in the bucket with herbs and I take a few bites of the saltless meat as tradition expects me to.

We will stay home one more day to complete the rituals. I'm glad Elik is here because I don't see how else I would have made it through this. I don't know how Saturday ended, I wasn't mentally there. I don't even remember falling asleep.

It's Sunday. Yesterday now feels like a memory from long ago as I try to piece together the pieces. But one thing unmistakable is the pain. It's still there and it's intense. Father asked to talk to me and Elik as it's evening and we are leaving tomorrow. Elik and I walk into his room and we sit at a table making sure we are a distance apart. Father is sitting opposite us.

"You know, son, what you did was wrong. You can't just come to my home like that!", he says.

"I'm sorr...", Elik begins.

"Wait. I'm not done", father says.

"Yes, it was very wrong but I'm glad you did it. I want to thank you for everything you did for us. Thank you for being there for my daughter. I don't know how we can ever repay you", father says.

"It's not a problem. I'd do it all over again", Elik says and looks at me. He reaches for my hand then when he realises what he's doing, he drops his hand.

"So you say you love my daughter?", father says.

Please don't ask about marriage, I say in my heart and cross my fingers.

"I love your daughter more than anything", Elik says.

He sounds so sincere.

"And you? You love your 'friend'?", father says now looking at me.

I will never escape this 'friend' issue shame.

"Yes baba, I do", I say. This is awkward. It's like we are making vows.

“Very well then. I wish you all the best. Treat each other well and you know whenever you are ready, son, your uncles will find us here”, father says. He just had to!

“Lastborn, go to your mother. I need to speak with him alone”, father says to me.

I hesitate but get up and leave the hut and find mother in the kitchen. I can't believe my other 2 brothers didn't show up! At least Zibulo is here and he's happy because he got \$200 from Elik. On top of that shopping! These people are overdoing it now, they starting to piss me off. Elik comes later laughing with father, we say our goodbyes to everyone as we will be leaving at dawn. I promise to call often and Zibulo is officially my favourite brother.

I sleep in mother's room and she wakes me up at dawn to get ready for the road. She already prepared water for me and since the whole home is dead asleep, I quickly bath outside and get ready to leave. The roosters are crowing already and it reminds me of back then when roosters were the alarm.

Mother hugs me and thanks me for coming through for the family. I ask her if she is upset with me bringing Elik around and she says she's not. She says she trusts my judgement and wants me to be happy. We say our final goodbyes to my mother and father as they are the only ones who got up to see us off. Mother made us scones for the road and she says I must return with her Tupperware the next time I come home. Elik starts the car and we hit the road.

“So what did father say to you yesterday?”, I ask.

"Nothing much", he says.

"Come on. Tell me", I insist.

"No really. He just wanted to let me know how proud of you he is. He loves you baby and you are everything to him. He said you are your mother's only daughter now and he wants only the best for you", he says.

He pauses and glances my direction then bites his lower lip. I know that means he's feeling bad.

"You are what's best for me Elik", I say and place my hand on his. "Thank you for everything and when it comes to you, I don't regret anything", I say. I'm truly grateful.

"He also said he will kill me if I ever broke your heart", he quickly looks at me as he says that then looks forward. I know what he's thinking. He's feeling guilty. He knows he has a PhD in breaking my heart.

"Yes he will kill you dead, trust me! I'm a princess!", I say. And laugh. He laughs too but it sounds forced. "You are my princess", he says.

"You know Fierce sometime I look back and wish I had done things differently, you know. I should have made you my wife. You should be the mother of my kids", he says.

I often wish that too.

"It's ok nana, don't feel bad. You know I love you right?", I say.

"I know and I love you more", he says.

My face is still puffy and my eyes are still red. The drive back seemed shorter mostly because I zoned out most of the time and got lost in my pain. We arrive at the Hilton around 1 pm. Lumka is already here in the parking lot waiting for us. He had his wife make us 'soul food', that's what he's calling it. How he got her to agree to do that beats me. What lies do these men tell their wives? I accept the Tupperwares and we go into the room and eat. I really eat for the first time this week. It's deep fried chicken with yellow rice, butternut, potato salad and beetroot. It tastes like heaven.

I want a friend who will be to me what Lumka is to Elik. The way they always come through for each other is amazing. I admire their bond. I've been shown so much love this week, I feel like I belong. I actually cheer up a little. Lumka says Elik should stay with me tomorrow and not go to work. I've decided to go to Cape Town on Wednesday evening.

Elik insists that he will spend tonight with me. I was ok with him going home really. He says he will only go home tomorrow night. I guess he meant it all those times he said he will always be there for me. Now getting over him is going to be near impossible.

He goes away with Lumka, I don't ask where to. He only returns in the evening when I'm already in bed. He slides into bed on the far side. He probably thinks I'm sleeping so doesn't want to wake me up or his body is cold and he knows I don't want him touching me when he's cold. He must get warm first! But I'm awake. I can't find sleep.

"Elik", I say. "I can't sleep". His side lamp is still on.

"Turn around, let me hold you", he says.

"No, that won't work", I say.

"Do you want me to go get you sleeping pills? I'm sure there's a pharmacy close by", he says.

I don't want him to go. I don't want him to leave me alone.

"Please make love to me", I say.

He looks at me, with eyes saying 'are you sure?'. I'm sure. I need this. I need to be soothed so I can forget, even if for a moment.

"Make love to me, please", he shouldn't make me beg!

"Come here", he says reaching for me.

His body is cold but I don't push him away. I surrender myself to him and close my eyes as he kisses every part of my body slowly from my lips all the way down. He lingers on my boobs, he's always loved them. I'm so vulnerable right now and my emotions are heightened and every touch of his tongue on my body threatens to throw me over the edge. He stays longer down there, taking his time and putting his tongue to work. My body feels things I can't describe.

When he's ready, and I'm ready, he holds me close as he gently parts my thighs with his knees and makes his way slowly into me. Ever so gentle like I'm fragile or something. I feel the pain leave my body and pleasure taking its place. I erupt into a meddle of emotions. I needed this.

I hold on to him. He kisses me and tells me he loves me and the sensation blows my mind. A tear rolls out of my eye and he kisses it away and tells me I'm the love of his life. It's so good I never want it to stop. I wanna stay right here, under him, in this state, for eternity. "Elik", is all I'm capable of saying right now, so that's what I keep saying.

When it is done, he holds me until my body stops trembling. I say "Thank you" then almost laugh at myself. I remember the day he took my virginity and said "Thank you" afterwards. That was funny! We spoon and I feel so much better. I feel safe in his arms. I feel at home. I actually manage to fall asleep.

I wish myself the best of luck in getting over Elik.

CHAPTER 26

Elik decided that I was in too much pain to go to Cape Town so he made me stay at the Hilton for a week. He would come through after work to check up on me. He brought me food, made sure I bathed, made love to me when I needed it and just held me when I cried. He showed me a love I've never dreamed of before. He would leave and go home afterwards but I was fine with that.

The bond that has been formed between Elik and I, I don't think it can ever be broken. Like, how will I ever forget how much he's done for me and how much he's loved me? Surely, no one can ever ask that of me. So fine maybe he didn't marry me but he's making it up to me.

Ok, so that week ended and I had to go to Cape Town. I couldn't stay away forever. I had to return to my life if there was any hope of me being addressed as 'Doctor' anytime soon. Elik dropped me off at the airport and I kept saying thank you and he kept saying not to mention it. I'll forever be indebted to him. When I got to rez, my room was a mess. Remember before I left I had been throwing things around trying to pack! The lab was still the same when I returned. Brain still had his crop top wearing girlfriend and Ndivhu still spent his time on YouTube.

It's been a very hard time for me. Half the time I don't know whether I'm going or coming or what the hell I'm doing. It's like there's a short circuit in my brain sometimes. It's taking all the strength in my soul to make it through everyday. The guys have been tip toeing around me because I cry at the slightest thing. I mean I cried the other day because I was making a chemical dilution and instead of adding 10 mL of sulphuric acid, I added 12 mL! I could have just thrown the chemical out and started over or just added more solvent to correct that 2 mL! But no, I cried. Poor Brain had to make the dilution for me and even ran my samples.

I'm trying though and I'm getting there. Baby steps. Two things that have kept me afloat are Elik and Akon's music. Elik has been a rock! He calls all the time and is genuinely there for me. If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be standing on my feet right now. I will get through this though. I'm a soldier! I play Akon literally all the time. His voice just soothes me and it's like he wrote his lyrics with me in mind.

A month has gone by and I'm starting to feel alive again. Elik's wife is going away for a work trip to Mpumalanga. I didn't ask for details, all I'm happy for is that the house is vacant and so I'm flying to Joburg this afternoon. I lost a bit of weight this past month but I still look drop dead gorgeous in my dresses, if I do say so myself. I had a Peruvian weave installed, had my nails done, I waxed and did facials. I'm ready. I've had more money this month because Elik was extra generous. I get an Uber to the airport, have my make up done in those pop up shops at the airport and board my flight. I have so many voyager miles of SAA now! I call Elik and he sends me a song to listen to on the flight. It's like we are in high school really. We still dedicate songs to each other!

As soon as we are in the air, I sit back, close my eyes and listen to the song Elik sent me, Birthmark - Akon. With every word, I imagine Elik, in a black suit, on a stage singing it to me in front of everyone. Our relationship really owes Akon a lot! Elik said no song describes our story better than this one. I agree.

He picks me up, we go home and spend the evening just loving each other. I hate that he has to go to work tomorrow. I wish he could quit lecturing already! He doesn't need that spare change!

I woke up early and made him breakfast then now I'm sitting outside with a cup of hot water infused with lemon in my hand. They say it helps kickstart your metabolism. And since I'm desperate to maintain this flat tummy, I drink all sorts of concoctions. I just want to breathe in the fresh morning breeze. "Bye babe", Elik says, his lips finding my forehead. "Have a good day hunn", I say, flashing him that

smile he tells me he fell in love with those 4 years ago. I hear the front door close and I wait until I see his Ford Ranger head towards the gate.

It's starting to drizzle now so I have to head back indoors. I think I'll shower quickly and make breakfast. The bed needs making, and after the steamy session we had last night, I think I should just change the bedding. Then I can work on my thesis. As I pull the duck feather duvet off the bed, something falls on the floor. Elik's phone. My poor baby! He will need his phone, so I'll just make the bed, shower, have breakfast and take his phone to him then return and do my work. My day is just mapping itself out. As I shower, I can't help wondering if going through his phone would be so bad after all. I've never done it before and it has never crossed my mind. I've never had the need to.

I can't shake this innate need to just go through his WhatsApp but I refuse to be one of those girls. But he left his phone, maybe the universe wants me to go through it. I make a simple breakfast of green tea and seeded bread with fried egg. After eating I load the dishwasher then I'm ready to go. I'll use his wife's Fortuner. I grab my bag and I pause looking at his phone lying there on the kitchen counter, begging me to open it. After I manage to convince myself that there's nothing there really so it won't take a minute, that he's probably gone through my phone too when I'm sleeping and that it's really not a bad thing, I pick it up and head for the couch.

I go through the smses first, nothing interesting there, just OUTSurance offering cheaper insurance and companies selling funeral cover. I open his email, it's work,

nothing interesting there as well, then finally the dreaded App. WhatsApp. I had no idea he chats to so many people, I thought he was busy! Where does he get the time? I recognise a few names but 2 in particular get my attention. One is 'Wifey' and the other 'Mbali'. Wifey is obviously his wife and Mbali is that stupid that he cheated on me with. Technically he didn't cheat on me, he cheated on his wife with both of us. But since I don't consider myself a side piece, I'm more like the deputy wife, I still think he cheated on me, plus he swore never to talk to that girl ever again.

I open Mbali first. I'm sure the conversation with wifey is boring, talking about kids and all that. Besides I don't think I want to know what he and his wife talk about. That's just wrong. My heart is palpitating as I open the chat and my palms are sweating. I'm greeted by a lot of red emojis. Heart eyes, kisses, hearts! I scroll all the way up. They have been communicating for a while now! I can't believe this. December is when they really got it on. That's the time I went home!

It's a lot of messages to go through, so I curl up on the couch to get comfortable. Looks like I'll be here for a while. He tells her he's lonely, he misses her body to which she sent him nudes in response and he sent drooling emojis! They spent a few nights together in a hotel sometime in December! I feel sick to my stomach but I keep reading anyway. He sends her money. There was a gap and he messaged her a few days back, when I was still in Cape Town, and they agreed to meet on Sunday at the Hilton. That's day after tomorrow! What?

I feel my head spinning and I reach for my water bottle. I think I'm really going to be sick. Mbali! Of all people! I know I had kind of broken up with him but that didn't mean he had to go sleeping around. I email myself the conversation for future use.

I might as well open wifey, now that we've established he can't be trusted. I can't read this. The woman is practically begging Elik to come home every night. Further down, she threatens to leave him to which he says he's changed. I think he's talking about me when he says 'She was just a meaningless distraction and I'm done with her'. The wife replies to that by saying 'You love that girl Elik!'. At least she has some sense! She says she will always love him and I don't know why that hurts me. I email myself that chat too.

Now I'm really sick. I go to the bedroom, climb into bed and bury myself under the covers. We kinda now just stick to the main bedroom you know. The guest room always has clothes on the bed for some reason! I want to cry but the tears won't come just a lingering painful stab in my throat. How could Elik do this to me?

I slept the whole day, in jeans nogal. Elik woke me up and he looked so handsome with that smile on his face. He is worried that I might be sick and for some reason I can't tell him about the messages. He says he called me several times with his office phone but I'd put my phone on silent before I slept. He brought me Cinnabon on his way home. Isn't he just perfect! He keeps asking if everything is ok and I say yes but I'm screaming at him in my head.

"Talk to me baby girl. What's wrong? Is it me?", he asks, pulling me into his arms. Where do I start? I let him hold me and I'm wondering if I should shout at him now or since our relationship is not defined, I don't have the right? I decide to leave it for now. I need to process this and I'll only confront him when I'm sure I can finish a sentence without crying. He makes me hot chocolate, kisses me, tucks me in bed and goes to the study to work. He didn't even ask me how his phone ended up in the living room!

I think I need to pack my bags and go back to Cape Town. I get off my jeans, they have creased my thighs bad and I go to the study. I need answers.

"Elik, can you talk?", I say

"I'm busy but yes I can spare a moment. What's up?", he says.

I slouch on the empty chair.

"Do you love me?", I ask.

He looks at me surprised.

"Of course. More than anything. How could you ask?", he says.

"Because... well.... Nothing. I just wanted to know I guess", I say.

"Come here", he says. He stands and I find myself walking into his arms.

"I love you baby. I'll always love you", he says.

I chickened out that easily! I return to the bedroom, my heart so sore and the tears flowing. I'm just hoping that sleep will take me. It doesn't. So I do what I know best. I knock myself out with 5 pills of Mybulen pain killers. I know I need to

stop abusing pain pills but they always help put me under, besides I buy them over the counter without a prescription, no questions asked.

I know I overdose on pain pills but I also know that 5 are enough to knock me out but not to kill me. The guys and I in the lab did experiments on these pills. We determined their composition and the average human's tolerance to them. 5 was the the maximum that could induce a deep undisturbed sleep without poisoning the body. So that's why I always pop 5 pills when I need time out.

I wake up to an empty bedside. Elik must have left for work already. My head is throbbing and I drag myself to the kitchen for water. I haven't eaten since breakfast yesterday but my appetite is still gone. I'm tempted to pop more pain killers so I can go under again but I know my system won't take kindly to that, so I have to deal.

I have a tonne of messages on my phone. My mother just wants to know if I'm fine and if I can send her some money, Elik is professing his undying love for me and saying how I look beautiful when I'm asleep and how he wants to take me out tonight and show me off since it's Friday. My supervisor wants to know where I am since he couldn't find me in the lab. I tell mother I'll send her the money and I tell Prof I'm down with flu and I ignore Elik.

Since Elik has decided to hurt me this bad, I plan on taking as much money from him as I can and sending it to my mother! It's only fair!

"Elik", I text him.

"Yes beautiful", he responds and I cringe.

"I need money to send home", I say.

"How much?", he asks.

"R10 000", I type.

He pauses a bit but I can see he's still online. I wait.

"OK. I'll transfer it to your account", he says.

"Thanx", I write.

"Chat later ok baby? I'm going into a meeting", he says.

I hate him so much! As much as I think I hate him, I'm making him dinner right now and I can't find it in me to pack my stuff and walk out of that door. I really need girlfriends to help me deal with these stressful things!

The day goes by so quick and I'm just getting out of the shower when Elik gets home. I drop the towel and stand there. I think I need approval, I need to know that my body still has the same effect on him, that he still wants me and that Mbali didn't mean anything. He gives me all the approval I need alright. I'm carried and thrown on the bed and I'm grasping at the sheets and mourning my life away.

I hate it when this happens and I can't believe I opened that door for myself.

Everytime he makes love to me, I forget, I forgive, I love and I just become stupid.

I'm there now, resting my head on his chest and telling him how much I love him and him playing with my hair. I'm so stupid it's not even funny.

I must have dozed off because it's 11 pm now. My heart is still sore but I get up anyways. I'm dressed up in no time and I find Elik working in the study. I hug him from behind and just stay there, thinking. "Ready to go?", he asks and I nod as he stands up. He's been ready for a while. "You look stunning! If we don't get out of the house soon, we won't go anywhere", he smiles. I find myself blushing. We drive to Sands because I'm not in the mood for Taboo today. I don't want to be reminded of Mbali!

I've been downing so many pina colodas my head is spinning. Elik is looking at me suspiciously but I just go right ahead and order another one. "Are you ok baby?" he keeps asking. "Why wouldn't I be?" I ask back and he shrugs. I'm getting drunk now and the endless trips to the bathroom are starting to annoy me.

I'm walking back from the bathroom when I see a skimpily dressed waitress flirting with Elik. She's probably just doing her job but with that much liquor in my brain, all reason leaves me. I grab a skyy vodka bottle on our table and hit the girl so hard, I felt the pain. She turns around and smacks me with the tray she is holding. In no time we are fighting and I'm pulling on her weave and she on mine and we are screaming obscenities at each other. "Leave my man alone skank!" I yell at her and she punches me.

Elik and some guys from the next table pull us apart and the bouncers usher me out. My nose is bleeding and my cheek stings so bad. When I saw that girl with Elik, I just saw Mbali in my mind.

As I stand outside in the cold, Elik joins me. "Fierce! What happened? What's going on with you?" he yells at me. I'm drunk right now and I want to use the bathroom so I don't have time for him. He literally drags me to the car and we drive home in silence. I can tell he's mad as hell, but I just pass out on the seat.

CHAPTER 27

My head is banging so hard against my skull, I just want to pull it off my neck. Elik brings me a glass of water and panados. "Do you want to talk about what happened last night?" he says. I shake my head. I'm in no condition to talk right now. "Ok then. You know where to find me when you need me. I have work to do!" he says and leaves. He's still mad at me!

It's a Saturday, does he really have to work! My thoughts piece together until they make some sense. Today is Saturday so he's meeting Mbali tomorrow! I need to think fast. I need his phone to see if maybe they cancelled, seeing that I'm around now. But I don't know how to get to it without raising suspicion. I try and get up but my headache won't let me. I spend the rest of the day nursing my headache and swearing never to drink again.

Sunday. The day I've been dreading is here. We spent the day lazying by the pool and I even read a book. Around 6 pm Elik says he is going over to Lumka's house for a get together but he can't take me because Lumka's wife is home. He says I shouldn't wait up. I say bye, knowing fully well that he is going to see another woman. I almost cried but I controlled myself. I still haven't let him know that I read his messages.

I call him an hour later and he says the get together is going great. But it's so quiet in the background! Shouldn't there be music or people talking? I hear giggling in the background before I hang up and I just go crazy.

I grab my phone and order an Uber. I'm so agitated I can't sit still. I have all sorts of crazy imaginations of what he could be doing right now. I wish this driver could drive faster. That 20 minute drive to the Hilton was the longest of my life!

As I drop off, I search the parking lot and there's our beloved Ford Ranger! I call Elik.

"Hey handsome!" I say, turning on my sweetest voice.

"Hey", he says.

"What you up to?" I ask

"I'm just with Lumka and other people. Can I call you later?"

"Of course hunn. Let me not distract you then. Say hi to Lumka for me", I say.

"Love you baby", he says just before I hang up.

The lies on this man!

I got here 10 minutes ago and I've been begging the lady at reception to give me Elik's room number but she's blatantly refusing. She knows me so I don't know what her problem is. I'm a regular here! I don't know what to do now. She keeps saying they can't give away guests' information. But I've been here so many times, surely I can be an exception.

I can see she's wearing a ring so maybe she'll relate.

"Please ma'am. I think my husband is cheating on me. I need to see for myself. I have two young kids and I need to be sure before I file for divorce", I let a tear run down my eye and I sniff. She's looking at me with pity so I hope she fell for it. "You are married? But you look so young! I also thought you and him were...you know", she says. "I married young", I sniff back another tear. "You mean to tell me you have 2 kids?", she says looking me up and down. "Yes, they are twins, both boys", I say as convincingly as possible. She looks on her computer and I wait.

"Room 214, but please sisi don't cause any trouble ne. You are better than that! Be strong", she says. She gets up, goes around the desk and gives me a hug. "Good luck", she says. I thank her and take the steps, I don't have the energy to wait for the elevator. My palms are sweating and my breathing is fast and heavy. I don't know what I'm doing but I keep walking and I find 214.

I take a few deep breaths before I knock. I knock again. I'm panicking now because what if he doesn't open? I knock harder and the door finally opens. Mbali! I stand there frozen looking at her. I can feel my heart shattering. She's wearing a dress

very similar to one Elik gave me for my birthday. It's taking everything inside me right now not to slap that stupid stare off her face. I knew they were together but I hoped maybe they weren't and Elik was actually at Lumka's house.

"Who's at the door baby?" Elik asks from within the room. Did he just call her baby? I thought I was baby, I didn't know it's a universal term! I gently push Mbali aside and thankfully she doesn't resist. I'm quite violent these days if she doesn't know me. "It's me, baby!" I say and Elik's jaw drops.

"Fierce! Baby I can explain!" he says trying to hold me. Baby? I push him back. "Lumka's house huh? So this is the new Lumka?", I ask pointing at Mbali. "Baby wait...", he says. "No I'm not waiting for anything. At least now I know where I stand with you. Let me not delay you two further. I can see your shirt is already off so get on with it. I apologise for the intrusion", I say. I turn towards the door and Mbali is still standing there looking lost.

"Fierce wait. Please. Let's talk", Elik says and jumps in front of me and grabs me. I try to shrug myself off but his grip is too tight. "Mbali get out of here!" he yells at her. "But Elik...", she tries to say. "Just get out!" he yells again. She looks at me and I smile at her sweetly. I must look very creepy to her right now. "Really Elik? You going to choose this stupid bitch over me? Really? That's how you do me?" she says. "There there, darling. No need to call me names now. Let's show a little class, shall we?", I say calmly. "You can have him! I'm done. All he ever thinks about is his wife anyways! Oh and he says he feels sorry for you because your sister died

that's why he can't dump you. FYI", she says. I feel a stab through my heart but I maintain the smile. For that reason alone. I'm staying, and she's going.

I let Elik push her protesting self out and shut the door behind her. Now it's just me and him. I can take the mask off. The lump in my throat has grown so big I can't talk. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry", he keeps saying. I have heard that so many times and even when I knew it wasn't genuine, I forgave. But I'm done now, for good this time.

He looks scared. I think he expects me to be crying and being belligerent and breaking things. But I'm just quiet and calm. "Let's talk. I'm done with this mess of ours. But I deserve answers before I say goodbye for the last time", I sit on the bed and he pulls a chair and sits across me.

"Why?" I ask.

"Baby. I'm so sorry", he says.

"Why Elik?"

He buries his head in my thighs and I wait. I have all day. I'll wait.

"Why Elik? If you don't want to talk, fine, I'm out of here", I say.

"No wait baby. Let's talk", he says.

"And no lies please!", I say.

He nods.

"So after everything that went down between me and you in December, I was hurt. I just started self destructing. You kept me intact baby. You held me down. You kept me together. So when you left, I fell apart", he says.

"Then why did you lie to me? Why did you do this?", he says.

"I just, I don't know. I love you too much and I respect you too much. Mbali is there. She's just something I call up when I have, you know, some needs", he says. I'm so scared to ask what those needs are because I thought me and him got kinky as hell sometimes. I even fell off a swing once and dislocated my shoulder. The doctor didn't buy my story that I fell off the bed while sleeping.

"So how long have you been seeing her?" I ask.

"Since December", he says, still looking down. That was too honest!

"Wow!"

"I'm sorry baby"

"So you really feel pity for me? Don't worry, you don't have to anymore. I'll make things easy for you. I'll get out of your life", I say.

"No Fierce. Please don't leave me. Just one more chance. Please", he says.

I laugh. I don't know how many chances I've given this man in the last 4 years!

"I didn't mean it baby. I just told her what she wanted to hear. I didn't mean any of it", he says.

He stands and paces, 1 hand over his mouth, the other on his waist. I wait. He sits down again and starts explaining. I've heard this speech before.

"Do you love her?" I ask

"No. I don't", he says.

"I love you", he adds. "You mean the world to me. I don't care about Mbali".

I shake my head. I don't believe this.

"Please don't leave me. I'll make it up to you", he begs.

I think I'm going to cry now so I need to leave. I keep seeing Mbali written all over this room and it's making me sick.

I stand and walk out. Elik follows. I run down the steps. I need to get out. I need fresh air. "Wait baby", Elik is behind me. I smile at the woman in the front desk and give her a thank you nod as I rush out. Elik follows and catches me by the door. He leads me away to a darker place, away from prying eyes. It's so dark outside now, and where am I going to sleep tonight? I didn't think this through, really.

"Let's take a drive. Wait here and I'll go get the car keys", he says. I find myself nodding. I swear my body has a mind of its own and it never really listens to me. The cold hits me hard as I wait for him to return. He returns a short while later and we go. We drive in silence, I don't know where to and I don't ask. I'm too hurt. He pulls up on the side of the road and says we must jump into the back seat and talk.

I jump in the back seat and as he holds me and I smell his scent and feel his breath on my neck, I can't hold the tears in anymore. I break down. He holds me and keeps saying he's sorry as I cry my eyes out. Why am I still here with this man? I calm down after a long time. "I hate you! You keep doing this to me!", I yell at him

and he holds my arms to stop me from hitting him. I calm down eventually and his lips find mine. "I love you baby. It's always been you", he says. Damn his voice!

I kiss him back and before I can talk myself out of it, my clothes are leaving my body and I'm spreading my legs for him and we are going at it. My mind stops working as I hold on to the slippery leather seats and my foot leaves prints on the misty window. I scream his name and I'm lost in another world when a knock on the window brings me back to life.

Not again! You've got to be kidding me. Cops really! Elik gets off me and we struggle to dress up. We eventually get out. I knew wearing a bodysuit was a terrible idea! I can't button it now. Elik opens the door before I'm done dressing and a cop literally drags me out of the car. I find my jeans and I put them on in full view of the 3 cops waiting for us. They ask if I'm a prostitute and I tell them I'm Elik's wife! They look at each other when I say that and I think they judge me less.

They tell us to drive behind them to the police station. We are arrested for public indecency and thrown into a cell. It's hardly public indecency though! It's at night, in a car! How is that public? Only thing I'm glad of is that they put me and Elik together in the cell. I thought they would have separate cells for men and women. Not that I'm complaining. There's a drunk guy splattered on the floor and two prostitutes sitting on the bench across us. I curl up on the bench and rest my head on Elik's lap and he plays with my hair. The things I go through with this man though.

I'm wondering in my head if this means I'll have a criminal record? Will I be considered a sex offender? What's a sex offender by the way? If I'm caught having sex, do I qualify as one? I don't want to be! I can't afford a criminal record, it would ruin my future. I turn around and face up, so I can look at Elik. He's still cradling my head and running his fingers through my weave.

"I'm sorry baby", he says. I swear, if he says I'm sorry one more time, I'll slap him. His sorries are so tired now!

"So what will happen to us? You have that presentation tomorrow morning baby. You have to prepare", I say.

Yes, he's a jerk. But he's my jerk. And right now I'm worried about his presentation at the Faculty meeting tomorrow.

"I'll call Lumka as soon as they let us out of here", he says. That's funny! The same Lumka he had claimed to be with. They took Elik's phone when we came in but they didn't take mine. It was in the back pocket of my jean. And since my body suit wasn't buttoned, the back was hanging over it.

"I have my phone", I whisper and I see his face light up. I give him and he goes on chat with Lumka. Lumka is married but he's no different from Elik. They cover for each other all the time! No wonder they are the best of friends. Lumka has helped me a number of times, like that time Elik's wife beat me up and threw me out of her house half naked and that time with the funeral arrangements.

After a long time, Elik says, "Lumka is on his way now. We won't have to sleep here". I'm so happy to hear that because to be honest, this metal bench is quite

uncomfortable. I'm still mad at Elik. As we wait we decide to talk even though one of the prostitutes tells us to shut up. She keeps scratching her arms and she looks like she's nursing a headache. We ignore her and keep talking.

"So you really went through my phone!" he says.

"Yes I did", I say.

"And you didn't say anything. Why?", he asks.

"I don't know. I guess I was in denial", I say.

"You should never have read all that, Fierce. It's just words. Meaningless. You know what you mean to me", he says.

But do I? Do I really know what I mean to him or do I just have an active imagination?

"I wish I never read that too. I can't forget and I keep feeling less and less important to you, each time I remember those things you said about me", I say. He keeps quiet for a while. So I keep talking.

"Elik. What are we? What am I to you?", I ask.

"You are my baby. You are the love of my life", he says it so smoothly I instantly believe him.

"Do you consider me your girlfriend?", I ask.

"Yes I do. Of course I do!", he says.

"Besides your wife? What are we? Are we exclusive or what? What is this? An open relationship?" I sound so calm, I'm scaring even myself.

"We are exclusive now baby. No more Mbali, I promise", he says.

"I've never once asked you to leave your wife Elik. You should have told me about Mbali. And when we got back together you should have stopped seeing her. You should have told me", I say.

"After everything that happened, I couldn't tell you. I was scared. Like right now I'm scared that you don't want me anymore. I know I've caused you so much pain. I want a fresh start, with you", he says.

"How can you have a fresh start built on lies though?", I say.

He keeps quiet and twirls a strand of my weave.

The cell clicks open and Elik's and my name are called. We jump up and head towards the door. Freedom. We find Lumka by the front desk and we are given the zip lock bag with our stuff. It's Elik's wallet, keys and phone really, nothing of mine. We follow Lumka outside. I bet he paid someone to get us out so easily. It's 1 am! Lumka hugs me and laughs at us.

"So? You guys! Sexing in the car, really? You still doing that?", he says and I blush. Wow! How does he know we do that? I thought guys don't discuss their sexual encounters! "You two are crazy! So they found you in action?", he can't stop laughing and I hide behind Elik. "It's good to see you Fierce. I see you still keeping my man here happy", he pats me on the shoulder. I blush even more. I wish the ground could open up and swallow me. Elik gives me the keys and I head to the car, leaving him and Lumka to talk. They take forever. He eventually jumps into the car and we drive home.

CHAPTER 28

It's 11 am. I slept flat out when we got home last night. I drag myself to the shower while recollecting yesterday's events. It's all a mess. I don't even know why I'm still here. I don't think love should be like this. Mbali! Getting arrested! Elik topless in that hotel room! It's so messed up.

I go through my messages and Elik says he's fine, he's working and will only be back home late afternoon. I know I shouldn't call it home, but I've been here so many times it's now like a holiday home.

Elik gets home around 5. My mood brightens when he starts teasing me for being short. I'm trying to kiss him but he doesn't want to bend down. And without heels I really can't reach. He's so silly. No more kisses for him!

He tells me about his day and the one student who took him to SRC because he uses big English words in class that's why she's failing.

"But baby. It's general Engineering terms. There's no synonyms for them! These kids!" he says.

I laugh at that because I know the drama of students very well. As we speak, he packs dishes from the washer into the cupboard. I stand against the counter and watch him. I just love him and I can't even help myself. We've been to jail and back together, literally. He's my ride or die.

We talk and we agree that apart from his wife, me and him will be exclusive from now on. I just had to repeat myself incase yesterday it didn't sink in! I even tell him, I'll seriously consider having his baby, I just need to finish lab work then he's more than welcome to knock me up. I'll do the write up pregnant it's fine. We play Mortal Kombat and somehow I'm just losing today I don't know what's wrong.

He says I shouldn't cook so we order pizza and when it comes I realise I can't eat. I'll have to eat tomorrow. I'm starving though.

"Don't you want some?", he offers me a plate.

It looks so tempting but no can do.

"No, I'm not hungry. I ate just before you got here", I lie.

I'm hungry but I know we will be making love soon and sex after a meal is the most uncomfortable thing in the world! When he puts your legs over his shoulders and your thighs push down on your stomach, you just feel like throwing up. I won't do that to myself. Besides I don't know what tricks Mbali has been showing him so I need to bring my A-game! As I predicted, as soon as we get into the bedroom, my back is on the bed and my legs are on his shoulders and he's kissing me. I'm sure I would have passed gymnastics class with an A. I did well not to eat.

I'm leaving the day after tomorrow because that's when his wife will be coming back. I hope she knows that I'm truly sorry for using her bed, it's just she didn't clean the guest room before she left so what was I supposed to do?

Today is the last day here. I didn't do much because I really needed to work on my thesis. I made pap with stew and spinach, just the way he likes it. I'm scoring brownie points these days!

Elik looks very worried when he gets home, he doesn't even want to know what I cooked. Maybe he just had a bad day shame. My poor baby.

"Baby, is my flight booked?", I ask as he pulls an ottoman and sits across me.

"Yes it is. I emailed you the booking confirmation", he says.

"Fierce, can we talk?", he says.

I thought we were talking but then ok.

"Yes", I say.

He looks so serious this can't be good. He takes my hands in his and I'm listening attentively.

"To be honest, you've been patient with me all these years. I hurt you more times than I can count and you took me back every single time. You've loved me, you've shown me loyalty, you've held me down, you are beautiful, you are intelligent and you get me. You complement me in every single way. I love you more than anything and I will be a fool to ever let you go", he says.

Is he going to propose? How will I say yes? Should I cry or scream or just put my hands over my mouth? Wait, if he proposes will that mean I'll be a second wife?

Do I want that? Do I mind? But his wife doesn't play nice, I don't want to live with her.

I feel tears building in my eyes. I know he loves me but it's so nice hearing him pour out his heart like this.

"I adore you. You are everything. Please be patient with me. I know I always ask a lot of you but please my baby, wait for me and don't stop loving me. Can you do that?", he says.

I have no words, so I just hug him and cling on to him.

"I'll never leave you Elik. You are my life", I say and I mean it.

"I'm really sorry for all the shit I put you through", he says.

My tears are running now and I can't stop them. He holds me and lets me cry.

We've had a rough 4 years and I feel like we finally got it right. For tonight only I'll pretend he's not married. Where's the proposal? I'm waiting.

I can't run away from the question forever though. I need to know and now seems like a good time to ask.

"Elik. Where do I fit into your future? Will you ever, you know, get a divorce and like, well, marry me?", I ask. I've never asked and he has never really volunteered the information.

He buries his head in his hands and I just sit there staring at him, wiping my tears.

I wait. He raises his head.

"I don't know how to say this. I don't want to lie to you Fierce. It's not fair to you and you are such a good girl", he says.

Now he's scaring me. I swallow hard.

"You know I love you right?", he says and I nod.

I know.

"Don't take this the wrong way. It's not you at all. I love you. You are my girl and I totally adore you", he says.

I roll my eyes. Like can he get to the point already!

"Komla said she will leave me if I don't let you go. She gave me an ultimatum", he says.

Problem solved. Technically, I've been 'married' to Elik for as long as she has, she just got to sign the paper and I didn't. And if she leaves, then Elik and I will be free to do whatever we want.

"Wow. That's interesting! I guess we need to be more discreet then?", I say.

"No Fierce. I told her I would do it. I said I'll leave you", he says.

What? That doesn't even make sense.

"You told her what now? Did you mean it?", I ask. I don't know where this conversation is going.

"Yes. I just need us to take a break", he says.

"What?", I don't believe this. Just 2 minutes ago he said he would be a fool to let me go, but now he's willing to let me go. Just like that! He's choosing his wife over me? Again? I thought he was going to propose!

"I need to get my family together. I need to be a father to my children. As much as I love you, I need to put my boys first", he says.

I feel like a truck full of cement just ran over me. I can't breathe. The shock hit me so hard I'm frozen. Is he breaking up with me?

"Please understand baby. I have to do this", he says.

I'm still frozen.

"Please say something", he begs and reaches for me. I shrug him off. This can't be happening right now.

"I still want to be with you though. I know I'm asking for too much. But please don't give up on me. I need you. It's just a short break. Just until I have my house in order", he says.

Elik and I have had so many ends but this one is the worst thus far. I can't explain how I'm feeling.

I'm just looking at him. I will miss this dark face, these brown eyes and these lips. I just keep staring at him. I went from promise of proposal to being dumped so fast, I can't believe it. Not even side chick, he just asked me to step aside and wait until he decides he wants me again. How did I miss the signs? How did I fall for this again? I can't even cry, I'm too shaken.

"Elik. After everything we've been through you going to drop me just like that? You done with me, just like that? First you married her behind my back, I forgave you. Then you moved to Joburg and left me in Cape Town, I forgave you and made endless trips here. You slept with Mbali, I forgave you. Your wife threw me out on

the streets and you didn't do anything, I forgave you. You slept with Mbali again, I forgave you", I say.

"Fierce...", he starts.

"I'm not done talking. I just kept forgiving you. I just kept loving you. Even when you didn't deserve it I loved you hard Elik. So am I hurt? Yes. Because I thought we were finally getting somewhere. I'll accept the break but not a short break. We break up and we are done, for good this time! To think I agreed to having your baby! I've really been so stuck on stupid all these years, it's sad! It's all good though boo, you've made your choice, AGAIN!"

I look at him and his eyes are glassy. I hope he's not going to cry. He has no reason to cry. If anyone should be crying here it's me!

This is the man I gave my everything to, the first guy I truly loved, the first guy I ever slept with, the one who taught me all about love, life and sex, the one who stood by me on my Masters graduation, the one who bought me the car I drive and most of the things I own, the one I played wife to everytime his wife was away, the one I watched get married but took back with open arms. The one who kept me together when my sister died and I had nowhere to turn to. The one who showed me love. I don't think I'll ever be able to forget him but this really is the end for me. My aunt used to say 'Don't let a man tell you he doesn't want you more than once'.

I stand and he holds me by the hips.

"I love you baby!", he says.

My hand just goes up and I slap him so hard. How dare he says those words to me! I walk to the guest room and push all the clothes to the floor. I cry into the pillow and he comes in. He rubs my back, promising that we'll find a way to work this out. There's no way we can work this out. Can tomorrow come already so that I go back to school.

He places his phone next to my head and plays Akon's - Breakdown. He lies next to me and holds me as I cry on. I can't believe this is the end. I let Akon into my head and with every word, I scream into the pillow and Elik holds me even closer. I breakdown.

BREAKDOWN

You found a soldier, but I'm a man of peace
I'll fight for your love. They threaten to take it from me
And protect your heart so you'll never be hurt again
But it's a sacrifice cause I'm an old fashioned working man

Which means I won't be home like I used to
On the phone like I used to
Won't be long 'fore I see you too, yeah

We live life with no fears

And you never disappear
You showed me how much you care
And was never insecure
I love the fact you let me live
And you held me down for years
The hardest part for me out here is when you cry
I'm not there to wipe your tears

So baby don't breakdown on me now
I need your love too
Make it back home, I don't know how
I'll do without you
Without you, I'll do without you
Can't do without your love, your love, your love
Can't do without your love

I know you hear the rumors, I know you hear the lies
I know you hear that I'm no different from all these other guys
I wanna come home sooner
To make you realize
That life's just a contest and you happen to be my prize

CHAPTER 29

I'm so done with Elik. DONE. I had to undo my weave and cut my hair just to prove how serious I am. I'm done! I need to settle down, I'll be 26 this year! I'm DONE. Here's to getting my life back on track. I'll drink to that. From now on it's school, nothing else. I wasted too much time chasing after a man instead of securing my future. Men will have you dickmated and not thinking I tell you!

We have a research forum coming up on Saturday in the multipurpose hall. There'll be professionals from industry and a networking session afterwards. I'm not really excited, I find them pointless, but I'll go anyway. Ndivhu, Brain and I are working hard on our exhibitions. It's mostly Brain and I working but it's ok, I'll cut Ndivhu some slack. I'm laughing more now, and pulling my weight in the group work. Sometimes I miss Elik then remember what an idiot he is. I haven't spoken to him in 3 weeks and I'm proud of myself.

As I walk into the lab, Ndivhu shouts for me to come to his desk.

"Dude! Is this you?", he says, opening up a page on Facebook. The page is called "Expose the Whores" and apparently it's where wives expose their husbands' side chicks. That's harsh because I don't think I'm a whore! This page is just ridiculous! If your husband cheats on you and you find out, leave. Should you decide to stay, that's your choice so don't bother the other woman, deal with it. By posting your husband's dirty laundry online, you are just embarrassing yourself. Besides why are you embarrassing the other woman? She's not the one who made vows to you!

Ndivhu scrolls down and stops at a post. It reads: "Dear Admin, please hide my name bla bla.....". The writer of the post is asking someone called 'Fierce' to leave her husband alone. She even goes on to say she thinks this Fierce has bewitched her husband because why else can't he leave her alone! I'm tagged on the post and there's a picture of me I posted when I was in Venice! I looked so cute in that picture though! Showing my thigh game in those short shorts.

"This is you Fierce", Ndivhu says. For once in his life he looks serious.

"You know that's bullshit Ndivhu! Me? A married man? Do I look like the type?", I say.

"Ya, I knew it was fake. There's no way you would do that. I know you!", he says.

He goes on to say it's probably someone who just wants to tarnish my reputation. I agree.

I sit on my desk and log in to Facebook. I go through the comments on that post and boy are women angry out here! Wow! I take screenshots for keeps and just read the comments. I can't believe I'm being bashed so much by people who don't know me!

I report the page and I hope Facebook blocks it, then I deactivate my account. It's not like I'm using it anyway. I don't need this kind of drama right now. I'm not hurt by those comments though, strangely. People are angry out here! No wonder depression and high blood pressure in women are so high. `People love catching feelings!

Saturday morning I go to the multipurpose hall and find Ndivhu and Brain already there. I'm soon bored by our stand and I walk around. The somatology exhibition stands out and I go there. They have very cheap massage specials on Thursdays, I'll consider going there sometime! I then go from stand to stand, just looking and greeting some students I know, till I'm back to ours.

"That guy has been checking you out this whole time", Ndivhu says. "What guy?", I ask. He points at a guy dressed semi-formal. He's wearing maroon chinos, a huge no for me! He is not bad looking though, he's quite chubby and his body lacks muscles but he is not fat either. He's wearing glasses and looks somewhat nerdy. I don't even consider him. Pass. He's not my type.

"Dude! You've been in drought for years now! I'm going to give him your number!" Ndivhu says. Me? Drought for years? These boys really have no clue about me. "Go and give him", I say. I don't think he'll go.

We literally spend the day standing there and smiling at people. We don't have much to display anyway. Just a glow in the dark face paint, an organic lipstick that changes colour depending on your mood, a mixed emulsion stabilised with legume fibre and a few posters. The day ends and I skip the networking as I have better things to do than keep introducing myself to strangers.

A number I don't know calls. It's a guy, he said he was wishing to see me at the networking session. He asks that we do dinner tomorrow and I tell him I can't, I'm busy. Ndivhu really gave away my number! I can't believe this boy! I'm going to kill him tomorrow. I get to my room and put my phone away. I can't trust myself around my phone. Might just end up calling Elik and begging him to take me back and make a fool of myself. We can't have that now.

I spend most of my time in the lab now. I lost time when I went home for the funeral and when I was grieving and when I kept going to Joburg. So I need to work harder now. That guy, I still don't know his name, has been calling me almost every day for over 2 weeks now, asking to take me out on a date, but my answer is constantly NO. I'm not rude about it though. I tell him "Today is not a good day.....oh I have commitments tomorrow evening. Sorry". I'm very nice.

Elik hasn't reached out and I'm tired of jumping up every time my phone vibrates thinking it's a message from him, only to find that it's Vodacom telling me to download songs I've never heard of. I guess he really is working things out with his wife. Why is getting over someone so hard though! Why can't I just forget him and move on!

It's Friday afternoon and Brain is checking if the equation I derived to explain the turbidity loss rate of my emulsions makes sense. He suggests that I use Ln because he says my K doesn't stay constant when he uses prime numbers. I

double check and he's right. I re-derive using Ln now and voila! Ndivhu is struggling with balancing a material balance and I help him out with that. We make a mean team, although Ndivhu never helps us with anything.

"Brain, how is your girlfriend doing?" I ask.

"She's alright", he says.

I'm standing behind him fascinated by the code he's building. He's programming his own experimental design application that works more like Response Surface Methodology but 5 times better, he says. It will be tailored for his data and will give the best optimisation we have ever seen, he says. Way to go Brain! Use that brain! Meanwhile some of us will keep using SPSS and these existing models. It's already hard enough plotting graphs, I'm not even going to think about designing my own software.

"So how is she?" I ask.

"She's fine", Brain says.

"When are you marrying her?" I ask.

"Not anytime soon!" he says.

"Why. Is she not giving it up right bro?" Ndivhu butts in!

"Shut up Ndivhu!" I say and return to Brain.

"Why Brain?" I ask.

"Because....because she's not you ok!" Brain snaps.

That was unexpected! I don't know what to say to that and thankfully Ndivhu doesn't say anything. Are we still there? I have no words. I give Brain a back hug

and a kiss on the cheek, then I return to my station. I love him, as a friend. He and I can never work. I've never even considered it.

So that guy from that day keeps calling me everyday asking for a date. Ndivhu says I must give it a chance and go for at least one date. With Elik out of the way and me now desperately wanting to move on, I eventually listen and text him. "I'll go out with you tonight". He only responds an hour later with a call. He's so excited he can't even hide it. He says we will go to Primi Piatti in Willowbridge and I insist on him not picking me up. In case I want to leave mid date, I need a way to get away from there! But of course I don't tell him that. I leave the lab early so I can go and get ready. I have a date!

My notifications are off, so I don't hear messages when they come in. I open my WhatsApp and go through messages as I walk across campus to my room. Elik's wife sent me a long message half insulting me for stealing her husband and half begging me to leave her husband alone. Yimhlolo yami le phela! (This is shocking!). What does this woman want from me now? I'm done with her husband! He's all hers so why is she being so childish about this. I know she was behind that Facebook post and now here she is calling me a slut and then turning around and begging me, in the name of all that's good, to stay away from Elik. And why does she keep referring to him as Baba Paul? That's just weird. I'm used to him being just Elik.

She even sent me a voice note. She's crying and calling me all sorts of names and threatening to come to Cape Town and beat me up. Cape Town is so big, where

does she think she'll find me if she comes down here? Doesn't this woman have a job? She should be working instead of harassing me!

As if that isn't enough! She sent me pictures of Elik and her twins, saying the kids need their father and I'm taking him away from them. Now I'm confused. I thought Elik told her that he broke up with me. Isn't that's what she wanted. So what's the problem now? Elik looked so bae in those pictures though and his two future heartbreakers are a spitting image of him. I'm not deleting these pictures. Elik looks too cute here to delete.

I'm not going to respond to this nonsense. I have a date tonight. I don't know what to wear. Will he like something skimpy or something decent? I really need girl friends to help me with this picking out of outfits business. I settle for a long bodycon with long sleeves. It says sexy but classy, at least that's what the sales lady at Forever 21 told me. She said it looks like it was made for me, and I agree. I put on my Brazilian wig and I'm ready to go. I wish I had braids, but my hair is still too short. I get to Willobridge at 7:30 pm. I'm 30 minutes late but who cares.

I'm just going to ignore the fact that Elik would have taken me to a 5 star restaurant for a first date and would have worn a suit. I'm giving this guy a chance to prove himself. We talk and I have question after question for him. He's a dentist and is juggling working at a surgery he shares with another dentist with working at a public hospital. He is from the Eastern Cape and his name is Athi, short for Athenkosi. Local is lekker they say, let me try me a South African. I don't know if

he's a gentleman or not because he didn't pull out my chair. There's no chair to pull, we are sitting on those couch things like those you find at Spur.

I have the salmon pasta and it doesn't taste bad. I would have ordered a garden salad but I don't want to come across as too full of myself. Our conversation is a bit dry but I work with it. I offer to split the bill and he agrees without hesitation! What? He actually said yes to me paying for my own meal! On a first date? Life is going to be rough mos if I date this guy! But I said I'm giving him a chance so I'll just push that aside and pay. Let me test the waters some more. I offer to pay for everything and he doesn't protest! OMG! Where's Elik? Yoh!

I pay anyway, I already offered. We end the date with a hug and a promise of a second date. Although I have to seriously think about that second date. When I got home, I was so tempted to call Elik and tell him about his wife harassing me but I know that door is closed now. So I called Athi instead and thanked him for a great evening. I haven't dated in a long time so I don't know the rules anymore.

I've decided to continue with Athi so that I don't get tempted to reach out to Elik. The best way to forget one man is to get under another after all! I meet Athi on Tuesday for dinner at Cape Town Fish Market, on Thursday for lunch at Spur and on Saturday at his house for dinner and a movie. His choice of movies is worrying me. Action, that's so not my thing. I'm all the way Sci-Fi. But again Athi is not Elik, I need to stop comparing them.

The only video game he plays is FiFa, I don't play that. He says he hates Sci-Fi movies because they are too far fetched, that hurt. He frowned at me drinking Coke zero because he says why drink a coke imitation when you can have the real one! He said he doesn't know who Akon is, that just broke my heart! He even hinted that he likes girls that are natural. Well, I responded to that by saying I don't have silicone in my breasts or butt implants so I'm very natural. I know he meant he hates nails, Brazilian weaves and stuff on girls but I didn't want to debate with him. That already told me he's broke! No one hates Brazilian weaves like men that can't afford them! You see this that I'm walking into is what they call a completely fresh start! But maybe that's what I need! I'll try and see. Anything to forget Elik.

Athi sent me roses this afternoon and I thought it was cute. He doesn't know I don't like flowers. He is a good guy with a decent job and a decent enough lifestyle. He drives a Hyundai i20 and is renting a basic 2 bedroom apartment in Brackenfell, with mis matching furniture. He's a bachelor so I will forgive that. Let's see where me and Athi end up. I promise to give it my best shot and overlook his flaws. He's not married so that's good. I can finally have a man that's all mine!

CHAPTER 30

Athi and I have been going strong for 2 months now. He's the ideal guy, decent looking, decent job, decent car and not living with his parents. He's soft spoken and treats me like I'm the best thing that's ever happened to him, maybe I am.

Who knows? I'm half living with him now because I have clothes, a toothbrush and toiletries in his house. Plus I have my own set of keys. I know it's all rushed but I'm a lover.

He works hard and that's ok with me because I work hard too. He cooks, watches soccer and goes out with his friends every other weekend. Fine dining is not his thing but he did it for me twice so far. He even went with me to a spa last weekend! I was pleasantly surprised.

I have been making major changes in his life. I need him to buy a house and stop paying someone else's bond. Standard Bank estimated his affordability at R1 200 000, so I told him to go for at least a R700 000 apartment, because we need to factor in levies and taxes. Besides we are trying to minimise his debt as much as possible. At least he has about R60 000 in savings, that should be enough to cover the transfer fees and bond costs.

I shopped for more affordable insurance for him and spent hours on the phone with agents! I finally got him a deal so now he's paying R250 less for insurance per month and his excess came down by a whole R1000! I had him cancel his Vitality because he doesn't go to the gym, or buy healthy food so it's just a waste of money. I also had him close those accounts at Markham and Edgars, he didn't really need them! I think I'm a blessing in this man's life.

We are good for each other. We compromise. He suffers going to the beach just to walk and I suffer going to Mzoli's and driving him and his drunk friends around. I don't even mind using my Fortuner for that so that they all fit.

It took some time to open up to him, but I think I like him now. Love is a strong word and I'm not going to use it loosely. I'm going to take my time falling in love, in the past I've rushed things and look where that led me. He's not my usual cup of tea but I keep sipping and hoping I will learn to love him the way he deserves, one day.

I don't really feel him though, it's like something is missing, our chemistry is just too weak. But I know he's good for me so I'm going to stay. Even when we make love, that spark is not quite there, I just do it out of obligation. I even had to start thinking about Elik the other day just to get through it. Like the other night, I was just wondering when he will be done so I could sleep. I even started drawing up a grocery list in my head and planning what to do the next day. It's just so boring and monotonous.

But I know he doesn't deserve this. Besides, not every man can be a sex god like Elik or Bunke! Athi is a good guy and I shouldn't mess this up. So I tell him how awesome he is in bed and tell him I can't get enough. Lying for a good cause is not bad.

He's been hinting at paying lobola. He asked about my culture in detail the other day and asked me to explain how we do our lobola. We've been dating for 2 months and this man already wants to wife me! I think it's way too soon. But he insists that he knows I'm the one. Honestly, I don't see myself spending the rest of my life with this boring sex, but that's why they created Adult World right? For

people stuck with good men that give them boring sex? I can get me a vibrator in future, I guess.

Ok so I know it's wrong and it's a sign of weakness on my part but Elik called me sometime last week. He had just fought with his wife and had taken a drive to cool his head. He said he needed someone to talk to and I was the only one he thought of. We spent more than an hour on the phone. We agreed that we will remain friends.

He said our souls are intertwined and we would be wrong to keep them apart. So we are friends now. I even encouraged him to make it up to his wife and do right by her. See, I'm not all bad. He asked if I'm seeing anyone now and I don't know why I lied. I said I'm single and focusing on myself. I told him he's free to chat to me if he needs a shoulder.

I'm going to cut down on my conversations with Elik. I feel bad. I realised yesterday that it was getting out of control when he asked me to send him some nudes and I actually did. Athi doesn't deserve my nonsense. I forwarded the same nudes to Athi and his response was 'wow'. He's never getting them again! Doesn't he know how much effort it takes to take a perfect picture of yourself naked? I have to take about 30 pictures, and try all sorts of poses until I can find that 1 picture. Then I have to filter it after that and crop it and edit here and there. That's too much effort for someone to just say wow and stop there! I hope these naked pictures of me don't end up on the internet one day!

It's Saturday and Athi said we are going for a picnic and the likes of Big Nuz and Oskido will be performing. He says it will be lit. I think it's going to be like those laid back picnic vibes in Kirstenbosch gardens where you just chill and eat while enjoying a sunset concert. I had lab work to do last night so I told him I'll come through in the morning and pick him up then we can go.

As the good girlfriend I am, I packed a rug to sit on and I went through Woolworths and packed a picnic basket with seeded rolls, dried fruits, preserves, cheeses, chocolates, 100% juice. I then made a stop at TOPS liquor store and got a 6 pack of Castle light for my man. I don't get this Castle light business. It has reduced energy and alcohol. If you are concerned with your weight, you wouldn't be downing beer after beer in the first place mos. And why would a beer have reduced alcohol? Where's the sense in that? That means you have to buy so many more to get drunk! Where's the sense in that? Anyway, alcohol is not my department so I'll drop the argument.

I show up at his apartment all dolled up and ready to go. I'm laid back in blue jeans from Cotton On and a white off the shoulder top from Legit. I have a sunhat and shades in the car. He says I look pretty and wants me to get in so he can show me how pretty I really am. I refuse because I don't want to have to fix my wig again. Besides we don't have that chemistry to be spontaneous and just go at it. We need to work at it first and that just takes too much time and effort.

We have to pick up his friends from their houses. This is the one thing I hate and I will bring it up soon. Why do we always have to go and pick up his friends and drop them back? Can't they at least come to his place and we just leave together? No man, this is not on!

First it's TaSiya and his girlfriend in Kraaifontein. They have a cooler box and camp chairs. Then Mondli and his girlfriend in Boston, then Bongz in Bellville, then Monde eMfuleni. I don't like driving in the township. There's so many humps and traffic circles and the people don't get off the road! You could hoot and flash lights, they are not going anywhere. And someone told me that if I ever run over anyone in the township I should just get out of my car and run away because the mob will kill me.

We are waiting outside for Monde and my phone rings. It's just my insurance wanting to know if I'm safe and my car is not stolen. Monde comes with three girls. Like dude what the hell! I don't know these girls and I didn't reserve space for them! Plus they have camp chairs and a big cooler box. I still have Asanda and his girlfriend to pick up in Litha park! I think I'm going to lose my mind.

Athi can see that I'm thoroughly annoyed and he holds my hand and kisses me on the cheek. I feel like telling all these guys to get out of my car, they don't even contribute to fuel but they let me chauffeur them around like they are kings!

Athi is different from Elik. He believes I'm independent so he really doesn't give me money. He lets me take care of my fuel and my own things. We take turns

paying for dinner when we go out. But this not giving me money is really bad because that's the reason I'm talking to Elik these days! I need help with my fuel and insurance and sometimes I want something really nice that I can't afford.

If Athi just stepped up in that Department, I wouldn't need Elik! I can't even ask him for money, like where would I begin without sounding like a gold digger? He's always going on about how girls these days are just after money and he's glad he has me.

We get to Litha Park. Asanda and his girlfriend come with a braai stand, cooler box and camp chairs. I open my boot and let Athi take care of this. If I get out, I'm sure I'll scream at someone! What do they think this car is! A bus? Somehow everyone fits in, with some sitting on top of others. We make a stop at a shopping centre because apparently we need a butchery and liquor store.

I'm very upset but I won't let anyone ruin my day. I get out and Athi walks with me. These guys buy so much beer, ice, coal, firelighters, spices, tonic water and meat, I'm beginning to wonder what kind of a picnic we are going to! The girls buy Lays, more alcohol and peanuts! I take a bottle of water and a Cadbury top deck chocolate. I need to eat, I eat when I'm stressed. No one even offers to pay for me! I mean they killing the suspension of my car and finishing my fuel but can't offer to pay less than R20 for me!

They are packed in my car like sardines, I can't even see through the rear view mirror! And they are talking so loud but they keep saying I must play music. Athi

puts on a house song and they sing along. He keeps smiling awkwardly at me, I think he's afraid I will lose it any moment. He knows I'm agitated. Who wouldn't be in this situation?

We get to the sports ground in Macassar and they offload. They all go to find a place for us while I stay behind with Athi. Monde comes back and thanks me. He also tells Athi to marry me soon and then he leaves. Athi apologises and says he didn't know Monde would bring all those girls. I keep quiet, I really don't want to talk about it right now.

I think I'll leave my preserves and seeded rolls in the car, it looks like I didn't get the memo. I take out the 6 pack and hand it to Athi. He thanks me. I'm not in the mood so we follow the other guys.

This is not a picnic! It's a bash or an open field concert or something but definitely not a picnic! There are camp chairs, cooler boxes, and gazebos everywhere. It's just 2 pm but some people are already drunk. Ya ne!

Our squad sets up camp and Athi and I have to share a chair. The girls are overly friendly with me but I'm failing to warm up to them. I'm in a bad mood. The girls and I leave the guys alone and go look for the toilets so that when they are needed we know where they are. The one girl has long nails and eyelashes that look like she's about to fly off. It's just too much.

We go back to the guys and they are upset that they can't braai so they have to go to the back and pay to use the braai stands there. To me that makes sense. It would be a fire hazard if all these people in here had braai stands! Besides most of them have alcohol in their hands and we all know alcohol is flammable! And what will happen when people are now drunk and pushing each other and pushing braai stands? Most of us have weaves here, we don't want to catch fire!

These are things that make me think of Elik! The day goes ok but I'm on my phone the whole time complaining to Elik about how boring my Saturday is and that I'm at rez sleeping. I had to reject his video call. I said I had a charcoal mask on my face and didn't want him to see me.

House music is not my thing, maybe it's because I can't dance I don't know. But it's so loud and repetitive. I want to sing along to meaningful lyrics. I want me some Akon. I had a brutal fruit but I can't afford to get drunk so I stopped there. If Athi wasn't drinking so much, I would let him drive. I'm so annoyed by waiting for these people to finish drinking, I could get drunk too you know, if only I wasn't driving. So basically, I drove around Cape Town picking up these people so I can bring them here and wait for them to drink and party and then take them back to their homes? Now, that's bullshit!

We only leave at 3 am! We can't find two of Monde's girls so we leave them. I have to do the drop offs and none of the guys say thank you to me, they all say thank you to Athi! We get into Athi's apartment at 5:30 am and he wants sex! Seriously?

He's drunk so he's going to take forever to finish and I just have to lie there and endure. But fine whatever. I don't know how it ends because I fall asleep midway.

He wakes me up at 8 am and says I should make him breakfast! That alcohol he was drinking must have messed up his brain! I get out of bed and go sleep on the couch. If he wants breakfast he knows where the kitchen is. I'm mad as hell. I thought he was taking me to a picnic!!!

CHAPTER 31

I really can't find peace in this house! I'm woken up by a very loud knock. I've hardly slept! I drag myself to the door and it's two of Athi's friends. I'm in Athi's T-shirt only and as I walk away I know I'm giving his friends a full thigh view. The problem with me is that it takes a while to fully wake up so in the first 2 minutes of waking up I'm not aware of what I'm doing. In my right mind I would have covered up before getting the door.

The guys say they are here to 'cure' the hangover because apparently they left the remaining beers in the car yesterday. I need to stop coming here on weekends before I go insane! I wake Athi up and I get into bed and sleep. These are his friends not mine, he must deal with them!

When I wake up at 12 they are still here and have made a mess of the kitchen! I think if I'm to survive with Athi I need to start smoking. Otherwise I'll go crazy. I say hi and make myself a cup of coffee. I want to go back to the room but Athi says I

must hang out with them. I don't want to but I also don't want to be the rude girlfriend.

I have never met one of the friends before so Athi introduces me as “yiCherrie yami le” (This is my girlfriend). I really hate that term ‘icherrie’! Just call me girlfriend or something nice and if that fails just call me by name. I sit on the couch with my coffee. I should have made it stronger. They are talking about girls and you’d swear they are talking about things with no value. They are like, "With R100 mfondini, I can get her a 6 pack of Guarana, and guaranteed uyataka (she'll sleep over)!"

The more they talk, the more I wonder if Athi does the same, you know, all these drunk one night stands. I mean there are weekends I don’t see him at all and he says he’s with his friends. There was a time I came to visit him on a Friday evening and he went out to buy pizza. He disappeared. I had gone to the police station to report him as a missing person but the cop had just laughed and said, "It's month end, don't worry, he will be back". I had spent the whole weekend going out of my mind thinking the worst! He showed up on Sunday afternoon without the pizza!

I feel so left out as they go on about people and things I don't know. I just keep sipping on my coffee and wondering why Athi is not including me in this conversation. The one guy is complaining. Turns out he lost one of his girlfriends to a Nigerian guy who owns a spaza shop. The conversation goes from that one guy to all Nigerians and escalates quickly to all foreigners.

Now they are blaming foreigners for drugs and human trafficking and organ trafficking and for stealing jobs and for being horrible people nje. The one guy says, "These foreigners must go back to their countries! They are messing up South Africa!". I look at Athi and he looks at me but says nothing. I take a deep breath and let them keep running their mouths.

The way they go on about foreigners you'd swear they are talking about some animals that escaped the zoo and are wrecking havoc in the streets! Apparently we are the reason for the junk status! Do these guys even know what junk status is! I'm just wondering why Athi is not saying anything. He's just sitting there quiet!

"Liyasqhela kodwa yaz" (You undermine us/you don't see us), I say. They all stop and look at me. My Xhosa is decent enough. I've lived in Cape Town for over 8 years now. So I heard everything they were saying. "Guys, she's also from that side", Athi says. Oh so now he talks! And what the hell does he mean I'm from that side? My country has a name! This boyfriend of mine guys will drive me to be an alcoholic shame. I can't.

"Yoh! Does she understand Xhosa?", the one friend asks. I roll my eyes!

"I do", I say in Xhosa.

"Are you serious? Are you also a kwerekwere (Derogatory term for foreigner)", he says.

I think I'm going to need something stronger than coffee to deal with this.

"Guys, it's enough now", Athi says. How could he allow this conversation to get this far!

“No, you see, you not that type of foreigner! We talking about those ones, you know them”, the one friend says. Now they are just pissing me off! I’m not even going to waste my breath on this. I’ll go lie down. Athi follows me and he apologises for his friends and says they were leaving anyway.

You know I don’t get this guy. His girlfriend is a foreigner but he lets his friends say horrible things about foreigners! I go off at him and he calms me down in Xhosa and it’s so sweet. You know the way Xhosa rolls off the tongue. It’s gotta be the best language in the world! I smile. Not at him but at the choice of his words. He can be quite smooth when he wants. I’m so in control of my emotions these days and I let things slide easily. I’m really trying with Athi.

He asks that I shower so we can go to Green Point. I say ok. I shower, put on shorts and a tank top and he drives. We get there and go to Pick n Pay and buy fruits, chocolates, drinks and a few other things we need to get a picnic going. A proper picnic! As we leave Pick n Pay we bump into 3 women, they say they are Athi’s aunts and are they are coming from Camps Bay.

The one woman goes, “What do you have here?”. She takes the plastic bag I’m carrying and goes through the stuff. I’m just standing there shocked. “Hay Athi, I’m taking these wethu, you have money, you will buy some more!”. I think she’s joking but they leave with the entire plastic bag! She didn’t even give me an apple! Athi just smiles and I feel like pulling off my hair. I need to sit this guy down and we have a serious talk. I can’t live like this.

I refuse to go back to Pick n Pay and we go across the road and sit on the grass. He thanks me and says he knows his friends go out of line sometimes and he's happy I accommodate them. He keeps saying how much he loves me and has never had anyone like me in his life before. He says it makes him feel proud when his friends see that he has a good woman, who can hold her own.

He tells me his ex-girlfriend got pregnant by another guy and had him raise the baby for 2 years. He had paid damages and had even sent a letter to her family asking for a date for lobola negotiations. He only found out the baby wasn't his when the baby needed a blood transfusion and he is Blood Type O and cannot possibly have fathered a child with Blood Type AB. He said the girl then came clean and was not even remorseful about it. He had been so hurt that he had been single the whole year. He says it got so bad that he had a different girl in his bed every weekend. I wish he had left that part out, there's no need to be that honest now.

He makes me promise that I will never hurt him like that. He says I'm different and he wants to marry me and make beautiful children with me. He's asking too much of me. I'm not there yet. He has a long way to go before I can consider marrying him. I feel terrible inside. I still chat to Elik and the guilt just overwhelms me.

I feel the need to give him my own sad story. I tell him my ex-boyfriend cheated on me, got the other woman pregnant so I left him and he's with her now. You

know sometimes I tell these lies that I end up believing. He says he would never do that to me.

We drive down to Waterfront and he lets me have a smoothie and a wrap from Kauai. He gets KFC on our way out. He says a real African man doesn't eat leaves, he eats meat! We go home and I feel closer to him today as we watch Orlando Pirates losing to Kaizer Chiefs. It's been a tough season for the Buccaneers shame. He's not too happy with his team for losing! He thinks they need to fire the coach soon. I iron his clothes for the week and pack his lunch for tomorrow. I think I can make this work after all.

CHAPTER 32

It's Thursday and I'm in the lab, getting a headache from trying to figure out some data. A message comes through from Elik. I need to block this man! I open the message anyway, I wonder what he wants today. He says John Legend is performing at the Coca-Cola Dome tomorrow night and he got tickets for me and him. I call him to try and understand. He says the tickets were for him and his wife but she was told she has to travel to Mpumalanga urgently for a work trip, so now he's all alone and he has an extra ticket. I still don't know what his wife does you know, I should ask sometime. She always drops off the kids with her sister when she's not around.

A John Legend concert! I can't miss that for the world! Besides why should we waste the ticket, right? Or maybe I could ask Athi to take me when John Legend

comes to Grand West? But Athi listens to house music. All he knows is Destruction Boyz and dancing to 'Omunye phez' komunye! What to do now! Ok I'll go this one time. I won't hurt Athi. He doesn't have to know. I could use a break from him, to be honest. Our relationship is exhausting.

I call Athi and tell him that my brother, that one in Hillbrow, was stabbed and is on life support and since I'm his only relative in South Africa, I need to go to Joburg and be with him. He says he has to work otherwise he would come with me. He transfers R5000 to my account so I can book flights and somewhere to stay. That's a first! This is the first time I've seen this man's money! I must be doing something right these days! I'll take control in bed tonight so that I leave him good and he won't suspect that I will be going to do anything with anyone else.

Friday. Athi drops me off at the airport at lunchtime. I didn't even touch that R5000. I told Elik that if he really wanted me to come he should get me flights, which he did. I get to Joburg and have to change to something sexy in the airport toilets. I had to leave Cape Town in jeans and a hoodie so that Athi doesn't ask questions. But that's not how I want Elik to see me. Elik has that thing that pushes me to make the extra effort all the time. I put on a dress I know he likes and a pair of heels. I brush my Brazilian and quickly touch up my face then take it all in my stride. I don't know why I'm bothering so much because Elik and I are just friends now!

Elik picks me up. The way he's smiling, you'd think he never dumped me not so long ago! Mxm. He keeps me in the hug for a while before taking my hand and

leading me to the parking lot. He got a new car! A Mercedes Benz GLS 550! I can't stop wowing! It's black and it's drop dead gorgeous! Wow. What a beauty! They have been advertising it on TV and this beast costs over a million Rands! Whaaaaat!

He really has a thing for big cars shame. And I used to hear that men who love big cars are those with, you know, small organs, so they will be over compensating with big cars. I would like to just dispute that myth. It's not true!

"So new car huh!", I say.

It's a bit late to act like I'm not impressed now. My mouth was open wide as I went around the car wowing.

"Yep, felt like something new", he says. He gets the door for me and I jump in.

"So where's the Ford?", I ask.

"It's there. I can give it to you if you want", he says and drives. I'm not sure if he's serious or not. But I can't handle that car anyway, it's too big. Besides it uses too much fuel!

"This one has tinted windows, the cops won't easily catch us this time", he says and winks. I look at the back seat and blush. We have really had some good times in the back seats of his cars.

"We are friends now Elik, behave!", I say and giggle like a little girl.

I start complaining about him and escalate to saying how unfair he treated me and going on about how what he did hurt me.

He looks at me and says nothing. He goes through his playlist and stops at "So Special - Akon". He turns up the volume and sings along. I can't help smiling. He's so precious. The song goes:

"Girl you're so special
I want you right now
Scent of your perfume makes me want you more when I smell ya
I'm lovin' your style. You stand out in the crowd
See you're so exclusified, don't really have to tell ya

Girl you're so special, you're so special
I knew it when I met you, It's what I have to step to
You, you're so special, you're so special
Girl just let me caress you
YEAA, JUST LET ME BLESS YOU
Girl cause you're special

Special with the way your body calls me
Special with the way you put it all on me
Special in the way you're self-controlling
No need to wake me up, I'm happy in my dream.

I wanna take the time to just look at you
And hope one day you will be my present
God damn you're so fine

I might have crossed the line

I'm just so consumed, I just appreciate your presence

So special she's a dime

You're so special, I knew it when I met you

That's why I had to get you

Girl you're so special, you're so special"

I'm a marshmallow by the time the song is done. I'm smiling ear to ear and looking around the car. It's too beautiful and I feel so special right now. I don't understand myself sometimes you know. The way I so easily forgive is not good. Maybe I should find another church and have this demon cast out of me.

We drive a while before we get to the Dome. Places in Joburg are so far away from each other! I want to tell him about Athi but now is not the right time. Not that he would have any ground to dispute the relationship. He's the one who dumped me after all. But I also know that Elik doesn't want me with anyone else, so why spoil a good evening with confessions no one asked for?

It's packed here and I don't know why I expected proper seats! Our seats are near the stage and the chairs are plastic like those from church and weddings. At least in church they dress them up and decorate them you know. These ones are just naked plastic.

Shekinah is the opening act and I sing along to "Let's take it to the beach....". I lose my mind when John Legend comes on stage. After 4 songs and amazing piano skills, he asks for a young lady who wants to dance with him to come on stage. I'm young, I'm a lady and I want to dance with him, so I fit the criteria. Before he even tells the crowd how it's going to work, I run up to the stage. Running in heels is more comfortable than walking in them. I never get that. I get to the stage at the same time with another girl who's just as excited as I am.

John Legend sings and dances to 'Green Light' with us and I feel so good as he twirls me around. I'm screaming and being ratchet and I throw my arms around him. This is John Legend fam! He used to be on a poster on my wall, right next to Akon, when I was in first year and now he's here in front of me, in the flesh! I can't stop screaming! He kisses the other girl on the cheek and does the same to me. I turn slightly and the kiss lands flat on my lips. I think I'm going to faint.

The other girl on stage is as ratchet as I am and we get down to twerking. Who would have thought you can twerk and make it bounce to 'Green Light'! I eventually go off stage and back to Elik. He's laughing at how childish I am and I'm elbowing him. He's just jealous! He took many pictures of me and says he'll send them to me later.

My excitement is just through the roof right now and I'm dancing and kissing Elik randomly. I forgot we are friends. We leave the concert singing 'All of you' and by the time we get to his house, the mood is set and he should really thank John Legend because I'm going to give it up to him good tonight. I haven't had good sex

in a while! It's no big deal sleeping with Elik! I mean I've done it a million times over. It's not cheating.

The weekend goes by too fast for me. I swear Elik goes out of his way to make sure I never forget him! What with the breakfast in bed, then playing a few rounds of Mortal Kombat, then a drive down to Hartesbeespoort for lunch and standing over the dam enjoying the views, then upgrading my phone to a Samsung Galaxy S8 Plus because, "The picture quality of your S5 sucks baby girl! Let's get you something fit for a princess", in his words. Then taking me home for mind blowing bomb sex. How can I forget!

I wish Athi was more like Elik, you know, I think I would love him better. If he just put more effort and took the time to understand me and be a little bit more romantic, we would be happier. I blame Athi for me waking up in this bed! If he treated me better and wasn't so stingy, I wouldn't have had a reason to do this! This is on him! I'm a victim here.

I'm sad to leave Johannesburg. But at least now I have some money to send home. Sometimes I wonder why no one at home has ever asked me where I get all the money I send to them! Elik drops me off at the airport and Athi picks me up. I have to say to Athi I have a headache to avoid getting physical with him. He asks about my brother and I had almost forgotten. I say he will be alright.

I go to sleep and wake up very early and go to campus. I spend the whole day on chat with Elik describing our weekend to each other as if we weren't there. We just

go graphic and hardcore on the descriptions of our sex this weekend, saying what we liked and had missed and would like to try in future. I even promise to send him nudes when I get to my room, just nje for control. I wish chatting to Athi was this fun and effortless.

I hardly get any work done as I'm on my phone most of the time. Athi calls me around 4 pm and asks that I come to his place. That's unusual so I immediately assume something is wrong. I usually show up at his house late at night and it's never been a problem. Maybe he's sick or maybe someone died. I pack up my backpack and drive to his place. There's traffic leading up to R300 and I keep trying to call him but his phone goes unanswered. I try Elik but quickly hang up. He could be home with his wife. I don't want any trouble.

My mind keeps straying to thoughts of Elik. One thing worse than a man with money is a man with good sex. When he puts it down on a weekend, you'll spend the whole week thinking about it, fantasizing about it and wishing he can do you just one more time.

As I sit in traffic, with nothing better to do, I play music and skip tracks until I find one that describes my life and I sing along. I swear Akon writes these songs with me in mind!

The track is "Over the Edge - Akon".

"I'm here at the crossroad

Where my life is heading, Man, I don't know
Should I stay or should I go?
Coz anything's better than what I've been through
What I would give to get a sign from up above
Letting me know that everything would be OK
I wish someone would pull me off from out of the mud
Will anyone out there say to me

I'm here, for you. Don't worry coz I got you
Don't trip. Don't stress
MY LIFE SEEMS TO BE HEADED OVER THE EDGE
Feels like I'm heading over the edge

Now everyday that goes by
I see things that'll make another man cry
I'M SITTING WONDERING WHY
I CAN'T FIND THAT SOMEONE TO FIT IN MY LIFE
See I was searching, but am I worth it?
AND DID THEY EVER THINK I'M GOOD ENOUGH FOR THEM?
Despite my suffering, I felt the loving
Etc....."

I really wish someone could pull me out of the mud. Can Athi be that sign that I
need from up above?

Athi's not home when I get there and I see a text saying I should wait, everything is fine, he's on his way. I guess he just really missed me when I was in Joburg and he wants to spend time with me. That's the only logical explanation. Why else would he call me out of the blue to come to his apartment? I put my phone on the charger in the living room and go take a shower.

I'll prepare dinner afterwards and I'm sure he'll be home then and he can tell me why he called me here. I take time in the shower singing "Over the edge". I'm feeling especially sexy so I just put on my La Senza lace. Is it wrong to wear underwear for one guy that was given to you by another? I'm yet to figure that out. I put on Athi's T-shirt on top. I'm into boyfriends' T-shirts when indoors. Deep down I feel guilty about the weekend so I'm hoping I can offer Athi my body as a peace offering.

"Baby", I greet him as I get out of the bedroom. He's sitting on the couch. I didn't hear him come in. He doesn't respond. Something must be really wrong shame. I go and sit on the arm of the couch. Athi has his phone in one hand and mine on the other. What is he doing with my phone?

"Fierce! Is this you?", he shows me a picture on his phone. It's me on stage with John Legend. My heart just starts beating fast. "I thought your brother was sick!", he says. I need to think fast. I could say my brother was so sick that I got depressed and had to go to a John Legend concert to cheer myself up. That doesn't make sense. I could say John Legend is my cousin so he called me and asked me to help him with the concert. No, that's too far-fetched. Or I can just say

that's not me, but what are the odds that a girl who looks like me, wearing the same dress I have and has the same hairstyle as me was in Joburg the same time I was! I keep quiet. I need to think carefully before I respond because I'm sure whatever I say from now on can be and will be used against me.

He says his boys had to send him the picture. By his boys he means the WhatsApp group where him and aboMonde talk nonsense all day and share big booty Instagram chicks' pictures. My heart is beating fast now and I'm trying to think of a good story fast.

"Baby, it's not what it looks like!", I say. I don't know what else to say.

"What exactly does it look like Fierce?" he asks. He's too calm for my liking. I wish he could start shouting already so I can cry and maybe he will feel bad and we get over this already.

"I went to hospital to see my brother and then my cousins also came and then they had tickets to the concert and one of my cousins had just broken up with his girlfriend the previous day, so now they had an extra ticket, so they asked me to come with them. I didn't want to go because my brother was in bad shape but the doctor said I can't stay past visiting hours, so I went with my cousins. And when we got there, they asked for a lady to go on stage and John Legend randomly picked me from the crowd and people pushed me to the stage", I say, trying hard not to stammer as I make things up as I go. I really hope he buys it. I know I wouldn't.

He's quiet for a while.

"I thought you were the only family your brother had in SA!" he says.

"Well, I'm the only immediate family he has. He listed me as his next of kin, so they called me", I say.

"Which hospital was he in?", he says.

"Baragwanath", I say smoothly.

"What's their names?" he says. Still calm.

"What?" I'm lost.

"Your cousins. What are their names?" he asks.

"Well, umm, it's Peter and Paul", I say. Those are Elik's sons' names. They are the only ones I could come up with right now.

He's quiet. My hands are shaking but I'm hoping it's not too obvious.

"So, what did you do all weekend?", he asks.

"I was at the hospital most of the time baby and that concert of course. I was going to tell you when I got home today", I say.

He stays quiet.

"Come on baby, it's just John Legend and I was on that stage for like 2 minutes tops!", I say, reaching for his hand.

He pulls his hand away and keeps quiet.

"Baby. Let me explain", I say. I need to tell my story better in a way he will believe me. I'm doing a horrible job so far, I think.

"Just shut up. I don't wanna hear anymore of your lies!" he snaps.

I have never seen him like this. His eyes are red and I can see the veins on his face pulsating.

"Fierce. Who's Elik?", he asks.

Ok now would be a very good time to die. Did he go through my phone? I cringe thinking of all the explicit things Elik and I were talking about earlier.

"So you've been with this Elik for years now? And this entire time you were pretending with me?", he asks, his voice rising.

There's no getting out of this one, I just have to stay quiet. Not even crying will save me today. "So he really is the best sex you ever had? And you spent all weekend whoring yourself out to him? And to think I kissed those nasty lips of yours at the airport! Sies mann!" he shouts.

"Athi wait, let me explain", I say. I don't know whether to get up or to stay seated or what now.

"Shut it. Just shut up! I just wanna throw up knowing what you were doing all weekend!" he says. He grabs me by the T-shirt and pins me against the wall. His face is so close to mine, I can feel his breath.

"So you went to another man? With my money?", he looks so angry right now, I'm terrified.

"I didn't use the money. I'll give it back!", I quiver. I was going to send it home but I'll rather give it back.

"That's not the point damnit! You made me drop you off so you can run to your boyfriend and when he was done with you, I picked you up! What am I to you? A fool?", he yells.

"Athi please", I beg.

"Don't Athi me! So, this whole time you were sleeping with the both of us? That's just disgusting! You know you are such a slut! I really thought you were different! I wanted to marry you!", he's still yelling.

"It was just a mistake. Please, I'll never do it again, I promise. Please baby", I'm begging here.

"A mistake? You lied about your brother to my face, got air tickets, went with your boyfriend to a concert, spent the whole weekend with him, then came home to find me waiting for you with flowers like an idiot! So tell me Fierce, eklek which part was a mistake?", he says.

"It's not like that Athi", I say.

I'm trying to beg with my eyes but I don't think it's working.

He really doesn't understand. Me and Elik are complicated.

"Fierce I had to read all those things you two did to each other! While I was here worried sick about you and your brother, you were there screaming your lungs out! Isn't he had to keep covering your mouth because you were too loud?", he looks into my eyes and I look down.

He really shouldn't have read all that! And I can see how that must have hurt him. I'm the quietest person in bed with him. I used to try and fake scream when we started but it got really tiring so I'd just take it silently and plan my day in my head while he's going at it.

"And you want a baby with this guy? You know you are sick! Go. Go make a baby. Get the hell out of my house!", he says.

Yes, I think it's best if I go but he doesn't loosen his grip.

"You told that man that you are single. So, this is nothing to you? I am nothing? He's really the best you ever had and you will never love anyone else? So why did you get with me? You just wanted a fool to play along while you wait for your married man to leave his wife? You are so sick! I'm so disgusted", he says and spits in my face. That's a bit extreme but I'm in no position to complain right now.

He really read a lot! He never should have. I just need time to get over Elik and I will be a good girlfriend to him, I promise. I've been trying. Can't he overlook this one thing and focus on the efforts I've made in our relationship.

"Do you love me Fierce?", he asks. I nod.

"Do you love him?", he asks.

The answer is yes but I'd be very stupid to say that right now.

"No, I don't. He's just an ex", I say.

I don't know what happened but Athi let's me go and before I know it, he smashes my phone on the wall. It's brand new! He then grabs me by the neck of the T-shirt and throws me on the floor. I'm pretty sure I broke a bone. He pushes his knee down on my stomach and one hand goes on my neck, choking me. He then slaps me so hard I see stars. I can't breathe. He gets up and I fold myself and cover my face as he kicks the hell out of me while calling me a slut.

I don't know after how long but he leaves and I hear the bedroom door bang. I crawl up, grab the car keys on the kitchen counter and run. My body aches but I run. Dejavu. I'm running away in nothing but a T-shirt on. I have blood on the T-shirt and my lip is busted. I run down the stairs, ignoring the pain and to my car.

A guy carrying groceries, coming up the stairs looks at me in shock. Three guys in the parking lot stop talking and stare as I run with towards my car. I jump in and drive off. I hope Athi doesn't follow me. I think he wanted to kill me.

My spirit is crying but I can't find the tears, I just keep making a sobbing sound that's tearing at my throat. I'm driving at 100 km/h, I could do faster if there weren't so many traffic lights and cars on the road. I skip two red lights and the cameras get me and I almost collide with a taxi in Bellville. Thankfully, taxi drivers have this driving thing under control! He swerves so hard, I thought the taxi would overturn.

I don't how I'm feeling, I don't know what this is? I've never been beaten up by a guy before. I'm hurt and I'm guilty but I'm also angry. Like why the hell did Athi go through my phone? Doesn't he know you don't go to the mountains looking for baboons because you are most likely to find them? And who gave him the right to beat me up like that? My own father has never laid a hand on me!

I get to campus and drive towards the sports ground, where no one will see me. I messed up a good thing. What's wrong with me? I have a labcoat in the boot and I put that on. I go down into the field and walk for 2 laps, thinking. What do I do

now? How do I convince Athi that I'm sorry and I'll stop my whorish ways? Do I give him time to calm down? How much time? I feel so guilty. But I feel so angry. He really didn't have to beat me into a pulp like that. He had no right! Or did he?

I leave the sports ground and walk to rez, trying to ignore the hellos of security guards coming from the train station, for the night shift. My face is a mess and people look at me funny as I pass by. I get into my blankets and cry. I messed up big time. I forgot my car there at the sports ground but that's the least of my worries right now.

CHAPTER 33

I go to the campus clinic the next day because I'm sure something is broken somewhere in my body. I tell the nurse I was mugged in Bellville and she says Bellville is no longer safe, her sister also got mugged last week. After a few checks she says nothing is broken. She gives me pain medication and tells me to stay safe. I can't go to the lab looking like this. The guys will just feel sorry for me and I'll end up crying a river. Besides my face looks bad. I just stay in bed all day, eat chocolate and cry.

There were several knocks throughout the day, I'm sure it was Ndivhu and Brain checking up on me. I can't see anyone right now. I need to be left alone. I need to think this through and make big decisions. There's this pain inside me and there only I think it can go away is if I face Athi and beg for forgiveness.

I think I will just go to his place and explain myself. I need another chance. I know I can do better. I hope he won't hit me this time and he has calmed down. It's 6 pm so he should be home. You know this is all Elik's fault. Why couldn't he just stay away from me! I was doing great without him.

I have to wear a loose dress because I failed to pull the jean up, it hurt. Now I have to walk all the way to the sports ground to get the car! Just great. I get to Athi's flat and he shuts the door in my face and calls me names in Xhosa that just can't be translated to English because they are too crude. I know he has every right to be angry and hurt but I just want a chance to get us back, to fix this. To be honest he wasn't like boyfriend of the year anyway, so he's being unfair here. My body hurts so bad but I need to ignore that, stand up straight and fix this.

I keep knocking. He says I should wait outside so I can take my clothes because he wants nothing to do with me. I wait, hoping he will change his mind and at least listen to me. He doesn't. He comes back later with a half-closed suitcase and handbags. He makes several trips and throws all my clothes and shoes and toiletries on the floor. Some of these things were expensive and he shouldn't really be dropping them like this, but it's alright. Just this one time he gets a pass.

He even gave me my phone and said he's sure my married boyfriend is missing me so I should call him. He says he had all night to read the rest of my messages and he saw all the photos of me and Elik. That just makes my blood curdle. He never should have. We took some racy pictures this past weekend which I meant to delete. Now I know why passwords and pin codes are very important.

The phone appears cracked but the screen protector and cover saved it. I think it will still work. The neighbours are outside for a free show and I'm glad I didn't see anyone on their phone recording this nightmare. I shove my clothes into the suitcase and close it. I shove the remaining things in my handbags. I'm not ready to leave without trying so I push in the door and it's not locked. I need him to hear me out.

"Athi please. Let's talk about this", I say and shut the main door with my foot so those nosy neighbours don't hear us.

"Bitch, just leave my house!", he says.

"Baby let me explain, please", I say.

"Don't baby me! I don't want to hear anything that comes out of your mouth. Take your blow job giving mouth and get the hell out of my house!", he says.

"Please Athi. Don't be like this. Let's talk about this", I beg. Why can't he just give me a chance to explain? Not that I know what I would say if he did. I'm just sorry.

"Just get the hell out. Are you deaf?", he says.

I don't budge. I really need him to listen to me. He goes towards the bedroom. I follow him.

"Ok, you wanna talk? Fine. Let's talk!" he says.

Progress, finally!

"And no lies this time!", he says pointing a finger in my face. I cover myself with my arms. I thought he was going to hit me. When I realise he was just pointing at me, I drop my arms and nod.

"So who's this Elik?", he says.

"He's my ex boyfriend", I say.

"Do you still love him?", he says.

"No, not at all. I love you. It's just you", I say.

"So how many times did you sleep with this guy?", he asks.

Wow! A million times perhaps?

I swallow hard.

"Ever since I met you, it was this one time. I swear", I say.

I don't know what he means by how many times and I'm wondering how he missed that part on my chat with Elik. We are like rabbits when it comes to that department.

"Do you love him Fierce? And don't lie! Is he better than me?", he says.

"No. I don't. He's not", I say.

The correct answer is yes but the truth won't set me free right now.

He's pacing and I wish I knew what he's thinking. Is he going to forgive me?

"You made me drop you off at the airport so you can go fuck another man! How messed up is that? I showed you off to my friends! I was so proud of you, you know!", he says and gives a squeaky laugh.

I look down.

"I loved you. I wanted to marry you damnit! But you are just like the rest of them. You are worse because you pretend to be this goody goody decent girl, when you just another whore! You are worse than my ex! I can't look at you right now", he says, his voice beginning to rise.

"Baby please", I try to hold him.

He slams me on the wall so hard and I know I should leave if I want to wake up alive tomorrow. At least I tried.

But he doesn't let me leave. He pushed me and I fall on the floor and I'm sure I'm going to be paralysed by this pain! I think I pass out a bit. I must be dreaming because I can feel something heavy on my body. You know that dream when you feel like there's something pinning you down and you can't move? I think I'm having one of those. The pain running through my body right now is enough to kill anyone. I slowly come back to my senses until I'm awake and my eyes are wide open.

"Athi? What are you doing?", I'm so shocked. He's undressing and has his leg on my stomach, I can't get up. I try to push his foot away from my stomach but he kicks my hand so hard I cry out.

"Come on Fierce. You want this. All this is because you just want sex. It's sex you want, right? So I'll give you that", he says.

This can't be happening.

"No Athi. Don't do this. Please. Get off me and I'll leave right now I promise. I'll leave and never bother you again", I plead with him.

This can't happen to me. I try to push him off but I'm just wasting my breath.

He isn't listening to me. He splits my legs apart with his and try as hard as I can, I can't push him off. With a deep stab he goes all the way inside me and I feel a pain run through my stomach and around my back.

I wish I practiced meditation, maybe I'd have the skill to detach my mind from my physical body. I try and direct my mind away from this. I try to think about the chemicals I don't have in the lab and I need to order. I try and remember that I haven't eaten today. I try and think of home. But my mind can't stay away for long. Athi's weight returns me to the present. I try to scream for help, maybe the neighbours will hear me. But he slaps me hard and pulls my dress over my face.

I just let him have me, the more I resist the more it hurts. I remember the senior teacher in high school saying when you are being raped you should cooperate with your rapist and not fight back if he's already inside you. I didn't get it then, but now I know she meant the damage would have been done already and you fighting back will have him hurt you even more, like that slap Athi silenced me with. I can hardly breathe under the dress.

After what feels like eternity he gets off me and leaves me lying there. I just stare at a stain on the ceiling and focus all my energy on it. How could this happen to me? Maybe I'm dreaming. I mean I took a nap earlier on campus right? So maybe I didn't wake up.

I can't stay here. I manage to get up and pull my dress down and slowly make my way out. I pick up my suitcase by the door, put the handbags on it and drag it behind me. Walking is hard, thinking is a nightmare, but I need to get far far away from here.

I finally make it to campus and into my room. It's a miracle I didn't have an accident on the way! My phone still works just fine. I call Elik and scream at him for ruining my life. I so badly want to tell him what happened, he's the only person who can be there for me. He's my safe place.

He doesn't give me a chance. He says he doesn't want to talk to me right now because my boyfriend called him and told him to leave me alone. So Athi called Elik? With my phone? He really is mental.

Elik's upset that I had a boyfriend and didn't tell him and he feels disrespected that another man called him in the middle of the night. He then hangs up on me. I call again. I need him. His phone goes to voicemail. I keep trying. Nothing.

I just want to sleep and forget right now. I take 5 of my pain killers, I need a break from this pain. It doesn't take long for me to start feeling drowsy. I just need some time out.

I wake up the next morning, shower, pull on leggings and a sweater, then go to the clinic. I hope that nurse from the other day is not on duty. How will I explain being robbed twice? I feel like driving to Athi's surgery and switch on the boiling kettle and baptise him with boiling water. We can call it a baptism of fire. Or just take a knife and chop off his penis and make him eat it.

I feel so hollow, like a huge chunk has been ripped from my core. I've heard rape stories and I always thought the pain was mostly physical. But it's not. It's

emotional. And being raped by your boyfriend is the worst. He could have just pushed me out. I can't process it. I just need to breathe and relax.

The receptionist asks me what I'm there for and I tell her I need to see a nurse or the doctor. She says what for and I tell her it's private. Who asks people what they are at a clinic for? I wait until there's a nurse available. He's very nice and looks very good in that navy blue uniform.

I tell him about the rape and he's shocked how I'm so calm about it. He asks if I have pressed charges yet and I tell him I won't be doing so. He asks if he should book me in for counselling, I say no. He asks if I'm on contraceptives, I say yes. He sighs and gives me a morning after pill anyway.

He asks if I had been using protection with this guy (Athi) before, I say yes. He asks if the guy used protection when he forced himself on me, I say no. He asks if I used protection with my previous partners (Elik and Bunke), I say no. He draws my blood for an HIV test. I usually hate that pricking pain on the thumb when they draw blood but today I don't mind it. As I wait for the results, he talks to me. He says I must press charges and I must really go for counselling, he adds that it's free for students!

The test is negative and so he goes ahead and gives me the post-exposure prophylaxis. It's an ARV (antiretroviral) of some sort that prevents you from contracting HIV. I thank him and walk back to my room and pop another 5 pills.

CHAPTER 34

I sit with 5 painkillers in my hand. For 2 days now, I have been in and out of consciousness, waking up feeling like death, crying, then drinking pills and going back under. At this rate, I'll be dead within a week! The body can only take so much pills, my kidneys will fail soon, I know that. I could also damage my brain, and what will I be without my brain! It's my most valuable body part. Isn't it funny though how sometimes we keep doing something even though we know it's very wrong.

It doesn't help that I'm not eating. If I still want to live, I can't be alone right now. I need someone to talk to. I need Elik. But he really doesn't want to talk to me shame. I try his phone and it's off. I swear to you, my brain stops working sometimes! I do somethings that I look back at afterwards and go "WTF was I thinking shuuuu!". Well it's one of those non-brain functioning episodes now. I go online and I book a flight to Johannesburg.

I WhatsApp Elik that I'm on my way and will be arriving at 5 pm. He's online but he ignores me. I get to OR Tambo airport and he's not there. Ya ne! What am I gonna do now? Where was I going to in the first place! I really didn't think this through shame. But I desperately needed to leave Cape Town.

I will just call Lumka, he will know where Elik is and what to do.

"Bhud' Lumka. It's Fierce!", I say.

"Oh, hi Fierce. How are you?", he says.

"I'm good. Tell me, where's Elik?", I say.

"I don't know actually. He's at the university today, I think", he says.

"Eeish. Ok, where are you?", I ask.

"I'm in Kempton Park, just getting out of a meeting. What's up?", he says.

"I'm kinda stuck here at the airport", I say.

"Which Airport?", he says.

"O R Tambo", I say.

"Ok, I'll be there in 20 minutes. Wait there", he says.

This gives me 20 minutes to pull myself together and pretend like I'm fine. This is not the time to be all up in tears and appear weak! 20 minutes later he calls and directs me to the parking lot. I find him and jump into the passenger seat of his car. He looks at me and asks about the bruises on my face but I brush it aside and I say I was mugged but I'm fine.

We talk about irrelevant things. All I really want to know is where Elik is but it's fine we can talk so long. It's nice to talk. He's upset because his last girl, that I never met, stole money from his wallet when he was sleeping and he never saw her again. I'm laughing at that. This talking is really helping redirect my thoughts. I'm liking it.

"I see now why Elik loves you so much. You are so bubbly and full of life!", he says. I laugh at that too. If only he could see through me, he would know that that bubbly girl died a while ago.

"So Fierce, tell me, do you really love Elik?", he says.

I look at him and try and read his expression, trying to decipher where this is coming from, but I come out with nothing.

"Of course I do. I've actually never loved anyone else this way", I say.

"Ya, but that thing of yours with that Nigerian guy really got to him hey", he says.

I roll my eyes. That was so long ago!

"I know. But it was just a fling. I wasn't even with Elik then!", I say.

"You shouldn't have though!", he says.

"Ok now that's not fair. Elik was sleeping around laboMwali here! Did anyone hear me complaining? No", I say. I'm ready to defend myself.

"When it comes to you, he's very protective. He doesn't want to share you. You know that right?", he says.

I know that.

"If he left Komla, would you marry him?", he asks. That was so random.

"He would never leave Komla. Why would he leave her?" I say.

"Hypothetically speaking", he says.

"I don't know. I guess so, if he takes me on a cruise to the Bahamas and gets me roses and champagne and gets on one knee and begs, I would consider it", I say.

That would be nice shame. Having Elik to myself! That would be the life!

Since Lumka's guard seems down, maybe I can get some answers. There's a question that's always been bothering me and I don't know, and now that Elik hates me, I might never get an answer to it.

"So tell me, why didn't he marry me in the first place?", I ask.

"That's one question my friend asks himself everyday hey. He thought you were too young at the time. You were like what? 21? 22?", he says.

"I was doing Masters! I wasn't young! Fine I was 22 but still!", I say.

He smiles and keeps quiet. I think I'm getting worked up and he doesn't know how to respond. I need to breath and calm down.

I keep checking my phone waiting for Elik to come online but he doesn't.

"He could have waited for me though, you know!", I say.

Deep down I'm thinking how my life could have turned out different. Athi would have never happened and I wouldn't be feeling this pain right now.

"You know his story mos. It was complicated. Lobola had been paid and stuff. It was just a mess. You should have seen him on his wedding day. He was confused as hell!" he says.

Well, I saw the video and he didn't look confused to me!

He gets serious now and looks at me. He says Elik told him about me sleeping around in Cape Town and is very upset. I explain myself, it wasn't sleeping around! He says I must give him sometime, he'll come around.

"No Lumka I need to see him!", I say.

"No. You can't. Give him some time, he will call you when he's ready!", he says.

"You don't understand. I need to see him today. Right now!", I say.

I'm getting worked up very fast. That temporary happiness is gone.

"Why? What's so urgent that you can't wait?", he says. He's such a calm person.

"I just need him ok. Fine, you want to know? I was raped ok. I was beaten up and I was raped. I need Elik, Lumka. Where is he?", I blurt out. His jaw drops. I mean I just dropped the bomb just like that.

"Who did that to you?", he looks so angry right now. I just breakdown, the memory is too fresh and I was stupid to think I can forget just like that.

He pulls me closer and hugs me for a long time and encourages me to cry. He just holds me there. I hate crying because that's when the pain intensifies and that's when you remember everything and you just end up crying some more.

"Look at me Fierce", he says when I've calmed down a bit. I do.

He has such a kind face.

"You can't tell Elik this. Pretend like this never happened", he says.

Pretend like this never happened? If we went through life pretending some things never happened, that would be heaven mos!

I keep looking at him. Is he serious right now? He should be encouraging me to open a case against Athi!!

"Elik and I have been friends for many years. He's like a brother to me, and I know him. This will hurt him! You don't want to hurt him, do you?", he says.

"What about me? I can't keep this to myself", I say.

"Come on Fierce. Please. What do you think Elik will do? He will find that guy and kill him, you know that. Think about the ripple effect if you talk. Elik will kill him!", he says.

Now he's just playing at my emotions.

“So I should just forget?”, I ask.

“Tell you what. Why don’t you go back to Cape Town until you have calmed down. Then only then, speak to Elik”, he says.

I refuse to argue about this further. It’s me who’s feeling what I’m feeling not him. He counts some money and hands me R3000 and kisses me on the cheek.

“You and Elik will be fine. Just don’t tell him this Fierce, please. I know him”, he says.

He insists on walking me into the airport but I insist I will be just fine. I need to think. I’ll get through this. If I can just try and pretend like it was a bad dream then maybe I can forget. I try Elik’s phone again. Nothing. My WhatsApp messages to him are not delivering as well so I don’t know what to do. I’m not going back to Cape Town without seeing him!

I open my Uber App and put Elik’s address as my destination. I don’t know what I’m thinking, I think I’m not thinking actually. You would think since it's the airport there will be Ubers everywhere but no. The war with the meter taxis have made them extinct. There's one that has been 3 minutes away for the past 30 minutes!

CHAPTER 35

“Taxi?” a guy in a lime green reflective vest asks.

“How much to Morningside?” I ask.

He looks as if he's calculating. Probably estimating the distance then factoring in the cost of fuel per litre, adding cost of time, labour, service and effect of distance and quality of the road on tyres!

"R650", he eventually says. That's a bit much. Uber said R320 - R380!

"I'll give you R550", I say.

"Ok. Just because it's you I'll make it R600", he says.

"Fine", I say.

I know it's a rip off but it's ok.

I use my own GPS and 50 minutes later we are in Morningside, outside Elik's gate. I spend about 20 minutes just pacing and wondering, should I? Should I not? Should I? I try to look through the gate but I can't see anything. The durawall is too high so I won't even bother trying to see over, with my shortness. I just need to talk to Elik face to face.

My phone rings as I'm still pacing. It's Lumka!

"Where are you?", he says as soon as I answer.

"Ummm, aa, I'm by Elik's gate?", I stutter.

"What? Have you lost your mind?", he says.

I just sigh. I told him I need to see Elik, what's his problem.

"Listen to me Fierce. Walk away from there and call an Uber and go home. Send me your full name and passport number, you need to get to Cape Town!", he says. I start walking away as I talk on the phone. You never know who's on the other side of the wall you know.

"But...", I start to say.

"If you want Elik to never forgive you, go ahead and go into his house!" he says.

Of course I don't want that.

"Fine I'll send you my details just now", I say.

He's right. I get an Uber and head to the airport. I have a flight ticket on my phone

by the time I get to the airport. My flight is at 10 pm. I get to my room and sleep.

Tomorrow might be a better day.

Better? Who am I kidding? It's worse. It's the worst so far. I woke up feeling like hell. I have to accept the fact that I'm on my own and have to work towards getting my life back together. But it's kinda hard to get your life back together when it was never together to begin with! I send an email to Prof and blind copy Brain and Ndivhu saying I'm feeling a bit under the weather and won't come to the lab this week.

I leave my room and drive to TOPS and buy 3 bottles of red wine then pass by the pharmacy and ask for a box of Mybulen pain killers. My stash is running low. I sit on the floor and close my eyes as I force gulp after gulp of wine down my throat. Gosh, alcohol tastes terrible! All I need is the after effects, but guess I have to suffer the terrible taste in the meantime. I actually drink a whole bottle! I'm getting good at this alcohol thing already, although I'm pretty sure you are not supposed to drink it this fast.

The pain is still there! I thought alcohol would erase it! It's a central nervous system depressant so why is it not doing its job! But now I'm crying and I feel so emotional and I'm just a mess. Oh well, if alcohol won't work, let me do what I know works. I pop my 5 blue pills and lie down on the floor and wait to fall asleep. I wait and wait and wait.

I feel so sick and sleep won't come. This doesn't make sense! These pills put me to sleep every single time, why not today? I try and get up to check if maybe I bought the wrong ones or they sold me an expired pack. All the alcohol just rushes to my head. You know when you drink sitting down you sometimes don't feel the alcohol that much, but the minute you stand! It just hits you square in the face and runs through your body like electricity.

My head is so heavy and I'm seeing double. I force myself to get up and try to stand. The room is dancing, my head is jumping and my feet feel like jelly. My temperature is through the roof and my heart is beating so fast it hurts.

I reach for my phone and dial Elik. I suddenly miss him so much. Drunk decisions! The phone falls off my hand as I fall onto my knees and throw up. I don't know what's happening. I think this is what dying feels like. I'm scared of dying. I don't want to die. My family needs me, I'm all they have. I can't die now. I try and get up but I fall again. I throw up but since I haven't been eating I just kneel there making throwing up noises but nothing coming out, just air. That's so painful!

This is bad. I see a light and I wonder if that's the gate to heaven. My brain is buzzing, my skin hurts, I'm dizzy and I can't stand. I crawl towards the door, away from that light and manage to open it then crawl outside. I try to scream 'help' but my voice just won't come. I throw up air again and I'm left with the bitter taste of bile in my throat. I feel like my stomach is on fire, it's cramping so bad, I think this is how being in labour feels like. I'm struggling to keep my eyes open and I can feel my consciousness slipping away. I can hear voices and footsteps but they sound so far away.

I see myself at home, running with my sister Replace and my little brother. Mother is shouting at us for something we did and we are laughing and running away. I feel so sleepy. I feel so at peace. But I just remembered that I can't sleep. If I sleep I may never wake up. I panic and force my eyes to stay open.

I can hear those voices again and there's a group of people around me. They just keep drifting in and out of my line of vision. I'm lifted onto a stretcher and carried away. That looks like an ambulance. Why am I in an ambulance? A guy is loosening my clothes and talking gentle asking if I'm comfortable. I don't know if there's two of them or just one. I'm seeing double or triple I can't be sure. My stomach hurts the most, it feels like it's been dipped in acid and is rapidly dissolving.

I keep remembering that I can't sleep. I need to live and the only way to do that is to stay awake. But my eyes are so heavy. I'm trying to think what happened. Athi! He really hurt me that bastard! I see that light again and I think I see an angel

smiling back at me, complete with wings and all. Why am I hallucinating? I let my eyelids drop, I can't keep them open anymore.

The next time I wake up, I'm in a room, on a bed with pipes in my arms and a mask on my face. I can see a nurse and a doctor on my bedside. I'm a bit confused.

"She's awake", the nurse says.

"Ma'am. Are you comfortable?", the doctor asks and I try to nod my head but it hurts so bad.

"What happened? Where am I?", I say. My voice is so dry.

"You are in hospital. You overdosed. You have been asleep for the past 27 hours", the doctor says.

Me? Overdosed? How? I always had this pain pill thing under control.

"What?", I say.

"You are lucky they brought you in when they did", the doctor says.

"What?", I say. I'm confused and I'm struggling to piece my memories together.

"I need to sedate you, alright? We are flushing the drugs out of your system and I need you to stay calm. The only way to do that is to have you asleep. Ok?", he says.

It's not drugs! It's just pain pills! I want to say to them but my throat is so dry. They must have injected something coming into my system because I feel so drowsy and I black out.

I wake up hours later and thankfully that oxygen mask on my face is gone. I feel so much better now although the headache is still there.

"Easy!", a voice says as I try to sit up. The lights are so bright I have to squint my eyes.

"Hey Beautiful. Welcome back", he says and I can see his smile.

Who is this man in this room? I know that scent and that voice! I squint my eyes more. Elik? No it can't be. I'm probably still hallucinating. What would he be doing here? Where the hell am I? They must have called the last number I dialed on my phone!

"Elik?", I say. It comes out as a whisper.

"I'm here baby. Don't talk. It's ok now. I'm here", he says and then feels my temperature with the back of his hand.

I must be dead. Elik can't be here. He didn't want anything to do with me anymore. I feel like I'm drifting away again but I'm trying hard to stay awake.

"Are you hungry?", he says. I shake my head and the effort hurts.

"Thirsty? Look, I got you a coke zero!", he says.

He's so precious but no thanks.

"How are you feeling?", he asks.

"Like death", I say.

I close my eyes. I can't stay awake.

"Don't you dare die on me Fierce!", he says. That's Elik's voice! Is he really here?

Don't I dare die on you? People always tell someone not to dare die on them as if it's that easy, as if that person has control over life and death!

"I need to sleep Elik. Just a bit", I say.

What I really want is to jump out of this bed and run into his arms and hold him and make sure he never leaves me again. I want to thank him for being here and I have so many questions! Although the spirit is willing, the body is so weak right now.

"Alright. Get some rest. I'll be right here. I'm not going anywhere", he says.

I just squeeze his hand. Talking is hard right now.

"Should I play you a song or something?", he says. I know he doesn't know what to do right now shame. He looks so tired.

"That would be nice. Just keep the volume down ok", I say.

"Ok", he says.

He plays Akon's Be With You and I can't help but smile. That's our thing. When we can't find the words to say to each other, we find a song that can express our feelings for us. I promise myself not to sleep until the song is done.

"You mean the words?", I ask and reach for his hand.

"Every last one!", he says and kisses me on the forehead. I close my eyes and listen to 'Be with you'.

"I know they wanna come and separate us but they can't do us nothing

You're the one I want and imma continue loving

'Coz you're considered wifey and I'm considered husband
And imma always be there for you

Either way you look at it I ain't going no where from my muffin
'Coz she gonna hold it down, can't no body tell her nothing
You got the kind of love that always make up after fussing
And that's what gets me closer to you

And no one knows, why I'm into you
'Coz you'll never know what it's like to walk in our shoes
And no one knows, the things we've been through
Can never measure up to half of what I put you through
That's why we'll break through

And I don't care what they say
I'm gonna be with you
And I don't care what they do
I'm gonna be with you

Seems like every day that go by things are getting harder
Wanna be the one that give you the whole enchilada
'Coz I know what my baby like, I lean you on that Prada
Louis bag to match with the shoes
All about knowing your woman and doing things to keep her longer
Sticking together forever, watch it grow stronger

That's the way it has to be, everything proper
Keeping it always true

You are everything in my life see the joy you bring
AND AIN'T NO ONE I CAN COMPARE YOU TO
AND I KNOW THAT YOU WILL NEVER WALK
AWAY FROM ME NO MATTER WHAT
AND THAT'S WHY I PLAN TO DO THE SAME THING FOR YOU"

Now I can sleep. I know he still loves me.

I don't know after how long, but I wake up again just as the doctor comes in. Elik is still here and I keep staring at him. The doctor asks how I'm feeling and I say better. The nurse walking with him helps me sit up.

"Will she be fine Doc?" Elik asks. He looks like he could use some sleep.

"She will be fine", he says.

"When can you let her go?", he asks.

"I'll keep her overnight for observation then she can go home tomorrow. Most of the drugs are out of her system. She will live", he says.

Can they stop saying drugs already! Geez!

"Did you get the results yet?", he asks.

"I'll bring them this afternoon", the doctor says.

The doctor writes down some stuff and they leave me alone with Elik. He's just holding my hands and not saying anything. The nurse returns with a tray of food and Elik says he will feed me it's ok, so the nurse leaves.

"Damn it Fierce! How could you?", he says. He doesn't sound angry though, he sounds more worried.

"Elik? Is it really you?", I say.

I haven't really wrapped my head around that. I don't understand how he can be here right now.

"It's me baby, I'm here. You safe now", he says.

"Where am I?", I say.

He puts a pillow on my back and helps me sit up straight.

"You are in MeloMed", he says then pauses.

"Are you doing drugs now Fierce?", he sounds quite upset now.

"Of course not", I say.

I look at him, still trying to adjust to the light and being awake. He helps me eat and drink. The food tastes horrible but I know better than to fight him when he's feeding me. When that is done and I feel even more alive, I'm ready to talk.

"How did you get here? What happened to me?", I ask.

I have a vague memory of the events leading up to here. The last thing I remember is sleeping on the floor outside my room.

"You were gone for a whole day! Do you know how scary that is? They called me and I got here as fast as I could. I thought I would lose you", he says.

I keep quiet.

"How could you?", he raises his voice.

"Please don't shout at me", I say.

He calms a bit and holds my hands.

"You had me worried sick. I thought you were gonna die!", he says.

I tell him how I had drunk a whole bottle of wine and then took pain killers. I tell him I couldn't take the pain anymore. I tell him about the breakup with Athi, leaving out the rape part, and how I came to Joburg to find him but couldn't and had to come back. I'm an emotional wreck when I'm done talking.

"Where you trying to kill yourself?", he asks.

"No. I just wanted to forget. I wanted to sleep", I say.

He gets up and paces the room.

"I did this to you, didn't I?" he says.

I look down. He didn't do all of it. Athi did. But he contributed.

"I'm sorry baby. I'm sorry. I did this!", he says.

His phone rings.

"I have to take this, it's Lumka", he says.

He goes outside and I lie back. I want to sleep. He returns minutes later and he looks at me. He looks somewhere between worried and angry.

"I just spoke to Lumka. I told him you were admitted and he told me what happened. Why didn't you tell me baby?", he says. He looks at me and I can see anger building up in his eyes.

"You wouldn't take my calls", I say.

He looks down. He keeps clenching his fists. He's fuming.

"What exactly happened?", he asks.

I keep quiet. I don't want to talk about it.

I can tell he's getting very worked up.

"It was my fault Elik. I cheated on him and he punished me. I deserved it", I say and start crying.

"No baby, no. Don't you ever say that again! It wasn't your fault! You didn't deserve it! He should never have! You are mine Fierce, mine!", he says.

I try to stop from crying.

"Don't cry now. I'm here ok. We'll get through this. I'll take care of you", he says.

He asks me about the 'drugs' again and I tell him how I used to take pills to force myself to sleep and how I have been struggling with dealing with the rape. Now that Lumka has decided to talk when he told me never to say anything, I guess we can talk about it. The secret is out!

"And I left you to deal with this alone. I should have been there for you baby. This should never have happened to you. I'm sorry", he says.

You know Elik and the words 'I'm sorry' are in the same WhatsApp group! The number of times he says that is too much.

"Get some rest. I'll wake you up when the doctor comes with the results", he kisses me on the forehead. He always loved kissing me on the forehead.

He looks at me and I smile. My lips feel dry though and I'm sure I look terrible. He has the most beautiful eyes in the whole world. I could look into them all day long!

"I love you", he says, holding the stare. I think he really wants me to believe him.

"I love you too", I whisper.

"I hate him Elik. He beat me up. He hurt me!", I say. The pain is not all gone. "He'll never touch you again. I'm here now", he says.

He gets up, paces around the room, then sits down and sighs deeply. How am I supposed to sleep now with him pacing like that!

"He's not going to get away with this!", he says in a low voice, talking to himself.

I cringe. I remember Lumka saying, 'Elik will kill him!'. That makes me so scared. I hope by 'kill him' he didn't mean like kill him kill him, dead, you know. Maybe kill him like rough him up a little or something.

Him being here is making me cry. The man I love with everything is here. He came through for me, again. I don't know how many tears I've shed in front of this man. And everytime, he holds me and comforts me until I'm better.

I don't to sleep. I just sit there, tears running, holding on to Elik for dear life. The doctor comes in, alone this time. He smiles at me and asks how I feel. I'm thinking 'Can't you see I'm crying? How do you think I feel?'. But I say I'm much better and I wipe away the tears.

Elik lets the hug go and holds my hand.

"I have the results from the lab now", the doctor says. Then he looks at Elik, giving him the eye to get out.

"He can stay", I say. He already knows I'm a pain killer junkie so what's the point of privacy now? Besides I've told him everything.

"Alright then. So you suffered from alcohol poisoning and you overdosed on mybulen. Do you know how dangerous what you did is? Alcohol poisoning could have put you in a coma for a long time or even killed you! Alcohol and mybulen are contraindicative, so when you mixed them, your system was poisoned", he says.

This doctor sounds upset at me! Don't they teach doctors not be emotional!

Elik squeezes my hand.

I feel stupid for not knowing that drinking that much alcohol in one go would oversaturate my blood and send my body into panic. My poor liver and kidneys! They had to work overtime. And I studied these pain killers, I had been careful. How could I have forgotten to check their contraindications!

"You are in the clear though. No organs were damaged and you will be just fine", he says.

That's good to hear. That's a huge relief. I was just scared I would die and my tombstone would be written, 'Here lies Fierce, who died of drug overdose'. That's not the way I want to go out!

"I have bad news though. I'm afraid, but you lost the babies", he says.

What babies? Or didn't I hear right?

CHAPTER 36

Elik and I just look at each other. Like what babies is this doctor talking about?

"No there must be a mistake. I wasn't pregnant!", I say.

I'm on contraceptives! And I'm pretty sure I would have known if I was pregnant!

The doctor looks at his papers then back at me.

"Yes, you were", he says.

No ways. I used protection with Athi every single time I let him put on his poor 3 minute performances. It would be an insult to be pregnant from that! I mean that guy used to just get on top of me, flop around, breath like he's having an asthma attack and sometimes before I could even figure out what the hell is going on, he would be done! I remember one night watching him seriously go at it, even biting his lower lip and I was thinking WTF! I had to cover my mouth to stop from laughing. His sex was just pure terrible!

I'm trying to think hard, to see how this might have happened. I come up with nothing.

"But I was given a morning after pill after the, you know, incident, and that was a few days back, so even if, let's say I got pregnant, surely it wouldn't be detected now!", I say.

"The morning after pill wouldn't have worked if you were already pregnant!", he says.

"No man. It can't be. Are you sure? How far along was I?", I ask.

"11 weeks", he says.

That's almost 3 months!

He looks too relaxed, he might be joking. But again I don't think doctors joke about things like this.

"No it can't be. Show me!", I say.

He hands me the report.

I scroll down past the hepatitis, HIV, anemia then there, the hormone I'm looking for, HCG.

There it is, on the lab report, in black and white.

HCG level = 208 000 mIU/ml.

So I really was pregnant! But how?

I'm looking back into memory to see how that could have happened. Asking myself questions.

Where was I 3 months back? I was with Elik.

Did we have sex? When have we ever been together and not had sex.

But I'm on contraceptives right? Wrong!

Oh shoot! How could I have been so careless! I got the 3 year implant over 3 years ago. I had forgotten all about contraceptives after that because I was covered for 3 good years. Those 3 years had expired! But because I had had it for so long, I had

stopped keeping track of it. In my head I always thought, 'I'm on contraceptives'. And seeing than I would go for months without a period, because of the implant, there's no way I would have known I was 'late'.

But I didn't have morning sickness and my tummy was still flat so maybe there's a chance the report could be wrong.

"Are you sure doctor?" Elik asks.

I'm just quiet now because I've been doing the Maths in my head and I can see that Elik must have knocked me up that time in Joburg.

"100%. She was pregnant, with twins", he says.

No no no. This can't be happening to me right now. Why does life hate me so much?

"What would have caused the miscarriage?", I ask. I need to know. I'm still in denial.

"Well, when your system got poisoned, the fetuses also got poisoned and your body rejected them. You are very lucky to be alive young lady!", he says.

He does a few routine checks on me before walking out.

"Noooooooooooooooooooo", I scream.

"It's ok baby. It's ok", Elik holds me.

"Nothing about this is ok! Nothing is ok Elik!", I keep screaming. He holds me and lets me scream and shout and swear.

"It's ok baby. We are ok. We've got each other", he keeps saying.

"It's not ok! It's far from ok", I shout.

The nurses have to come, hold me down and sedate me because I was losing my mind and screaming and disturbing the entire hospital wing.

I could have been a mother to not one but two mini Elikes. I wish I had known I was pregnant so I could have never taken those pills or drank that alcohol or gotten with Athi in the first place. I wish I had known so I could have enjoyed the pregnancy. Would they have been boys or girls or a boy and a girl as Elik and I had wished for? Would they have had their father's eyes? Now I will never know.

When I wake up Elik is sitting there, with his head in his arms. I know he's stressed. I've never seen him this broken before and I don't know what to do or say. I mean we were not even talking not so long ago and now he's here and we have to just pick up from where we left like nothing happened!

But I know now is not the time for my tantrums. So I just sit there looking at him. I want to be strong for him but I don't know how. He's always been strong for me and held me together when I was falling apart. I never had to be strong. He is the strong one.

Through my tears I see him wipe away his own. I get off the bed and throw my arms around him and we hold on to each other. I can feel his body shaking. He's crying too and the more he cries the more I cry. I lost our babies. I don't know how I'm going to live with that. It takes a while for us to compose ourselves.

"I hate this hospital gown!", I complain. I think I just need something to be angry at.

I throw the gown off. I don't have clothes though, I asked the nurse to throw away the ones they had brought me in, because they were full of blood and vomit. I don't mind being naked because this is Elik. He has seen me naked so many times! "I'd rather be naked than wear this stupid gown", I say and fold my arms.

"Here. Have this", Elik says.

He takes off his hoodie and puts it on me. He looks quite delicious in those sweat pants and a plain black T-shirt! But eating him is the last thing on my mind right now.

"I'll go get you something to wear. Sweat pants?", he says.

I nod. Those will do. I know we need to talk but we both seem not to know where to start.

The nurse comes in and Elik has to step out as she needs to suction me and clean me up. She says almost 20% of pregnancies end up in miscarriages in the first trimester. I honestly don't know why she told me that. What does she want me to do with that information? Does she really think that will make me feel better? Like, 'Oh! It's not just me, 20% of us lose babies all the time'.

She removes the expired implant and asks if I want to be put on contraceptives. I say no. I'll decide on those things when I'm thinking clearly. It's not like I'll be having sex anytime soon anyways.

I hate contraceptives to be honest. I went from one to another in the first year I was introduced to sex, trying to find the one that was kind to my body. The injection made me fat I couldn't deal. The pill made me paranoid and I had serious mood swings. The IUD, that was a disaster. I would have severe cramps and that thing sometimes hurt Elik when we got busy which just spoiled the experience. So I had to take it off. The condom never worked for me and Elik, mostly because we would have sex in the most random of places and we hated having to now look for one. And also because once we did it without, he never wanted to see them again. Then I got the 3 year implant and it had been perfect for me. So I need to think carefully before I decide which one I want.

Tomorrow I'll be discharged and I have to go back to my room at rez and be alone. That just scared me. I don't know how I'm going to manage on my own. I think I should take some time out and go home for a while. My aunt will have my back I know and she will help me through this. My parents can never find out about this. I'm their golden child who can never do no wrong and I would like to keep it that way.

Elik comes back over an hour later with an Edgars plastic bag and he throws himself on the chair. He looks so hurt I don't know what to do. I slowly get out of bed. I'm tired of lying down anyway. I feel so much better now and I can walk up straight. I force his knees apart and stand in front of him. He looks up at me and his eyes are glassy and teary. He's being strong for me, as always, but I know inside he's shattered. I wrap my hands around him and let his head rest on my stomach.

“It’s ok baby. Cry”, I say. I know he always says ‘a man never cries’ but this is not the time for that. I need him to cry and let the pain out. He holds on to me and cries. I keep holding him close, feeling his body tremble.

CHAPTER 37

It’s visiting hour and there’s like 10 people here to see me! Like who the hell told these people where to find me! Elik steps outside when the group steps in. He says he doesn’t feel like people right now but will be right outside if I need him. I’m forced to fake a smile for my visitors. There’s Ndivhu, Brain, Brain’s girlfriend, the warden of our rez and some faces I recognize from rez but can’t put names to. They brought flowers and a basket with biltong, nuts, biscuits and chocolates. Poor snack selection for a sick person if you ask me! I tell them I had food poisoning, I can’t tell them the truth. You know people don’t always deserve the truth because they use it against you and laugh at you behind your back!

The warden suggests that they form a circle around my bed and pray for me. I’m not a prayerful person. Maybe because I feel like I have so many sins I wouldn’t know where to start asking for forgiveness or because I’ve never found the right church to go to, I don’t know. They all pray together at once and I’m just moving my eyes from person to person as some reach the speaking-in-tongues level. It feels like a cult and I’m lying here in the middle as a sacrifice.

When they are done, they wish me a speedy recovery and leave. Ndivhu, Brain and Brain's girlfriend stay behind. Her name is Olwethu but she calls herself Osh so I call her Osh.

We talk about the lab and I have to now explain how I went from a flu to food poisoning. I say I had tinned fish which must have expired and that's how I almost died. I'm just lying through my teeth and using medical terms just so it sounds true. Brain's girlfriend, Osh, then asks the guys to step outside so she can 'fix me up'.

They do as they are told. She's wearing a crop top and nice denim shorts and has blonde box braids on her head. I don't think I've ever seen her stomach covered, ever, maybe she really needs to show off her belly ring and the tattoo of a butterfly on the left side of her stomach. She looks good though so I guess if you got it why not flaunt it.

"Hayibo girl, awusembi! (you look so ugly)", she says.

I can't help but laugh as she goes on. She's quite a character.

"Ha a chommy (friend) this is not on! You look horrible, I'm not gonna lie to you! I was embarrassed for you the whole time the people were here!", she says as she removes face wipes and a make-up bag from her handbag.

"You look like those homeless people at the train station in Bellville, ha a, it's really not on!", she insists. I think she's just exaggerating now. Fine I've been crying my

eyes out, have had pipes in my body, haven't had a decent meal in days and I feel like my soul has been ripped right out of my body! But I don't think I look that bad.

She cleans me up with the wipes, puts a bit of Ponds on my face, puts on foundation, concealer, bakes me with powder, contours my face, highlights my eyes and cheekbones and lastly a nude lipstick.

"See, now you look normal!", she says handing me a mirror.

Wow. She did a good job. I should ask her to teach me when I get better. We've never really been friends though, we have a 'hi' 'hi' friendship because she comes around the lab sometimes. Besides Brain is always uncomfortable around me when she's around! She's too much but I think I like her. I need someone this cheerful around right now.

"So, is that your boyfriend? The dark one who was here when we came in", she says.

"Yes it is", I say. I'm not sure if me and Elik are back together or what, but there's no harm in me saying he's my boyfriend.

"Why was he so angry?", she says.

"He wasn't angry, he's just tired and doesn't feel like people right now", I say.

"He must be loaded! I saw his watch! Is he Venda?", she says.

Because he's dark he must be Venda! Stereotypical much!

"No he's from Ghana, actually. And yes he's loaded!", I say.

"So is it true that men from up there are good in bed?", she says.

I can't help but laugh. Why do people always ask me that! I know what she's really asking is if they have big things.

"You know it's true! You dating a man from up there as well", I say. Brain is from Cameroon so I don't know what she's talking about.

"No, it's men from Nigeria and countries around Nigeria that are, you know!", she says.

I can't deal! Who tells people these lies mara? Besides I'm not a good reference, I've only been with 2 guys from around that region and although they are well gifted, they cannot represent the whole population!

"And Brain? Isn't he gifted?" I can't believe I just asked that! She blushes a little.

"Well Brain is ok I guess. You know the first time I saw it, I was like whaaaaat? Where's the rest of it? But he knows how to use it so I can live with that plus he treats me well so I can overlook that!", she says.

Good girl!

I can't believe we are here discussing Brain's penis! That's just wrong on so many levels.

"Be nice to Brain Osh! He's a good guy!", I say. I'm serious. Good men are scarce these days and she has one.

"But girl, I thought you were with that dentist, Athi?", she says.

I roll my eyes. I really don't want to hear that name!

"No, I'm not judging. Keep them both!", she winks at me.

She's something else but I've already decided I like her. I think me and her will be friends.

Brain and Ndivhu walk back in to say goodbye because visiting hour is over. I thank Osh and ask her for a hug, she really brightened up my mood. I tell the guys I'll see them in the lab soon.

Elik only returns when everyone is gone. He looks so distant, like he's deep in thought. I just let him. I don't know what else to do. We barely talking. He helps me bath, helps me eat, helps me into the sweat pants and T-shirt he bought from Edgars. This whole time I was just wearing his hoodie!

"Can we talk baby?", I say.

"Not today my love. Please", he says.

I understand.

He puts me to bed and kisses me.

"That bastard won't get away with this!", he says. I don't think he's talking to me. I think he's just thinking out loud.

That just scares the hell out of me, I would rather we just forgot about Athi. I don't want Elik doing anything that could ruin him.

He says he has to go and freshen up and will be back. I'm glad I still have my phone. Those good Samaritans that helped me that day made sure I had it. It was on the locker on my bedside when I first woke up.

I go through the messages. My mother is just checking up on me. My brother in Hillbrow wants money, I'm not sending him anything! After he didn't show up for our sister's funeral, I cut him off. My eldest brother Zibulo wants Elik's number. Hell no, he just wants to ask Elik for money! Elik doesn't need that right now. I'm not giving him.

I call Lumka, I need to make sure Elik doesn't do anything stupid.

"Bhud' Lumka, it's Fierce!", I say.

"Hi. How are you doing?", he says.

"I'm better now", I say.

"Ya hey. I'm sorry sisi for what happened. How's Elik holding up?", he says.

"That's why I called you. I'm worried he's going to do something stupid. Please talk to him. I can't have him go to jail. You have to speak to him!", I say.

"That dog deserves everything that's coming to him!", he says. He's so calm like he knows something I don't.

I'm just wondering what exactly it is that's 'coming to Athi'.

"No Lumka. Whatever Elik has planned, you have to stop him!", I say.

"But Fierce you know how Elik gets when it comes to you! You think someone would hurt you like that and he would just let it go? And the babies you lost were not just yours you know! They were his too!", Lumka says.

It's like reasoning with a small child! What happened happened. We need to move on. There's no point in making our situation worse.

"What is he going to do? Is he going to kill him?", I ask.

"No of course not. Hes not a murderer! You know that! Don't worry yourself about this. Everything will be fine. You just focus on getting better!", he says.

"Will you at least talk to him!", I snap. He's really annoying me now.

"Alright alright. I will. But trust me, you have nothing to worry about. He's not going to do anything", he says.

I don't believe him! I hang up.

I have everything to worry about! Besides Lumka is the one who decided to tell Elik about the rape after explicitly telling me not to! He should be handling Elik!

I call Elik. I need him right here by my side so that I know he's not out there, up to no good.

"Baby", I say.

"Hey beautiful!", he says. He sounds drained.

"Where are you?", I ask.

"Here by Protea Hotel", he says.

Ok that's not too far.

"Please come back. I don't want to be alone", I say.

"I'll be right back. Let me take a quick shower then I'll be back", he says.

"Ok. I love you Elik!", I say.

"I love you too Fierce. More than anything", he says.

He returns an hour later and I feel bad for making him spend his time here at the hospital instead of sleeping. I have no pipes left in my arms and they are just

keeping me here for observation anyway. So I move over and he gets into the bed with me. The bed is designed for a single person but with our bodies glued together we will fit just fine. We spoon and I push my body tightly into his. I need him right here and I never want him to leave.

“We will be ok”, he says then tells me to sleep. I can't sleep though. I'm thinking his wife must be worried sick about him and how about work? Did he take leave or did he just disappear? And the kids? Surely they miss him. But I wont ask. He said he doesn't want to talk.

CHAPTER 38

I'm so useless when I wake up. This morning I had no clue where I was! It took me a whole 5 minutes to kick start my brain. Then I remembered – hospital! And all the stress around it.

I want to get out of here so bad I'm not even going to bath here or even eat here. I'll do that when I get to campus. Elik walks in with a cup of coffee, hands it to me and then just sits there typing away on his phone.

You know sometimes I just look at Elik and find myself falling in love all over again! It's like he was made for me and I love every thing about him! His legs make those cute, subtle brackets that pop out when he's wearing jeans. He looks divine!

I'm just standing there, sipping on my coffee and looking at him. Like how on earth did my soulmate end up with another woman? Couldn't he just have married me in the first place and all this would have been avoided!

I want to chat but I know he's still hurting and I know better than to talk. I think he's angry at me too so I'll just keep quiet until he comes around. I'm battling my own demons here. The physical pain is not so much now but the loss of my twins is really eating at me. I feel so guilty and I blame myself for this.

I fill in the medical aid papers and the discharge papers while Elik goes to get the prescribed medication from the hospital pharmacy. For the first time ever I'm grateful to Home Affairs for forcing foreign students to have medical aid! I wrecked up quite a bill! And what now? There is an ambulance fee of R3000! I always thought ambulances were free you know. Like everyone is always quick to say 'Call an ambulance', so I thought it was a free service!

"You done baby?", Elik says.

"Yep", I say and get up.

I ask for the nurse who took care of me and thank her with a big hug while Elik just stands there looking so annoyed.

"You are a lucky girl, you know that! Your husband is so supportive! God blessed you when he gave him to you", she says.

I could tell her, "He's someone's husband and I'm just renting and I don't think God would bless me with another woman's husband", but instead I smile and say,

"He really is!".

I then follow him to the parking lot. Elik is something else! He gives overdoing it a new meaning. Who hires a 4x4 Land Rover in Cape Town! It's not like we are going to the Namibian desert or something. I get that he likes big cars but now he's just overdoing it. If times were different I'd laugh at him for this, but for now I just jump into the passenger side and keep my mouth shut.

The only thing I have is my phone and there's no interesting messages there. My mailbox is so full and I'm scared to open it because that's just stress on its own. I don't know how I'm going to finish this PhD when I'm always going off track like this.

We drive silently towards campus. I wish he would say something. This silence is killing me. Is he angry? Is he still planning to hurt Athi? Is he blaming me? Does he hate me? I want to know.

"Pull over!", I say, and surprisingly he pulls over on the yellow shoulder! I didn't think he would.

"Please look at me", I say. I wait. After a long time he sighs, turns to me, takes my hands and looks at me.

"Do you hate me?", I ask him.

He looks at me and I can see the hurt in his eyes. I've never seen him like this before.

"I don't hate you Fierce. I can never hate you", he says.

"I'm sorry that I lost our babies. I didn't know. I wouldn't have taken those pills and drank if I'd known. I swear", I say. Now I feel like crying. Saying it out loud makes it hurt so much more.

"Baby. It's all on me. I did this to you and I don't know what to do. I did this, not you", he says.

He's going to make me cry now. He's not to blame for this, I wish he could understand that.

"I'll take care of you like I always promised to. I don't know what I'm doing but I need you to trust me, ok?", he says.

"Ok. Just know that I don't blame you for this", I say.

If anyone, I blame myself.

I feel better now and we drive on and he parks outside my rez.

"Go pack a bag. Our flight leaves in 3 hours!", he says.

What?

I can't go anywhere now. I need to get back on my feet very soon and go back to the lab! Besides I don't feel too well and I thought he was dropping me off. I could use some rest.

"But, where are we going?", I say.

"To Joburg. You are coming with me!", he says.

He's not even looking at me.

"No Elik I can't, I....", I begin to say.

"You know what Fierce, I really don't have the energy to fight with you right now. Go pack a bag and get back here. I'm taking you to Joburg with me and that's final", he says.

"But...", I try to say.

"It's not open for discussion!", he says.

I want to argue but I don't think that's a good idea right now.

I walk into rez and the 2 security guards there look at me funny. I'm sure they are gossiping about me and my near-death drama. I find my room locked and I have to go ask for the master key from the warden. My room was cleaned! I don't know who cleaned it but I'm grateful they did. I don't even care how I look. I put on leggings and a hoodie, get my backpack, throw in my laptop and charger, get a weekend bag and throw in a few things, then head out. I don't even know how long I'll be in Joburg for.

We pass the turn off to the airport and head towards town. I'm not going to ask where we are going to, Elik is in a mood. We drive down to Longstreet and he parks by Short Market Street.

"Stay here!", he commands and jumps out.

He crosses the road and disappears into a building, I'm not sure if it's a night club or what. Longstreet looks different during the day. You wouldn't think it's that nightclub after nightclub zone! It looks normal right now with proper shops and restaurants.

I wait. Elik has been gone for too long now. I keep checking outside for him. Oh there he is, finally! He stands outside a door with a guy I can't recognize. The guy looks gangster, with muscles like a bouncer and arms full of tattoos. He looks like the type of guy that would kill you without blinking and then mince your body so you are never found. They finish talking and the guy goes back in and Elik crosses the road and we drive off.

"So who was that?", I ask.

"An old friend", he says.

"Why did you go see him?", I ask.

"I had to drop off something", he says.

I can tell he doesn't want to continue the conversation so I just drop it.

We drive to the airport, drop off the rented car and get our flight. I wish he could talk to me. I need to know what's on his mind. I need to know what he's thinking. But he's shutting me out yet I'm here going to Joburg with him! I'm pretty sure my mother dropped me when I was a child and I landed on my head! This head doesn't seem to work too well.

We barely talk on the way, we don't even eat on the plane. I just sob into my hoodie and Elik puts his arm around me and makes me rest my head on his shoulder. But he doesn't say anything.

Lumka picks us up. This is true friendship Elik and Lumka have. They support each other in their infidelities! It's sad though because this is the same Lumka who goes

and smiles at Elik's wife knowing fully well there's me on the side. And Mbali and whoever else is there that I don't know of.

I'm upset with Lumka. He should have let me be the one to tell Elik! Maybe all this could have been avoided. He should have let me see Elik that day I came down to Joburg! I know he was just looking out for his friend but still. I'm pissed.

Elik and I sit on the back seat of Lumka's Range Rover and I lie down on his lap. He intertwines his fingers with my mine and rubs my back softly with the other hand. At least I know that even if he's angry with me or whatever, he still loves me. That's comforting.

"Elik, are you sure this is a good idea?", Lumka says, looking into the rear-view mirror.

"Ya", Elik responds.

"Have you seriously thought this through?", Lumka says.

"Ya", Elik says.

"Are you sure sure sure? I mean come on man", Lumka sounds worried and now I would like to know what they are on about.

"Ya", Elik says.

I'm just thinking in my head, 'Lumka just drop it, can't you see this person doesn't want to talk!'

I know him. I've had fights with him in the past and he would just fold his arms and sit there looking at me going off at him. Then he would just say, "Are you

done?". That would make me angrier. But in those days my anger always led us to the bedroom for some hard make up loving.

"She can stay with me you know or just put her up at the Hilton", Lumka says. He's quite persistent shame.

"No. She's coming with me", he says.

Is that 'she' referring to me? And where exactly am I being taken to by the way?

"Are you sure? I mean come on Elik, it's not gonna work man", Lumka says.

He really sounds worried and that's worrying me.

"Dude, please. Just drop it ok", he says.

"Ok fine. Your call", Lumka says.

Elik goes back to rubbing my back and Lumka looks back disapprovingly but keeps driving anyway.

I actually don't know where we are going but no one is telling and I'm not asking. I sit up and I see a billboard showing directions to Sandton, then we are on Rivonia Road, then we are in Morningside, then we are outside his home.

Lumka drops us off and he pulls me aside.

"How are you holding up?", he says. We didn't talk at the airport because I'm mad at him.

"Why did you tell him? You said he should never find out!", I snap, but keeping my voice low.

"He was going out of his mind. I had to tell him. He thought you were dying and was blaming himself. I thought he deserved to know why you overdosed. I needed him to know it wasn't his fault Fierce!", he says.

He's justified. But still I should have been the one to tell him.

"I'm sorry", he says.

I fold my hands and nod.

"Please take care of him! He's not ok you can see. Call me if he does anything stupid", he says.

I nod.

Elik takes my bag and backpack and I follow him into the yard as Lumka drives off. I just drag myself behind him into the house. I can't wait to get to a bed or couch so I can sleep.

"Where are the kids?", I ask.

"In daycare", he says.

"And where's she?", I ask.

"At work", he says.

I look at my phone and it's almost 4 pm.

"Wait? What? So she'll be coming home soon?", I ask.

"Ya", he says.

I feel like grabbing him and shaking him so he can talk. These one word responses are not working for me.

“And me? Why am I here if she’ll be coming home anytime from now?”, I ask.

“I’ll deal with her. You’ll use the guestroom!”, he says and throws himself on the couch.

What? He wants me and his wife under the same roof? Not even I would stoop that low. Like what is he trying to do here? Either that brilliant mind of his isn’t working anymore or he’s just trying to get me killed.

My brain starts working overtime trying to figure out what’s going on and why I was brought here in the first place. It’s never been my intention to disrespect his wife! And I have no wish to come face to face with her again after that brutal beating she gave me last time. I’m not that dumb!

This is bad. Very, very bad. I’m as good as dead. We might as well start making funeral arrangements! That woman is going to skin me alive! I can’t be in this house right now. We go back and forth with Elik, me trying to make him see how wrong this is and him telling me to just trust him.

This is the problem with having these English-based relationships! This man is not hearing me right now as I explain my self in English! If I could say it in Ndebele maybe he would hear me!

CHAPTER 39

It's my life, if he won't listen to me, I'll walk. My bank account is running pretty low though, I don't even think I can afford a hotel, let alone a flight to Cape Town. I could use my voyager miles I guess. Anything to get out this house. I don't want to be on the DailySun tomorrow morning!

"Elik, I know you are angry and hurting. But baby, this is not it. I want you, but not like this. Don't do this. She's your wife and she's going to show up here with your kids. You don't want that. Let's get out of here and figure something out", I say. I know throwing in his kids will make him think better. It doesn't. I've known him for so long and I know the one thing he hates is seeing me cry. So I start crying!

"Ok fine. Let's go then if that's what you want!", he says. I grab my bag and backpack, follow him to the garage and I take a deep breath as we drive out. That was a close shave! I don't even want to imagine what would have happened had that woman found me in her house!

He drives to the Hilton and gets a room. I've stayed at the Hilton for a long time now, it feels like home. I've actually never asked why the Hilton specifically! He insists he will spend the night, I insist he goes home. He can't stay with me forever.

"Go home baby. I'll see you tomorrow", I say.

"I can't just leave you", he says.

"It's ok. I can take care of myself. Go. They must be worried about you at home!", I say.

"They will be fine. I'll go tomorrow", he says.

This man is so stubborn!

"Baby, when Komla's not happy, she stresses you out and you are a nightmare to deal with when you are stressed. So please go. We can chat later", I say.

"Alright then. Call me if you need anything", he says and gets up.

"Buy her flowers on your way home and chocolates and wine. You owe her a lot", I say.

I don't hate his wife, I have absolutely nothing against her. We just happen to have the same taste that's all. I actually feel bad for her. I can't imagine how she feels everytime Elik disappears.

I walk him out. I wish he didn't have to go but I understand he has to. I don't want him getting into any more trouble than he already is. Now I can get some rest and I hope he can make peace at home and come up with a believable story of where he's been these past days.

It's almost 6 pm now so I throw off all my clothes, get into bed and set an alarm for 8:15 pm. That will give me enough time to get up, shower and go down for dinner.

There's a banging knock on the door of my room. I wake up annoyed and it's not even 8 pm yet! If it's house-keeping, I'm going to be very upset! Why are they disturbing me when I put the 'Do not disturb' sign outside the door? I drag myself out of bed and wrap a towel around myself and get the door.

Now I have seen it all!!! My parents might as well have named me DRAMA because the amount of drama I attract shocks even me sometimes. I have the worst luck in the world. The universe won't even let me finish grieving my loss before throwing another rock at me!

I immediately become fully awake as she strolls past me and bangs the door behind her. Elik's wife! The last person on earth I expected to see here. I'm so scared, I'm literally shaking. Karma is such a bad B! Is this how Mbali felt when I walked in on her? How did she know where to find me? Don't tell me Elik went on confessing now!

She looks strangely calm and I turn to open the door so I can run away.

"No. Don't even think of it", she says. I hesitate, but she seems too calm, she might actually kill me, I can't trust her.

"Sit", she points to the bed. I walk slowly and stand at the edge of the bed, as far away from her as possible.

"Sit. Isn't this is the bed you and my husband sleep on! What's wrong with just sitting?", she says. I sit.

She goes to the coffee making station and boils water. Is she planning to burn me with water? There is dead silence in the room, the only sound being the hissing of the boiling kettle. I'm trembling and my heart is beating fast. I'm trying to look around me for a weapon I can use to defend myself should the need arise. I guess I'll use that pen over there.

I wish I was dressed though. Now I will have to run out in just a towel. That's bad. My phone is under my pillow on the other side of the bed and I'm too scared to go for it. I just want to call Elik to come and take his person here.

When the water is done boiling, she turns to me with 2 cups in her hands and offers me one. She just made me tea? I refuse it because I'm sure she poisoned me this one. What am I even doing here right now? I should have run out. "Well, suit yourself", she says and puts my cup on the floor.

I get a good look at her. She's wearing a below the knee African print dress. Those ones people love to wear to weddings these days. She has a matching scarf on her head and she looks, how do I say it. Wifely? Motherly? She's nothing like me. I can understand why Elik married her. She has that wifely thing and she looks like the type that will cook everyday and do all chores some of us can't do.

"You are Fierce, right?", she says.

I nod and keep looking at her. I thought she knew me!

She takes off her scarf and throws it on the floor. She should buy a closure for that Peruvian! The bonding is looking clumsy!

"Had to check, you know. I can never be too sure with my husband!", she says. What does she mean by that? My eyes just widen. I bite my lower lip and look down.

"You didn't think you were the only one, did you?" she says. She's enjoying this! I think I'm going to faint. Elik has other girlfriends?

"Shame you poor thing! You thought you were special! Although I have to give it to you! You have lasted the longest!", she says and sips her tea.

I'm so gonna kill Elik!

"Now you feel my pain!", she says and I'm still quiet.

"Let's talk!", she says and crosses her legs. I'm still trembling and expecting her to throw that tea at me any moment from now. The way she's so calm is disturbing.

"You know what, I used to cry every night, for my husband when he was out there sleeping around with you. I even know your scent, because I would smell it on him every night he got back from work and on his clothes when I had to do laundry! I used to pray and blame myself, then I realised it's not me. It's girls like you Fierce. Girls who don't respect other people's marriages!", she pauses and looks at me. I feel so naked right now and I wrap the towel tightly around myself.

"I thought moving from Cape Town would make it stop. But no! You two always found a way to each other!", she says.

I don't like her being here. I want her to leave right now. It's so awkward. I know me and her have shared a penis for so long, we are practically wives-in-law, but I can't stand being with her, worse, alone!

"I was home mourning my father and you were in my house, sleeping in my bed, with my husband, drinking my chamomile tea and driving my car!".

I swallow hard.

"Tell me why?" she says.

I look down.

"Am I talking alone? The sooner you start talking, the sooner I'll leave!", she says.

"Why?", she says.

"I love him", I say. That's the honest truth.

"You love my husband?" she asks, raising an eyebrow.

Well, not when she phrases it like that!

"He wasn't married when we started", I say.

"Oh That's bullshit and you know it! That was many years ago! He's married now!

He has been for years now!" she says.

I keep quiet.

"Did he promise to leave me for you?" she asks.

"No he didn't", I say.

Well he did once at Park Station but I didn't take him seriously.

"Do you have children Fierce?", she says.

That question just hurt me.

I shake my head. I'm too scared to even open my mouth.

"Well I do, two, I'm sure you know that. I don't want my boys growing up without their father", she says.

I keep quiet.

"My marriage could have been good you know, but you Fierce, you! I didn't even get a honeymoon because of you!"

I won't respond to that. I didn't even know they didn't go on honeymoon and I don't see how that's my fault.

She's looking at me now and I'm getting really scared. I don't think she's blinking.

"Please Fierce, I'm begging you. Please leave my husband alone", she says.

I keep quiet.

"What do you give him for him to keep chasing after you huh?", she says.

"Nothing", I say.

"I cook, I clean, I do laundry, I take care of the children, I even make the same bed you sleep on when I'm not around! But he still chases after you! Why?", she says.

I don't know. Maybe he loves me after all. But I'm not about to say that.

"You know, from day one we were fighting about you! Tell me, with so many men in the world, you can't find one for yourself?", she says.

I'm still quiet. I'm thinking of an escape plan.

"We've been going for counselling you know!", she says.

"I know. He told me", I say. That was before the whole Athi thing though.

"He told you? Oh wow, he's telling you everything now?", she says and puts down her cup.

"No, not everything. But he's going to stay with you. I will tell him to work things out with you", I say.

"What? You will TELL him to stay with me?", she says. I think she's getting angry.

"I mean, I told him before. I mean, he will stay with you", I say.

Ok, I think I really need to stop talking now. I'm adding paraffin to an open fire.

"You TOLD him to stay with me? What I hear you saying is that I should be grateful to you for telling my husband to stay with me! Is that what you are saying?", she says and stands.

Wow. Why did I start talking? I was doing so much better when I was quiet.

"You know what! I need to get out of here before I strangle you to death. But before I leave. Tell me something. Will you leave my husband alone?", she says. I keep quiet.

Shouldn't she be having this conversation with Elik? I don't owe her an explanation.

"You know I've tried reasoning with you but clearly you can't reason with a whore!", she says.

Did she just call me a whore? She's lucky I'm scared of her!

"She comes and sits next to me and I keep shifting away until I'm stuck on the corner.

"Do you recognize these?", she says scrolling through her phone.

My jaw drops! It's naked pictures of myself that I sent to Elik sometime back. Why didn't he delete them! I looked pretty good though she has to admit! Some of those pictures had Elik walking out of a meeting and driving at 180 just to come and get some! And why didn't I crop out my face! I'm stupid!

"I'm going to post these on the internet and make sure everyone sees you for who you really are!", she says.

"No you can't", I say.

That would be bad for me. I'm going to be a lecturer and how am I going to do that when my students have seen pictures of me naked. And the way things spread on campus, everyone will have a picture of me in no time. And I'm from Zimbabwe where these things are frowned upon. And I'm known to be a good girl, so this would just destroy my reputation. And my parents have smart phones now, so what if someone sends them these pictures?

"Just leave Elik alone and I won't post them. It's that simple!", she says.

Is Elik worth all this trouble though?

She stands in front of me and lifts my chin up with her hands so that I'm looking at her.

"How old are you even? 23?", she says. She must be almost Elik's age. 35.

"25", I say. I'll be 26 this year but I'm still 25.

"Geez. You disgust me!", she says and she slaps me so hard. I wasn't expecting it. Did she just slap me because I'm 25? I'm confused.

“Take your phone and call Elik right now and tell him you are done with him. Tell him you have a boyfriend that you love and you want nothing to do with him! Tell him you don’t love him”, she says.

Is she serious right now? Elik will know I’m lying. So I just look at her.

“Please don’t try me. I don’t want to fight with you! Just do it!”, she snaps. I go around and get my phone. I’m struggling balancing the towel and holding my burning cheek. I’m here stuck with my boyfriend's wife! It's every side chick's nightmare! My life is such a mess shame, I could write a book!

But this woman has no idea what she’s doing! By me just saying, 'I have a boyfriend', that's going to send Elik over the edge and he will come here running in a heartbeat. But she started this so I’m just going to play along and watch the drama unfold. She slapped me first after all so let the games begin.

I dial Lumka first and when he answers I hang up. I just need him to worry about me so he can call Elik. I dial Elik next and we exchange hellos. I say I'm fine and I don't even need to ask as he just starts telling me. He says he's home and had a fight with his wife and she stormed out. I wish he knew she was right here terrorising me right now.

“Elik. There’s something I need to tell you. I can’t do this anymore. I have a boyfriend and actually I’m with him right now, so me and you are done! It's over”, I say then hang up.

"Good girl", she says with a conniving smile. I look down and smile in my heart. She has no clue what she has just done! She really doesn't know her husband that much? She's so naïve it's not even funny.

She says I must book a flight and get back to Cape Town and never come back to Joburg again and she will not leave until I do so. She's just ordering me around and insulting me and telling me what to do. I'm just scared she will rearrange my face so I keep doing as she says.

I take my laptop and deliberately go on the British Airways website. They have expensive flights. I see a ticket for R2200 and I click on that one, knowing fully well that I have less than R1000 in my account. The card keeps declining and I keep trying and she keeps waiting! Elik is blowing off my phone and she's annoyed.

"You two have the same ring tone now?", she says.

The ringtone is "Don't matter - Akon". She will never know but we have a story behind that song and we chose it together.

"Delete his number!", she says.

I do that. I don't care really, I know Elik's number by heart.

"Bring here", she says and I hand her the phone. I'm so obedient tonight. She looks at my phone then she smashes it against the wall. The screen cover of me and Elik kissing must have pissed her off! My poor phone.

"Hurry up already!", she yells at me and pulls me by the ears. Seriously? Ears? Am I a child now?

I keep trying my booking, knowing it won't go through. I've never seen anyone go mad before but I think what I'm watching is the process. She paces, talking to herself. She stops, looks at me and laughs. She keeps pulling her weave and swearing at me. Then she gets my bag, throws it on the bed and goes through all my stuff, throwing my things one by one on the floor, saying 'did he buy you this?'. She looks at my lingerie longer than necessary. She keeps calling me every name in the book.

She was better when she was an angry wife, beating me up and sending me nasty messages. This approach she's trying now is terrible. Blackmail? Really? And forcing me to dump Elik over the phone? I've been riding with Elik for 4 years now, he knows when I'm bluffing! I'd never call and tell him I have a boyfriend! Ever!

Then the knock I've been waiting for, for the past 30 minutes finally comes! I dash towards the door and open it. She tries to say 'Don't' but it's too late. Elik walks in and Lumka follows right behind him.

CHAPTER 40

Elik looks like he just saw a ghost. The shock on his face! He looks at me and then at his wife then back at me then back at his wife. I bet he didn't expect to find her here with me. Did he honestly think I would bring another man into a hotel room he's paying for? I'm sure he knows me better than that! I'm just glad he got here as quickly as he did, that's all.

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"You alright baby?", he says.

I nod.

"Did she hurt you?", he says.

I shake my head.

"Here. Go put this on", he says.

He takes off his hoodie and hands it to me. I guess me standing there in just a towel in front of his friend isn't sitting well with him. I take the hoodie and pick up a pair of shorts on the top of the pile of my things Komla threw on the floor and

disappear into the bathroom to put them on. I lock the door, just in case Komla follows me and flushes me down the toilet!

I can hear her shouting from here and trying to fight Elik. I feel much better when I get back. I'm dressed now. His hoodie is too big for me and I could have worn my own, but I just had to wear it to make a statement.

"Komla go home. I'll talk to you at home!", Elik says.

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"There's no need to disrespect her! Go home", he says.

"Disrespect? You are disrespecting me. Both of you are disrespecting me! I'm your wife! The mother of your children!", she says.

She says that like she deserves an award for it. Will people just stop talking like making children is an achievement!

"Then behave like a wife and stop embarrassing yourself!", he snaps.

Is he defending me right now? I like this.

I promise, the weed this woman smokes is too strong, she needs to sue her dealer! She picks up the cup she had offered me earlier and throws it at me. I duck and it hits the wall behind me but the tea leaves me wet. Thankfully it's cold now. She starts throwing things at me and Elik. Pillows, cushions, my own clothes, my shoes, saucers, jars with the sugar and coffee and tea, everything in sight. I think she has gone mad!

Elik blocks things with his arms until he is able to restrain her. I feel sorry for him. Me, I'm stuck on the wall and I keep ducking. Luckily, I was quite good at umamtshayana (Dodge ball) back when I was growing up. That skill is coming in very handy right now.

"You would leave your family for this girl! Can't you see she's using you like the rest of them! All she wants is our money! Why can't you see that?", she screams and tries to break free from Elik's hold. Obviously she has no clue about me. I'm not using Elik and I'm not after his money. I love him and he just happens to have money! Coincidence.

But she said 'like the rest of them'. There's more of us? I have to remember to address that with Elik at a later stage.

"Will you just behave! Please!", he says.

She groans and looks at me with evil eyes. I'm terrified out of my mind.

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I can feel him boiling with anger.

"Why am I doing this? I should be asking you that!", she snaps.

I move closer to the wall, trying to get as far away from her eye as possible. This room suddenly feels too small. There's no where left to run to.

"I'm going to kill this bitch! Let me go Baba Paul! Allow me to squash her", she screams.

Gosh I hate it when they call him Baba Paul. Like seriously! And calling me a bitch is old now! She needs to learn new words!

“And you? Your mother failed to raise decent girls. She raised prostitutes only! Your sister died doing what by the way? Oh yes, aborting an innocent baby! I'm sure you taught her how to be a prostitute!”, she says.

What? How did she even know that?

Now she has crossed the line. When it comes to my sister, I don't play. I charge towards her and grab her by her weave. It looks horrible anyway so let me do her a favour and pull it off her head. Poor Elik is trying to separate us and we are pulling and dragging and screaming at each other.

“Stop it both of you! Just stop!”, he yells.

I let go and she lets go.

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“I'd love to see you try!”, I spit back.

“Will you just shut up! Both of you just shut up!”, Elik yells.

I look at him and his eyes are red.

“Sit!”, he says.

I sit on the bed and Komla crosses her arms and remains standing.

“Can we stop this nonsense already! You giving me a headache!”, he says.

I think I see Lumka laughing but I'm not sure. I'm still wondering why he isn't doing anything. We could kill each other here and he would just stand there!

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Wow. He knows he could have just lied right? I need to teach this man of mine how to lie.

Lumka is still just standing there with an 'I'm staying out of this' posture.

"Why would you do this? What did you wish to gain from fighting her? Your battle is with me!", he says.

"She's the centre of all our problems! Can't you see that? Has she bewitched you?", she shouts back and hits the wall with her fists.

I'm not going to say anything. I'll just sit right here and watch.

She goes on a rant again about how much she has done for Elik and how she's sick and tired of his whorish ways and how embarrassing it is for when people at church gossip about her husband cheating on her.

It's not long before she loses it again. She grabs the boiling kettle this time and throws it at me. Her aiming is quite bad so it hits Elik on the stomach instead. She

throws my shoe at me and it gets me on my back as I run away from the bed. It's going to be a long night! I wish I had a helmet, to protect my face at least.

Lumka must really be enjoying this movie! I feel like screaming at him. Why is he just standing there doing nothing!

Komla is throwing everything! I'm standing here by the wall wondering if now would be a good time to crawl under the bed or to jump into the closet or not. I kid you not, when I see her pick up a vase, I jump into the closet and hold the door from inside. I'm not going back to hospital!

What's happening here is just crazy. Had this woman never showed up here this could have been avoided. I could be having dinner at the restaurant downstairs in peace. Had she just spoken to her husband at home and left me out of it, this wouldn't be happening! She and I have co-existed peacefully in Elik's life over the years. Why is she ruining that unspoken arrangement now? I mean, I respected her enough to leave her house when her husband wanted me to stay!

I'm looking through the keyhole of the closet! She's breaking everything and even pulled the bedding off the bed. She breaks a glass on the wall. I'm glad I wasn't close, I'm sure she would have stabbed me in the neck with it. She keeps saying she will kill me, I'm starting to think she's serious.

She stabs Elik in the arm with the broken glass. Oh hell no! Now she's gone too far! She can't hurt my man like that and think I'll just do nothing. I come out of the

closet, I'm not scared of her anymore. She can bring it on. I'll kung fu her behind back to Ghana if she doesn't know me!

Lumka now seeing that blood is involved joins the party. He holds Komla back and I take Elik. I need to know he's not seriously hurt.

He's bleeding but I can't do anything now. I have to stay alert and keep dodging this woman.

"Should I call an ambulance?", I say.

"No. It's not that deep", he says.

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CHAPTER 41

Is Komla serious right now? What are we? Teenagers? Where we ask a boy in high school to choose who he loves! She can't be serious.

"Just go home Komla. Please", Elik says.

"No choose. Choose", she says.

She must be very sure of herself shame.

Elik looks at me pleading for help with his eyes. He looks so defeated.

"Don't do it baby", I say.

I don't really care who he chooses. I just don't want him choosing me and then having to watch Komla fall apart!

"Choose Baba Paul!", she keeps saying, and I keep shaking my head no at Elik.

There's a loud knock and the door opens. It's hotel security! They need us to get out because of the chaos we are causing. This is humiliating. Worse because I'm

the only one dressed in shorts here and for people looking there's no question that Komla is the wife and I'm the home wrecker .

Komla is now being held back by security. She just won't calm down!

"Baby. Go to the car", Elik says giving me the key.

I'm trying to pack my laptop and charger into the backpack. Packing when you in a hurry is the worst thing because you end up taking even longer! I grab my phone from the floor and a few other things. The clothes can stay, it's fine.

I take my backpack, grab the room key and run out. Lumka talks to the head of security and we leave the couple inside to deal with their marital affairs. There's people from other rooms standing in the passage probably thinking the worst of me. In hindsight, these butt rider shorts are too short, but it's not like I had the chance to choose what to wear. I just picked what was most accessible.

I find Elik's car and drop my stuff in and just stand outside. I need to catch my breath and process all this. These are times I wish I smoked! I'm worried about Elik though!

"You alright?", Lumka says as he joins me. I nod and hug myself.

He lights up a cigarette and smokes away. I feel like asking for a puff but I hate the taste of cigarettes.

Lumka must think I'm psycho. The first time, he picked me up at a garage beaten to a pulp and half naked, then he found me at the airport planning to go to Elik's house, then he bailed me and Elik out of a police station after we were caught

having sex in the car and today he watched me being belligerent and fighting!
Some words I said, I need to wash my mouth out with sunlight dishwashing liquid.

"I'm sorry about all this", I say. I'm too embarrassed. I wish he hadn't seen that. I'm so used to people knowing me as this 'hardworking, intelligent PhD student' that I can't stand it when they get a glimpse into the other side of my life.

I feel like this is all because of me and I owe him an apology.

"No worries. You and your boy (Elik) are quite dramatic! It's fun to watch sometimes. You should write a book", he says and laughs.

Mxm. That's not funny.

"I'm glad she didn't hurt you. Elik was going to lose his mind had she hurt you", he says.

"She really hates me! I thought she was going to kill me!", I say.

Maybe I'm exaggerating a little but well, who cares!

"You will live", he says and pats me on the shoulder.

"You think she's going to leave him?", I ask.

"Nah! She's not going anywhere!", he says and puffs on his cigarette.

I guess deep down I'm afraid that this is the end of the road for me and Elik. When all is said and done, he has to choose his family over me. He loves his kids and I'm not about to be a stepmother!

"I need to go back inside. I need to make sure Elik is alright", I say.

I'm really worried about him. I don't trust his wife at all. She could stab him to death. I thought security would have evicted them by now!

"No don't! Stay here. I need to deal with management. We don't want to be blacklisted from the hotel you know!", he says and throws his cigarette butt on the ground.

By 'deal' I know he means pay someone a 'look aside and forget this happened' fee.

As soon as he disappears into the hotel, I go in and take the stairs. My biggest problem is that even when I know there's trouble, I still walk right into it.

I just remembered that I need Komla's phone. It has my pictures! After tonight I'm sure she will not hesitate to post them and I cannot afford to have my nudity displayed for the whole world to see. I took the room key before I left so I open and step in.

Komla is sitting on the floor with her back against the wall and Elik is standing against the opposite wall with his right foot over his left and his right arm pressing down on the cut on his left arm. He looks drained. I wonder what they are talking about. It's so quiet, I'm not sure what to do. I just know I need her phone. Maybe security allowed them to stay if they keep it low? Or did Lumka manage to pay off someone that quick?

This looks wrong. I'm walking in on husband and wife and I know this whole fight is because of me but here I am with all my thighs out, swinging my hips into the room.

I just stand there looking lost.

"I'll, umm, I'll come back later", I say.

"Get in. Sit", Elik says.

He's got this commanding voice sometimes that just makes me obey.

I look at him but proceed to the bed and sit.

"We have nothing left to hide right? So let's talk like adults!", he says.

This is too awkward!

"Komla do you want a divorce?", he says.

She looks up as if she got shocked by electricity.

"Of course not! How could you even ask me that! I made my vows to you and I have kept them! You just need to do the same. Without this one (point at me), we can make our marriage work. Let her go Baba Paul!", she says.

She's aware that she could have just said 'No' and stopped there, right? And that Baba Paul, I hate it with all my heart! He's Elik!

"I don't get all of this. You've always known about Fierce. Why are you acting crazy now? I told you about her the night before the wedding, remember? But you convinced me that we had to get married anyway! You begged me even", he says. Oh! I see what happened here. She's one of those women who marry a player and hope the ring will miraculously change him and force him to settle down. And

then when that doesn't work, she gets pregnant and hope the kids will achieve what the ring failed to. Shame, poor soul!

"Just leave her, please. Remember what the therapist said? He said we need to eliminate all these third parties. We can work through this!", she says.

You have no idea how awkward me sitting here is. I don't even know what to do with my hands. I don't even know how to sit. I'm just fidgeting and counting how many steps I need to take to run out of the door, just in case.

Now she's not screaming, she's just crying. And I'm starting to feel guilty. This is so awkward.

"Apologise to Fierce. You had no right to treat her like that and that thing you said about her sister. That was cruel!", he says.

She looks like she's going to blow up and swallow the whole room. I shift to the edge of the bed. Away from her.

In all honesty, I don't think she owes me an apology. Elik is just stretching it now.

I can't be here right now! This is too much for me. I can't sit with him and his wife. It's too wrong. I need to remove myself from this situation. Is this how my mother felt the day my father brought a second wife home? Did she also go this crazy?

And since I'm pretty sure that when it comes down to choosing, he's going to be forced to choose her, why don't I break it off first? That way I might just leave with

a little pride. I can see Komla's phone on the table next to her and that's all I want right now. I don't mind losing Elik today, I know in my heart that I'll be waking up in his bed very soon.

"You know what guys. Let me make this very easy for everyone. Fighting is not in my nature and I have bigger issues that I'm dealing with at the moment! So how about I leave you two to sort yourselves out and I go back to Cape Town tomorrow?", I say.

By the way I still need Elik to give me money, otherwise I'll be taking a bus to Cape Town or worse a train! I walk towards Elik and give him a kiss on the shoulder. I couldn't reach his cheek! I'm not wearing heels.

"You know I love you boo, right? And because I love you, I'm letting you go", I say. That doesn't even make sense! But I think that's how that saying, 'If you love something, let it go. If it comes back to you, it's yours forever. If it doesn't, then it was never meant to be' goes, so I'm just repeating. He's looking at me like I'm joking and he actually smiles a bit and I can't help but smile. He's my soldier. He came to rescue me. How can I not love him?

I walk towards his wife and kneel in front of her. I'm just going to swallow my pride, humble myself, admit I'm wrong then walk out with my head held high. Sounds easy enough.

"Hey. Look, I'm very sorry for the pain I've caused you. It was never my intention. I'm done with him now, you can have him back. I'll do my best to stay away from him", I say.

I'm really bad with words shame!

In response, she pushes me back so hard I fall on my bum and sit on the floor. What's wrong with her? I was calling a truce here and being the bigger person. Maybe I have a poor choice of words but I was trying. She could have at least met me halfway not push me!

For that reason only, I take back my apology. I get up and reach for her phone. I don't think she can see what I'm doing. All she's focused on is screaming obscenities at me and hitting me. She's been screaming so much today I don't know how she still has a voice!

This woman can punch yoh! She punches me on the thigh and I feel a cramp run all the way down to my toes. I don't know when she got up but she's pushing and pulling and punching like a professional boxer! I'm holding on to the phone with one hand and car keys with the other. I'm using the hands to protect myself so that she doesn't hit my stomach. I haven't fully healed and I want more children in the future. She hits like a man! I keep screaming "Elik, help me". It feels like forever before he gets her off me.

"What the hell is wrong with you!", Elik screams at her.

I get up and get the hell out of there, crying and all. She won't get away with this! I'm going to take Elik, keep him, make babies with him and she'll wish she never laid her paws on me! But it was worth it. I have her phone now.

Elik comes after me, and she comes after him. We literally leave the hotel running. It's a circus I tell you! I open Elik's car, jump in and lock myself in. I put her phone in the glove compartment for later use. I hope it doesn't have a password otherwise I have to wait till I get back to Cape Town and my hacker friend Tindo can unlock it.

I watch through the window as she keeps trying to hit Elik and he keeps holding her hands so she doesn't. My poor baby! I start the car. I drive a Fortuner so I'm sure I'll drive this just fine.

Where the hell is Lumka? I find my phone in my backpack and dial him. This phone is strong shame. It has kissed the wall so many times but it's still working! Things are happening so fast it's like we are in an action movie. The shouting is attracting a crowd! All the hotel staff is standing outside now watching the free show. People love things!

"Lumka. Get out here now. Elik is dying", I say. I couldn't think of anything else to say to make him rush. Like 2 minutes later, he comes out running. He holds Komla back and I open the window and tell Elik to jump in. He jumps in the back seat and I reverse and pull off. Komla must have broken free from Lumka because a stone

hits the rear windscreen. Thankfully it's shatterproof glass so I'm sure not much damage was done.

I can't handle the drama in this life I chose. Couldn't I have found a decent, unmarried man though! I just want to go home. I want to go to the village where there's peace and quiet.

Elik's wife declared war on me today and the way I'm so angry right now, she will regret this. With every punch she reminded me of Athi. And I refuse to be a victim ever again!

Since I'm going to keep fucking Elik anyway, I might as well keep him mos. In the past I always cut him off and always felt guilty and held onto the few morals I had left. I'm done with that now.

I'm passing Centurion now and I have no clue where I'm going. I'm so angry I can't stop driving. I'm overtaking unnecessarily and over speeding and cutting people off but who cares! Why are there cars on the road at this time of the night anyway! I only pull over after Pretoria on the road towards Rustenburg. Far far away from that crazy woman!

I know the drill. I jump into the back seat and switch on the light.

"How's your arm?", I ask.

"I'm not made of glass. I'll live", he says.

"I know! You are a warrior! My warrior!", I say. I kiss him.

"Has the bleeding stopped?", I ask.

"A little bit", he says.

I look for anything I can find in my backpack and I find my white sissy boy vest. I love this vest but I love this man more.

"It's ok my baby. Let me take care of that", I say. He gives me his arm and I tie the vest around the wound, trying to restrict the blood flow as much as possible. I have poor first aid skills I know.

"Thanks for standing up for me. Thanks for everything actually Elik. For coming to the hospital, for today, for always being there for me, for loving me the way you have. I can never thank you enough!", I say.

I know I need to say thank you and I need to stroke his ego.

"I mean, what would I do without you? You mean everything to me and no one can ever take your place. I'll always be yours", I say.

He smiles a bit.

"Do you promise?", he says.

"I promise. You know I love you with everything I have, right?", I say.

He nods.

"Do you love me?", I ask.

"More than anything", he says.

"I'm so sorry about tonight baby. I didn't mean to. She just came at me and attacked me. I didn't know what to do", I say.

"It's me who's sorry. It's my job to protect you. She had no right. No one has the right to hurt you!", he says.

Awwwww.

"If you don't want me anymore I understand", I say.

"Why wouldn't I want you? I love you. Don't you know that?", he says.

I know. I'm just playing him like a guitar.

Komla really pissed me off!

I was going to rent Elik for a few days, maybe for a week, just until I'm back on my feet then give him back to her. But after tonight, I think I'll be keeping him for a while.

"Did she hurt you?", he says.

I nod.

She didn't really. It was a few punches that I can handle but I need to be babied right now.

"What do you want me to do Fierce. Should I get a divorce?", he says.

"Let's talk about that tomorrow. We've had a long day", I say.

I don't want to get into serious discussions right now.

"Are you cold? Do you want the hoodie?", I say.

I take it off before he says no. I'm not wearing anything underneath. I know he loves my twins so let him bask in their glory. It's too bad I had that procedure at the hospital otherwise I'd be bringing my Karma Sutra on right now.

I hand him the hoodie and he puts it aside. That's not what he's looking at.

I know if anyone passed by outside the car right now, they would see me but I don't care.

Let's take this up a notch, shall we? I sit on top of him, with each knee on either side of him and then lean back on the back of the driver's seat. Now we can talk. He looks like someone who hasn't eaten in a long time when they see food. I give it a moment, just staring at him staring at me. It's that same look he had that first time he murdered me on his office table!

I give him a hug and just stay there, feeling his hands run up and down my naked back. Then he's trying to remove my shorts. That was quick! And how is he using that left arm? I thought he was hurt!

"What are you doing?", I whisper in his ear.

"I need you baby", he says.

"You know we can't!", I say.

"I know", he says and sounds disappointed.

I'm really missing out. With his emotions so charged up I know he was gonna lay it down so good, I would be asleep all day tomorrow!

"But. That doesn't mean I can't take care of my man now, does it?", I say.

We haven't made any memories in this car yet. I switch off the light. Getting your freak on in a car is hard work. There's limited space. I have to get to the front and

push the seat all the way forward before I can go down on my knees and take care of business.

Someone once said to me 'going down on both knees to give a blow job to a man who already went down on one knee to propose to another woman is witchcraft'. Well in that case I guess I'm a witch tonight and I'm casting my spell on this fine dark chocolate of mine!

The end doesn't even taste that bad you know. Just close your eyes and swallow all of it like a good girl.

CHAPTER 42

You know if Komla had been nicer to me I would have been nicer to her. Isn't that how life works? I would have asked Elik to go home. I would have begged him even. But now I'm savage! I've carried my guilt for far too long. I deserve a break!

She married him for 4 years? Yeah well I've been riding him for that long too. She has his children? Well I almost had them too and I plan on having a whole football team in the near future. She drives a white Fortuner? Newsflash, I do too! Same model even. So we are equal! And after yesterday, I'm convinced I know Elik better than she does!

Last night, we had to drive back to the Hilton and take my clothes. The room was in such a mess, I felt sorry for housekeeping who had to clean up in the morning!

We couldn't sleep there obviously. So we settled for Garden Court in Morningside. It's just down the road from Elik's house. Bad geographical location choice but it made sense because well, he still needed to go home and change for work in the morning. That's if Komla didn't change the locks on him!

That sadness we had when we left Cape Town was long gone when we got to the hotel. Now I'm angry and Elik is just worried about me as always. This messed up situation has brought us closer together. I always tell people that Elik and I deserve each other. One messed up person deserves another. Maybe this chaos is what we needed for that breakthrough.

Elik was gone when I woke up this morning. I panicked. What if he changed his mind at night and left and went back to her? I had to call him at lightning speed. He can't drop me now! He said he was already at work. That's was a huge relief. Imagine being dumped the very next day!

Shit! Shit! Shit! Komla's phone! I hope she hasn't blocked it. I find it in my bag and sit on the floor. She doesn't have a password! Perfect! Let's see what she has here. This woman is a qualified stalker! She has so many of my pictures on her phone it's scary! She also has pictures of like 4 different girls. They are on fleek and have this pouting and booty popping thing under control.

I think I recognise one. That must be Mbali! Seriously! Elik is still with that bitch? I go to Facebook to see if she has posted any of my business and there it is in her mailbox. I knew she was the one who posted me on the 'Expose the Whores' page!

I deactivate her Facebook. With such behaviour she doesn't deserve social media!
I switch off the phone, take out the battery and throw it back in my bag.

I don't know what to do with myself all day today. It's only 10 am and Elik will only be back like after 6. When I called him, he said he needs us to talk when he gets back. I hated his tone. Serious talks never go well for me.

What am I going to do with myself all day? I can't stay alone with my thoughts for that long. I will drive myself crazy! Thinking what Elik might be thinking. The problem with these borrowed relationships is there's no surety, you can be kicked out in a heartbeat when he decides to run back home and 'do right'.

I'm not hungry so I skip breakfast, then go on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to check if anything from last night is trending. Nothing.

I think I'll go down to the spa. I need to be as relaxed as possible when Elik gets back. I get there and ask them to charge to the room. For the welcome drink, I'm made to choose between green tea ice tea, infused water or a super green smoothie (cucumber, apple, kale). I'll have the ice tea. Those green smoothies had me almost throwing up last time. Yuck!

I opt for the full body hot stone massage, a full body scrub, an Indian head massage, mud feet treatment, a pedi and manicure and a basic facial. That should keep me occupied for the next 3 hours. I have to ask the masseuse to be gently because I was beaten yesterday so I'm quite sore.

It's only 2 pm when I'm finally done! What am I supposed to do with the rest of my life now! I can't stop thinking about those girls in Komla's phone. Are they his other girlfriends? I thought the spa will make me forget!

I need to call Ndivhu and find out how things are going. Sometimes I forget that I'm still a student.

"Ndivhu! How is it going?", I say.

"It's all good man. Where are you?", he says.

"Well, I'm in Joburg. Family emergency!", I say.

"But you were in hospital yesterday!", he says.

"I got out and came to Joburg!", I say.

We talk and he says everything is great and Prof is looking for me but they told him I had food poisoning so that's why I'm not in. He says there's a document I need to fill in. The engineering conference is next month and is happening in Singapore this year and we have to go. I don't remember submitting an abstract but I guess I will go as a guest, our Department has enough money, so why not. Besides I need to leave Africa and its troubles behind even if for a week.

"And dude! The cops were here this morning looking for you!", he says.

I think my heart just skipped a beat.

"Cops, as in police?", I ask.

Why would cops be looking for me? I've never been in trouble with the law. Yes sure I have a couple of unpaid traffic fines, but I don't think that would have metro cops looking for me. It's not yet a crime to steal someone's husband right?

"Yes cops cops as in policemen, uniforms, sirens, guns and all!", he says.

"Why were they be looking for me?", I ask.

"I don't know. But that tea lady said she heard that you had an abortion that's why you were in hospital and now you are wanted for murder!", he says.

He starts laughing.

I'm glad he can see how stupid that sounds. But wow. So there's rumours already around my hospitalisation? Seriously? I'm going to bite off that tea lady's head when I get back! I didn't have an abortion, and even if I did, I would have gone to hospital for it, it's legal!

So why were cops looking for me?

The day is going too slow for me. I have too much on my mind. The cops. The women in Komla's phone. The talk Elik wants us to have. It's just too much. I'm getting a headache just thinking.

I'm having my cup of green tea at 6 pm when Elik says he's by the door. I let him in and give him a big hug. It feels like forever since I last saw him. He looks so good in a suit I won't forgive him if he dumps me today!

We make small talk about his day as he changes into sweat pants and I tell him I didn't do anything, I just went to the spa downstairs. He says I should have gone shopping that's why he had left his credit card. I'm in no mood for shopping! He says that we should take a drive so I can get some fresh air and we talk.

"Where are we going?", I ask.

"To Mushroom park", he says.

"But they close the park at 6!", I say.

"They will open it for us", he says.

They won't open the park. They strictly close at 6! I've been there before. But I'll reserve my comments. We get there and just like I said, it's closed. He jumps out, walks to the gate and the security guard comes out. They talk a bit, then Elik takes out his wallet and next thing the boom gate is being opened! When I grow up, I want to have money shame. With money you get whatever you want!

It's just the two of us in the whole park and it's so quiet. We walk to the far end, to a clear stretch of grass and sit down facing each other. It's so peaceful here. You know sometimes I forget that I'm a side chick. I've never really thought of myself as one. Like I've said before, I'm more of a deputy wife, you know. I don't think side chicks go through as many things with the man as Elik and I have.

"Ya. So, your car? You still happy with it? Do you need an upgrade?", he says.

"No. It's fine. I still love it", I say.

I have serious detachment issues.

"I transferred money into your account this afternoon. You know, so you can send some home and also buy yourself something nice", he says.

"It hasn't reflected yet, but thanks", I say.

I don't think this is what he wanted us to talk about.

"And you still ok staying at rez? You know we can get you a nice apartment wherever you want", he says.

"Elik. Stop. I'm sure this is not what you want to talk to me about", I say.

He keeps quiet.

I take his hands. He can tell me anything. I'm sure we've been through enough and I can take whatever he throws at me.

"Ok. So about yesterday. I'm sorry about all of that. I'm sorry that Komla did that to you. It should never have happened!", he says.

"It's not your fault baby. I'm just glad you came when you did", I say.

"What did she say to you?", he says.

"Well, apart from calling me every name in the book, she wanted me to break up with you and go to Cape Town or else she would release nude pictures of me", I say.

"Shit!", he says.

"No worries. I took care of it", I say.

He looks at me funny but I'm not about to tell him how I have his wife's phone.

"You said something yesterday, about telling her about me the day before your wedding", I say.

That's a painful memory for me to look back on. I was busy in the village looking for network on top of trees trying to send messages to him and he was busy making vows! We even spoke on the morning of his wedding and he had told me how much he loved me. Yet after all that betrayal, he had somehow found a way back to my heart and I forgave. I don't know what it is about this man but it's too late for me. I don't think I can ever resist him.

"Come sit in front of me", he says. I do that and let him wrap his hands around me.

"You know, you've never told me about you and Komla. What went wrong?", I say.

"That's what I wanted to tell you. It's only right that you know", he says.

I swallow hard. I always ask for the truth but sometimes I'm not ready to hear it.

"You know I started dating Komla years ago in high school. Then I went to Singapore to do my degree and she went to a local college. She waited for me, I would only see her in December, but she waited patiently. When I finished my degree and went back home, things were different. I don't think I loved her but she was so loving and caring for me that I couldn't break her heart. Besides, she had been patient with me for 4 years. I didn't want to hurt her feelings.

I left and went to Zimbabwe then came down this side and she still waited. I liked her a lot but never felt real passion for her, you know. The spark just wasn't there. But she was a good girl. She went to church, she dressed decently and my parents loved her. So I tried to be very logical about my feelings and I thought that maybe it would get better with time. Years went by and she started asking me about

marriage and she was saying she isn't getting any younger. So I proposed, because she was wife material you know and I paid lobola and all.

Then I met you Fierce and I started really living. You made me feel alive! I felt that magic with you, you know that craziness that always had me having you in the backseat of my car or making out on Signal Hill or just lying in bed quietly. You loved the same stupid movies as I did, you played video games and even beat me at some of them, you were smart and spoke engineering with me, you understood me and genuinely loved me.

I wanted to spend time with you, to do everything with you, to take care of you, to protect you, to make love to you countless times and to just hold you and look into those big eyes of yours. I wanted you. You made me feel like that's how love should be. You never pretended with me. You cried, you were emotional and you talked. You opened up to me about everything.

I can never forget the first time I made love to you. Do you remember? That's the day I decided I don't want anyone else touching you. You were all mine. That's why I lose my mind everytime someone threatens to take you away from me. And you were always so cute and so happy when you saw me. Because of that, I couldn't tell you about Komla. And that was my mistake. I should have told you.

I told Komla about you the night before our wedding. I told her I loved you. She said the wedding was going ahead and that I would get over you. I felt bad because everything had been paid for and I didn't want to embarrass her in front

of friends and relatives. So I smiled and went ahead and married her. You know on the night of our wedding, I didn't even touch her. I was so guilty and thinking of you. We actually fought about you.

After I married her, I came with her to South Africa and that's actually the first time I really got to know her. We just existed. That spark just never came. I tried to talk to her many times but she wouldn't open up. She just said 'we must pray about it' and that's all she always says when we dealing with a problem. And our sex life, if I can call it that, is a joke. You'd swear we are in our seventies! And I tried Fierce, I tried really really hard but she just wouldn't meet me halfway.

So I gave up. I wanted out, but then Peter and Paul came and I couldn't leave. I don't think I love her but I've been with her for so long it seems unfair to just walk away. I don't mean to hurt her you know.

I wish I had married you. You are my baby and you make me so happy. It hurts me every time I think that I'm wasting your time. But I'm so selfish I can't let you go baby girl. I truly love you and one day I'll do right by you. I promise".

Is someone cutting onions here? Why are my eyes crying so much?

CHAPTER 43

That was so touching. I can't believe he bared his soul to me like that. I actually don't know what to say. We just sit there quietly for a long time, looking into the night. I hold on to his arms, just so he knows I'm here and I'm not going anywhere.

"So? What's the plan? With you and Komla, I mean? Where to from here?", I ask.

He looks down.

"I don't know", he says.

"You saw her this morning?", I ask.

"Yes", he says.

"And?", I say.

"Nothing. I just got into the house, changed and went to work", he says.

"You don't have to leave her you know", I say.

Honestly, I'm not sure if I'm ready to have Elik full time. I mean, yes I love him, but he's in Joburg and I'm in Cape Town. That might not be too ideal. Besides I'm confused and I'm not as angry as I was yesterday. So I'm feeling a little guilty about what happened yesterday.

"Are you serious? I thought you wanted to be with me", he says.

"I do. But I want us to do it right you know. Not like this. For now you have to try and fix things with her", I say.

You know sometimes I talk and I don't even understand myself.

"I wish I knew what to do", he says.

"You have to decide at some point though boo. Who do you want? Me or her?", I say.

"Can I have both?", he says.

I'm not sure if he's joking or not. It's too dim here to read his face.

"Will you ever leave her though?", I say.

Even the hard questions need to be asked. I know he said what he said but will he actually ever have the courage to tell her?

"I don't know", he says.

Ya ne! I'll be 40 years old one day and I'll still be a side chick!

"I love you baby. I'm just confused, I need you to love me and be there for me, just a little while longer. I just need to sort out my mess and get my life together. Can you do that?", he says.

I nod. I think I can try. It's not like I was trying to marry him anyways.

We look into the night and he keeps rubbing my arms. It's starting to get quite chilly. But we not done talking. Those girls on Komla's phone have been haunting me all day.

"Elik. I need to know. Who else is there?", I ask.

"There where?", he says.

"Come on. You know what I mean! Do you have other girlfriends?", I say.

I hate it when he plays dumb!

"There's no one else", he says.

"Please don't lie to me! We have been doing so well tonight. Don't spoil that. Tell me the truth", I say.

He keeps quiet.

"Who else is there Elik? Komla told me!", I snap.

He's making it hard for me to stay calm.

"Why does it matter? There's no one at the moment. It's just you!", he says.

"It matters to me. So tell", I say.

"They are in the past baby and they are not important. Can we not talk about it?", he says.

I try to stand up. If he's not going to talk then I might as well leave.

Of course I wouldn't leave because where would I go to? But he doesn't know that.

"Alright. Don't leave. I'll tell you whatever you want to know", he says.

I sigh and sit back down.

"Do you have other girlfriends besides me?", I say.

"No. Not at the moment", he says.

"Have you had other girlfriends this year?", I say.

"I don't think we can call them girlfriends, but yes", he says.

He's holding me so tight, I think he's scared I'll run away.

"How many?", I ask.

"Baby come on! Is it really necessary to talk about this?", he says.

"HOW MANY ELIK?", I ask.

"3", he says.

I feel like the world just crushed down on me! Like a truck full of cement just ran over me, reversed and ran over me again. I can't breathe. 3? This year alone! 3! As in 1, 2, 3! I can take 1, or maybe 2 but 3! Plus Mbali 4! Then me and his wife! 6! SIX! I can't.

"When was the last one?", I ask.

"Like 2 weeks back. When your boyfriend, I mean when that guy called me, I lost my mind", he says.

That was his reason for getting with Mbali! I had left and gone home and he had 'lost his mind'! So that means everytime we fight or something he doesn't like is said about me, he will 'lose his mind' then go out and find a girl to sleep with?

"They meant nothing Fierce. It was just sex", he says.

My head is buzzing.

"Who are they?", I say.

"You don't know them", he says.

"Just tell me their bloody names already!", I say.

"Well, Minky, Ntando and I don't remember the name of the other one", he says.

"Wow!", I don't know what to say.

"They meant nothing. I promise", he says.

I think I'm going to cry. My heart is so sore. THREE! I don't believe this. In all honesty, I don't know why I'm hurt. I was with Athi at the time and couldn't care less who Elik was sleeping with. But it just hurts so bad. I'm hurt by seeing what

my future looks like if I stay with Elik. I'll end up like Komla mos, running all over Joburg, chasing girls.

I can take sharing a penis with one woman, but with 5 women! I don't think I can.

"Fierce. Listen to me. Those girls happened when I wasn't with you. I would never walk out on you, you know that. It's you that I want. Everyone else means nothing", he says.

That doesn't make me feel better at all. If they mean nothing so why sleep with them?

"Do you love them?", I ask.

"Hell no!", he says.

"Then why? How did this happen? How long? Where do you get these girls?" I say. I don't understand really.

I'm really struggling to keep my voice down.

'Baby. Let's drop it. Please", he says.

"Fine, the last one. You say it was 2 weeks back? Where the hell did you meet her? Do you still talk to her?", I ask.

"I bumped into her at Taboo when I went out with the guys. I ended up taking her home with me. It was just once! I don't even remember her name and I never spoke to her after that", he says.

Yes! He said that about Mbali as well until I found her in that hotel room with him!

So one night stands now. Seriously?

"Do you at least use protection baby?", I say.

Why am I even calling him baby right now! What the hell is wrong with me!

"I do. I did", he says.

I feel so sick.

"Ya ne! Life of a side chick", I say.

I didn't mean to say it out loud. It was just a thought.

"What do you mean side chick? You not my side chick!", he says.

"Then what am I?", I say.

"You are my soulmate. You are the love of my life!", he says.

I laugh. It just sounds funny.

"The love of my life just had to be a casanova! Lucky me!", I say.

"Did you just call me a casanova?", he says.

"Did I? I meant man-whore! Pardon me Professor!" I say and try to stand.

He catches me and pulls me back to the ground.

"Don't talk to me like that Fierce!", he says.

I actually feel bad for saying that. But I won't say sorry.

"Look at me", he says and turns my head around. I have to shift the rest of my body otherwise my neck will break.

"I love you, how can you not see that? I'm here right now with you yet my home is falling apart! For all I know my wife is packing right now. How will I explain that to

my kids? Stop acting like a child. I told you those girls happened when we were not together and they meant nothing!", he says.

He's shaking me.

I look down and stay quiet.

"I need you to make a decision. Right here, right now. Do you want to be with me or not? Do you love me or not?", he says.

It's quite dim but I can see his eyes. Sometimes I think he knows that his eyes are my weakness so he just makes me look into them to soften me up.

"I want to be with you and I love you", I say.

I can't imagine breaking up with him, at least not now. I need him as much as he needs me. And technically he didn't cheat on me. What he said earlier about me is making it hard to hate him right now.

"I'm sorry baby. I didn't mean to disrespect you. It's just that I really really really hate it when you get with other girls. You are supposed to be mine Elik", I say.

"I know. Come here", he says and holds me.

Damn he smells so good.

I'm stupid and the sooner I make peace with that, the better for my poor heart.

CHAPTER 44

I'm glad I finally had a heart to heart with Elik. I know I'm probably making a bad decision by staying with him. And I know he's probably going to make things right with his wife. I actually want him to. I know my place.

Is he a cheater? Yes. Is he a jerk? Not to me directly, but yes. Is he probably chatting up some girl right now? Maybe. Am I stupid? Oh there's never been a doubt about that! So why am I still with him? Maybe because I'm a ride or die kind of girl, or maybe it's because I've been to hell and back with him or maybe I'm just dickmatised. I don't know. I'm still trying to solve that paradox myself. But one thing I know for sure is that it has something to do with love.

Last night ended up with tears and make up kisses and cuddling. We decided that we will stay together and try and make this work. I'm not sure exactly what 'this' is because I don't think I can call it a relationship, but we will try and work it out anyway, whatever it is.

So today he's going home to try and see if there's anything left of his marriage to save and I'm going back to Cape Town to see if I can try and finish my PhD this year still. It's a long shot but if we really work hard I'm sure we can both accomplish our goals. I just have to keep crossing my fingers that he doesn't 'lose his mind' and run around looking for a girl to help him destress.

From now on it's just me and my thesis. I won't even talk to Elik that much! That man puts the T is trouble. But he had me smiling ear to ear this morning with his sweet talk and promises and well, my bank account is no longer dry, that's something to smile about. There's nothing as dangerous as a rich man with good sex! It just confuses the hell out of you. And it doesn't help that I actually truly love Elik. We didn't have any sex though, I'm still recovering.

I took an early morning flight so Elik could drop me off at the airport before going to work. As soon as I got to my room, I dropped my bags, changed shoes and walked across to the Department.

I hate my room. I have bad memories there. Campus still looks the same. Students are still eating gatsby's and pies and talking too loud. The tennis court is still buzzing with shuttles and the student centre is still overpopulated. Nothing's changed.

I miss last year you know. Me and my lab mates were in a good space. They loved me, cared about my feelings, bought me lunch, gave me money and treated me like a princess. I miss that. And at this time next year they won't be here. I don't even know where I will be. I might just do myself a huge favour and go do a post doctoral fellowship in Australia and stay far far away from Elik!

My stomach hurts a bit. I know I just lost my children and I feel awful. But what if that was a blessing in disguise? What if that was the universe telling me to RUN fast and far and never look back? But the way Elik stood by me at the hospital makes it hard to forget him and RUN. You know what, I'm not even going to think about him today! It's too stressful to try and figure out what I'm doing with him!

I get to the lab and some things never change. Ndivhu is on YouTube watching the BET Hip Hop awards! Brain is working and talking to himself. My desk is quite a mess. They ask how I'm doing and I say I'm fine.

"The cops were here the other day looking for you", Brain says.

I'm sure that was yesterday and I already know that. I just don't know if I should go to them or wait for them to come back for me. I'm thinking hard what I might have done. I'm not a criminal.

I have minor crimes though like sexting Elik (that's a crime, right?), sending nudes (I think that's considered distribution of pornographic material), I've smoked weed but that was years ago (that's possession of illegal substances), I've sexed in the

car but no charges were laid against us that time (Public indecency). I've watched porn too. I just wanted tips to up my game and blow Elik's mind away. No harm was intended. I really don't know why cops would be looking for me.

I go online and google, 'What to do when the police are looking for you'. The answers are skip town, change your identity, get a lawyer, kill yourself, get plastic surgery and get a new face. I can't do any of that so I guess I'll just have to wait it out.

I get up and take my dirty vials down to the washroom, I need the lab assistants to wash them so I can run my samples this afternoon. I bump into Prof as I reach the last step.

"Lastborn! Good to see you are still alive!" he says.

"Hi Prof! You know I'm a soldier, I don't just die!" I say.

"That's good to know! You need to stop eating these canned stuffs and cook like a real woman should!", he says.

"Yes Prof", I say.

"Walk with me", he says.

We still sticking with the food poisoning story.

I have a tray full of dirty vials, but it's just methanol, it's not going to kill anyone, so I walk out.

"You look good for your age you know", I tease him.

He's been like a father to me and he was my lecturer in undergrad and was my supervisor for my Masters and now for my PhD. He laughs at my tease.

"I'm sure you would look good too if you were not always wearing that dirty lab coat", he says.

"Hey! A dirty lab coat shows that I work hard!" I protest.

"But you know a lab coat should never leave the lab right?", he says.

"I know", I say.

I actually know that but I do it all the time anyway. It's not like I work with food or anything.

"So how is the work going? Are we still finishing this year?" he asks.

"Eeish Prof. It's going. I'll send you my Chapter 4 by Monday next week", I say.

This means I just signed up to work through the weekend.

We are almost at the administration building now where Prof is going and I have to turn back. I see him every time anyways so he won't really miss me. I say my goodbye.

"Wait Lastborn. I have good news for you", he says.

I brighten up instantly.

"Did we get more funding?", I say.

"Well, no, but your friend is coming back next week and he's done with his thesis! So he can help you with your work and I have a project I need you two to work on", he says.

My friend? Which friend? It would be nice to have an extra pair of hands I guess. But who?

"Which friend Prof?", I ask.

"Bunke!" he says and my breath catches.

"But, I thought he was only coming back end of year!", I say.

That's what he told me before he left.

"No, it was a 7 months programme", he says.

I think I'm going to have a stroke. I smile and fake excitement then quickly walk back to the lab.

Bunke! Of all people, it has to be Bunke! We used to be fuck buddies and it's bad enough that I had him know I caught feelings for him. And with all my confusion with Elik at the moment, I can't trust myself around him. I don't want to see him and I don't want to work with him. My legs open too easily! He should just stay in Florida!

My day has been officially spoiled. I drop off the vials and I get back to the lab and wonder if it would be actually bad to have Bunke back. He was quite the gentleman and was always soft spoken and always got me lunch. Well, he was a wild tiger in the bedroom but no one knew that except me and it was a well guarded secret. He was good to me and always helped me. If he can act professional then I don't think it will be a problem. Besides we parted on amicable terms so I don't foresee a problem. I just need to teach myself self control.

Then here's Brain. This brother has been attracted to me for a long time and I'm wondering if I should have gone with him. He might have made a decent boyfriend. But he's light skinned and that's just not my thing. I like my men extra dark! But what if I ignore colour and just ask Brain out? But he's with Osh now and I kinda like her so I can't take her man from her. Oh well, let me shelf that thought, I'll think about it later.

"Hey Brain", I say.

He looks up.

"You look good in that T-shirt. I love it", I wink.

He smiles and I think he blushes a little.

Good, I still got it.

"I'll be right back guys", I say and pick up my keys. I have to go to Bellville. I walk back to rez to take my car. I go through my playlist looking for a song to sing along to. I get to Holla Holla. Akon is all I listen to really. I'm sure this is the song Elik and Lumka sing when they picking up them Slay queens in clubs!

"Holla holla at you girl

You need to quit it, ohh

Girl you need to quit it

So many girls outside, and I wanna go take a cruise

And I know you're a sex machine and I wanna do something new to you

The way you roll them thighs, and your girl doing it too

If you want we can mix it up, I could set it up, she can get it too

We got plenty of drinks, and plenty plenty of water

We got plenty of dank coming from Cal-ifornia

And we all got that bank so believe we can afford you

So stop, playing and show me what you can do

And don't be acting like that (like that) I know you wanna ride

Cause my Lamborghini doors go up and down

Now all these gorillas here, all these women here

Somebody here gon' fuck

That's why I'm tryna holla holla (holla holla) holla holla (holla holla)

Holla holla (holla holla) holla holla (holla holla)

I'm tryna holla holla (holla holla) holla holla (holla holla)

Let me holla at you girl

Got a big ol' truck outside, sitting on 26s

Imma bout to step out my ride, with about 20 bitches

And they all like girls, so they all be kissing

That's why I'm tryna put you in this girl

While I'm up in this club, gotta get my groove on

If you wanna roll with a nigga, go with a nigga try to get a move on

And I hope that you like girls, cause I wanna see you kissing

And now I'm tryna put you in my world

Oh, shawty, you said you want a player with money

So why you acting funny with me?

I ain't tryna prove nothing to you

Shawty I'm tryna do something to you, yeah

Shawty, Uh, I'm tryna holla holla

He just a roll of pennies, I'm a stack of dollars

I'm tryna see what you gon' do

Cause baby I'm tryna leave here with you

Now don't be acting like that (like that) I know you wanna ride

Cause my Lamborghini (doors) go up (and down)

Now all these gorillas and, all these women here

Somebody here gon' fuck"

I put it on repeat and sing along at the top of my voice. Damn you Elik for not being able to keep it in your pants!

I get to Bellville Traffic Department in a couple of minutes. There's no queue and I pay all my traffic fines, you know just in case that's why the cops are after me. I ask the lady and she says none of them had been changed to a warranty of arrest. So I just wasted my money mos! I shouldn't have paid. But ok whatever. I go back to campus.

I need to go and have a chat with that tea lady spreading abortion lies about me. I find her in the staffroom, drinking tea with other workers. She's older than me, probably by 20 years or so. Our culture teaches us to respect adults, but does it teach adults to respect us?

"Hi auntie", I say.

"Oh Fierce it's you! Hay awunamahloni ntombazana! (you have no shame girl)", she says.

Someone please hold me back before I kill someone.

"What do you mean by that?", I say.

"Abortion! Hay, you are so nasty! You are rotten. You have zero morals!", she says.

"Where on earth did you get that from?", I ask.

I need information before I smack her upside down.

"My friend who cleans at postgrad rez told me. You really thought no one would ever find out?", she says.

People in here are just looking at me and it's taking all the strength in my soul not to pick up that cup and throw it at her. I don't even know why I came here. I can't out talk her obviously. I actually have no words at all. All the things I thought I

would say to her are gone. So I'm going to walk away.

"Murderer! I'm calling the police!", she says and reaches for her phone in her bra! What's that they say again? Don't argue with a fool because they will drag you down to their level and beat you with experience.

I make a call to Elik on my way up to the lab and tell him what just happened. I need to speak to someone and he happens to be my best friend. I'm almost in tears. I need to make friends you know. I had friends in undergrad but they were morally bankrupt and I was a good virgin back then.

I tell Elik how the woman is telling people I had an abortion and he says: "Send me her name and surname and the Department she's working in". She's relief staff so getting her fired shouldn't be that hard!

I'm back at my desk and I'm shaking. My hands are literally trembling. That woman really got to me. I'm not yet over the miscarriage and I don't appreciate people making fun of it. I make a strong cup of coffee. At least Bunke is coming back and will buy something stronger than this Ricoffy these guys drink! Please don't ask me why I don't just buy my own stuff. I guess I'm used to being the only girl amongst these guys and I expect them to take care of me.

It's already after lunch. I've been up and down since I got back from Joburg. I'm calmer after the coffee and now I'm ready to start working on my Chapter 4. Oh man, can't I be allowed to just focus! I'm disturbed by a banging knock on the door. I'm the nearest so I get up and open the door and it's the security guard. He is with two cops.

"Miss Lastborn Fierce Nkomo?", one of them says.

"Yes, that's me", I say, trying to fake a smile.

"You need to come with us to the station", he says.

"Ooo kay. Can I just get my phone and wallet?", I say.

"No! You need to come with us right now", he says.

"What's this about?", I ask.

"We will talk at the station! For now you have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you", he says.

They are not very friendly!

Ok, now I'm officially scared. I think I'm under arrest. I just wish I knew what for.

Brain is standing by the door with Ndivhu looking helpless.

"I didn't do anything guys", I say to them.

I need them to believe me. They handcuff me and tell me to walk. I walk.

They put me at the back on the van, where they put criminals! This is not nice. I can feel people watching through windows! I'm sure that auntie is having the time of her life right now. Let's see who will be laughing when she gets that 'you are fired' from her boss! Mxm. If she ran as fast as her mouth she would be very skinny by now!

Things sometimes happen so fast in my life, I think I'm being bewitched. I mean I was dying in hospital not so long ago, then I was fighting Komla in Joburg the other day, then I was in Elik's arms yesterday and now I'm in a police van unable to balance myself on speed humps because my hands are behind my back! Tell me that's not witchcraft.

CHAPTER 45

We get to the police station and they take me out, actually they pull me out and I bang my head. But now is not the time for crying. Clearly, these men don't give a rat's ass about me. I've been at this police station before to have my fingerprints taken so I could apply for a police clearance for my visa and also to certify some documents. The cops had been very friendly then and one had even asked for my number.

I hope this isn't bad because then I'll either end up in jail or I'll get deported. I don't know which is worse. They uncuff me then take my fingerprints. I thought they only take your fingerprints if they are arresting you? Are they seriously arresting me?

Still no one has told me what I'm being accused of. They are legally supposed to tell me why they arrested me but I'm not dumb so I won't start throwing words like 'legally' and 'rights' around police. It just makes them mad and they make your life more difficult. I hope this doesn't mean I'll have a criminal record hanging over my head. Please everyone in heaven, don't let that happen to me.

They ask me for my full name (which they start making jokes about), date of birth, my passport number and place of birth. When I mention Zimbabwe as my place of birth, things just get worse. They start going on about 'these foreigners' and I know I won't get fair treatment here. I've resorted to being silent and only speaking when spoken to.

They don't even let me wash my hands after taking my fingerprints. I have that black stuff all over my hands! I wonder if this thing comes out if it dries. I won't say anything though. Maybe if I just do as they say, they will let me go. I've given up trying to figure out what this is about. The one cop leads me to a room at the end of the corridor and shuts me in it and leaves me alone. The room only has two chairs and a table.

I sit and place my hands on the table. Let them have a good time cleaning that black stuff off their table!

I must have been sitting here for over an hour now. I'm sure I look very guilty because I'm sweating, and breathing like a fish and trembling. I can't go to jail. I won't survive. I'm too soft. Besides, orange is not my colour so those prison clothes won't work for me.

I'm sure I have rights. I don't know them off my head but I'm sure I have them. I should have paid more attention to series like SUITS and BOSTON LEGAL, maybe I would know what to do in this situation.

Maybe I can go to those witch doctors with those pamphlets that they force into your hands, written 'Rats to make court cases disappear' to give me some of those rats. I don't trust those doctors though. The promises they make to you are scary

and funny at the same time. Like one had an advert written, 'Quick and painless abortion. Pregnant or not, nomatter'. Like whaaaaaat? Pregnant or not!

I think these police are supposed to grant me at least one phone call. Someone needs to come and bail me out. And now I'm starving and I'm thirsty. I last ate an omelette on the plane this morning. And today of all days, I'm not wearing a watch so I have no clue what time it is.

Finally the door opens and it's that unfriendly male cop carrying a folder. He drops the folder on the table and pulls a chair and sits opposite me.

"I deserve to know why you are holding me!", I snap and stand up.

"You deserve nothing. Now sit", he says.

I give him the look, but I obey. I can't afford to throw tantrums right now. I sit.

"Good girl! So this is how this is going to work. I'll ask you questions and you'll answer them. And don't even think of lying!", he says.

"What if I want to plead the 5th amendment?", I say.

He laughs so hard and claps his hands.

I don't get the joke.

I can't answer questions without a lawyer! That's how people end up in jail mos! I'll just start talking here and before I know it, half the people I know will be in jail.

"5th amendment? You watch too much TV! This is South Africa not America!", he says.

"Ok fine. Can I have a phone call then? Please", I ask.

I'm behaving now. I'm basically pleading.

"If you tell me everything I want to know then maybe I can let you make that phone call. Or let you go even", he says.

I nod.

"So what's your relationship with Athenkosi?", he says.

That's the last question I expected.

"He's my ex boyfriend", I say.

"Ex? I see. When did you break up with him?", he says.

"I don't know. Like 2 weeks back maybe", I say.

"Why did you break up with him?", he says.

"I didn't know breaking up with someone was a crime!", I say.

"Don't act smart with me. Answer the question", he says.

"I don't know, I cheated on him, I guess", I say.

"It will do you good to drop the attitude you know!", he says.

I hate this man. He's been mean to me since they picked me up. I hope when he gets home tonight, he will find that his wife is leaving him for the next door neighbour and then he will be so upset, he will accidentally pull out his gun and shoot himself in the foot! Then when he tries to call the ambulance, he'll discover that his battery is flat! Then when the neighbours call the ambulance because they heard gunshots, he will get to MeloMed and they will tell him his medical aid is invalid so he ends up being taken to a public hospital, sleeping on the floor because all the beds are taken! Mxm! I hate him.

"What's your relationship with Lemon?", he says.

Lemon? Is that even a name? The only relationship I have with lemon is that I drink it in warm water in the morning to kick start my metabolism!

"I don't know anyone called Lemon", I say.

I don't think he believes me.

"Where were you this whole time?", he says.

"I was on campus!", I say.

"I mean, in the past few days, where were you?", he says.

"I was in Johannesburg!", I say.

"What were you doing in Joburg?", he says

"I was with my boyfriend!", I say.

"I thought you said you just broke up with Athenkosi! So you mean to say you already got another boyfriend?", he says.

I don't like what he's implying.

"Yes. No. Well, it's complicated", I say.

"What are the odds that on the very same day, you suddenly checked out of hospital and fled to Johannesburg!", he says.

I didn't suddenly check out! And I didn't plan to go to Joburg!

"What are you talking about?", I say.

He spreads out pictures of Athi in front of me. I cringe. They sure people evidence? I didnt know that! Im seeing a side of the law I've never heard of before. I can barely recognise him. His whole face is swollen and he is covered in

blood. In one picture, he has a huge cut on his forehead and his lips seem busted. This is bad.

I know he hurt me and I hate him, but he didn't deserve this. No one deserves this. Why would anyone do that to him? Well except if he raped someone else then in that case they did well! But then why am I the one arrested? They think I beat him up that bad? Thanks for the credit but I'm actually not that strong.

"That's Athi! Is he dead?", I say.

"No. He is in hospital. He will live", he says.

"I don't understand. What happened? What has this got to do with me?", I say.

"He is your boyfriend right?", he says.

"Was", I say.

"You lived together in his apartment in Brackenfell?", he says.

"Not really lived together but I was there quite a lot. Why? What happened?", I'm losing my patience now.

He starts from the beginning. He says Athi was beaten within an inch of his life in a nightclub in Longstreet run by someone called Lemon. They say the police found 1 kg of Tik in his car after an anonymous tip off. He says he thinks the fight that defaced Athi is thought to be either drug related or gang related.

"And drug dealers don't just start overnight! So we have reason to believe you know something about this since you lived with him. If you agree to testify against him, no charges will be laid against you! We will grant you full immunity", he says.

I could testify and lie you know, just to get back at Athi. I could say he made the Tik himself even and kept it in his surgery and under the bed. I can say he used to be high everyday and I even helped him sell the Tik in envelopes through the window of his car.

Except I don't even know what Tik looks like and to be honest I'm not as heartless as people think I am. I wouldn't falsely testify against someone, nomatter what they did to me.

This whole story doesn't add up though.

1. Athi doesn't do drugs
2. Longstreet is not his hangout place. He hangs out ekasi, so how did he end up in Longstreet?
3. He's a happy drunk, so I don't think he would have started a fight in a nightclub
4. Athi definitely wouldn't sell drugs. He was always against Nyaope and Tik and all those drugs
5. He most certainly doesn't run with a gang. He's weak. I don't even think he knows how to hold a gun

Something doesn't sound right. None of this makes any sense.

"So no doubt Athenkosi will go to jail for a very long time. But all I want from you is your testimony and for you to help me catch Lemon. I believe they worked together with your boyfriend", he says.

“Who’s Lemon? I don't know him or her”, I say.

He looks at me like he doesn’t believe me.

He opens his folder and holds a picture to my face. I shake my head. I say I don't know the guy. I've never ever seen him before in my entire life.

“Are you sure? Look carefully”, he says.

“Trust me, I have a photographic memory. I’d recognise him if I’d seen him before”, I say.

“Well then Miss smarty pants! If you decide to remember, call me”, he says and walks out of the door.

I feel dizzy, my stomach is in knots and I'm struggling to breath normally. I've seen this Lemon guy before. He was talking to Elik in Longstreet on the day we left for Joburg. Elik said he was an old friend.

I'm sure they are watching me so I have to act normal. But I can't. I just know whatever I do or say from now on, I can not mention Elik.

I keep remembering Elik saying ‘he (Athi) won't get away with this!’. I remember how upset he was when he found out that Athi had raped me and how angry he was when the doctor told us about the miscarriage. Now I'm really scared. I get off the chair and sit on the floor, against the wall.

Good gracious! Elikplim Nkrumah what did you do?

CHAPTER 46

I have so many theories about what happened here. I suspect that Elik paid that Lemon guy to plant drugs in Athi's car and to beat the living daylights out of him. But there's gaps in my story. I can't figure out how Athi got to Longstreet, he never goes there or why he would have gone clubbing alone in the first place. He always goes out with his friends.

I don't know how to feel about this. If Elik really is behind this, did he do it for me? Am I supposed to be grateful? He will have a man thrown in jail for me? That's kind of sweet in a twisted way. And it's not like Athi is my favourite person! That bastard deserves to go to jail! I'm confused though and I think it will serve me right to just keep my mouth shut. I'm known for saying all the wrong things.

The door opens and thankfully it's a different cop this time and he is nicer. He apologises for the way I was treated and says "Sorry for the inconvenience". That's just insulting! This is more than an inconvenience! This is trauma at it's best! I'm sure I've lost 2 kg today because I haven't eaten or had anything to drink!

The cop talks to me. More or less repeating what other one said, but in a nicer tone.

"They took my fingerprints, does that mean I will have a criminal record now?", I ask. The way I'm so scared of having a criminal record! I know I do a lot of bad things in my life but as long as there is no hard evidence then I'm good.

"No, that's procedure. You will only have a record if you are charged", he says.

"Can I go home now?", I ask.

"You know what skaat, just tell us everything you know. We can protect you. If you withhold any information, it's obstruction of justice and that will be added to your charges. Should you be charged of course", he says.

"I don't know anything. I swear", he says.

I'm so drained and hungry and exhausted and I wanna pee so bad.

He goes on and on about how protecting criminals makes you an accomplice blah blah. I just want to pee so bad, I'm not listening, I keep thinking 'toilet'.

"Alright, you can go for now. But you not off the hook! We will be watching you", he says.

I nod. I run into the first bathroom I see and it's a male toilet but I don't care. I go into male toilets all the time when women toilets are occupied. And guys are really nice, they never chase you out of their toilets. They just stand there by the urinary and look at you funny and you go into the toilet and lock yourself in. Done.

It's dark when I go outside and the cops at the front are making jokes about me like "she's wearing expensive hair bought with drug money". Jealousy makes people nasty! They know they wish they had this hair!

I need to throw away this labcoat, it's so dirty now and has black stains and my poor hands! I really hope this thing comes off!

The good cop gives me a lift to campus and drops me off by the gate. I have to walk all the way to rez.

I have to go to Ndivhu's room to ask for his lab access card. He gives it and I walk to the lab and get my things and walk back to rez. I want to call Elik but what if my phone calls are being monitored. That guy did say they will be watching me! I know I watch too many movies but what if? There's that 0.001% chance and I'm not risking it. I ask to use Ndivhu's phone and call Elik. I don't care that it's after 11 pm or if he's sleeping in bed with his wife. He has to answer. This is a matter of life and death!

"It's me!", I say.

"Whose number is this?", he says.

"Ndivhu's. Elik what did you do?", I say.

I'm actually whispering. I'm so paranoid. There could be a drone floating here listening to my conversations!

"What do you mean what did I do?", he says.

"I was taken by the police. They locked me up all afternoon. I just got back. They were questioning me about Athi and about that guy you were with in Longstreet and drugs and they think I know something. What did you do?", I say.

"Go to sleep baby girl. I have no idea what you talking about", he says.

Then he hangs up. He actually hung up on me! The nerve!

I call back and his phone is off! Mxm. I have no option but to thank Ndivhu and go to my room. I'm so hungry but food is the last thing on my mind right now, besides all I have is 2 minute noodles and tinned fish. That's not too appetising right now. I don't know who to talk to about this. I keep imagining myself in jail.

I'll never finish school mos. I'm dealing with something new everyday. I spend half of my time stressed instead of doing something productive. I'm so exhausted though so I throw my labcoat on the floor, get out of my clothes and climb into bed.

I woke up early today and went to the lab. I'm having coffee and googling Lemon. Turns out Lemon is his nickname but that's who everyone knows him as. Apparently he's suspected to be involved in the drug flow in Longstreet and is suspected to be a member of a gang. His pictures are sprawled all over the internet and it's him, I have no doubt. I saw him. In one of the pictures, he has a tattoo of the number XXVII (27). The 27s gang is well known in Cape Town as the most brutal of gangs. They kill for a living. They chop you up without blinking an eye. I honestly hope Elik is not deeply involved with these people. I don't want to be dragged down with him.

I'm going to drive myself crazy and the way Elik said 'he has no idea what I'm talking about' was too fishy. The Elik I know would have gone berserk when I said I

was held by the police. He would have started threatening to sue the whole of SAPS (South African Police Services). I have to call him again with Ndivhu's phone.

"Baby, did you have anything to do with what happened to Athi?", I say.

"Who's Athi?", he say.

"You know who Athi is. My ex", I say.

"Don't talk to me about your exes!", he says.

And hangs up!

He's being such a child!

I tell Brain and Ndivhu I was taken by the cops because my ex, who Ndivhu hooked me up with by the way, is involved in a drug scandal. Ndivhu says he's sorry he hooked me up with a junkie and Brain says, "Stop running around with these men Fierce. Come to me, I'll treat you right". Maybe in another lifetime Brain, I'm too damaged for you in this one.

I've been jumpy all morning. A knock, a beeping sound, anything makes me think the cops are back for me. I can't concentrate and my mother has been harassing me with messages saying she needs money. I'm starting to wonder what she uses the money I send her for! I'll send anyway, and have Elik 'pay me back' my money.

I drive to Bellville to go to Mukuru to send the money and when a police car drives behind me I begin panicking. I almost lose control of the car. I can't live like this. I keep wondering if I'm going to end up in jail for something I know nothing about.

I need to find Athi. He might be the only person to give me answers. I don't know where they are holding him or if I'm ready to face him for that matter. I call the police station and pretend to be 'Athi's aunt' but they say they can't disclose such information. I call his surgery and the dental assistant says Athi is on leave. Like really now!

I have to leave the lab at 9 pm when the guys leave because I'm too scared to be alone right now. And I just get to my room and lie in bed thinking how I can find Athi. Maybe I should go to Longstreet and look for this Lemon! But he looks so scary I don't think I would want to be anywhere near him. He is a 27! And if the cops see me with him I might just have I had to close the blinds twice! Maybe I must just go to Joburg and ask Elik, but that's unfair because he's still trying to fix things his wife. Me showing up might make things worse. I hardly sleep.

I'm up at 5 am and I go to the lab. I spend the day trying to figure out where to find Athi. I've called almost everyone who knows him and still nothing. I eventually decide to drive to his surgery and luckily the other dentist is there and he knows me as the 'girlfriend'. He says Athi is in Groote Schuur but visitors are not allowed.

I'll go at 3 pm, that's when the visiting hour is. Meanwhile, I go back to campus and try to concentrate on my write up. I might as well quit this PhD already. I have so many problems with men I hardly have time to focus.

I get to Groote Schuur at 2 pm so I can find the ward he's in. After being sent from wing to wing, and lying and begging people, I eventually find it. The receptionist says only family members are allowed to visit prisoners. I say I'm his sister and she asks for any ID document and I give her my driver's license. She looks at it and says I must wait till 3 pm. I don't know what she was looking at because nothing there connects me to Athi! I don't know if I actually want to see Athi but I really need answers before I go insane. I'm here playing Nancy Drew!

At 3 pm I proceed to the ward. The prison warder says I can't go in as no visitors are allowed at all. I beg and beg and beg but he's not budging! Had I known it would be this hard, I would have dressed sexier and shown some thigh and a lot of cleavage, maybe he might have been easier to convince. That used to work like a charm with bouncers at clubs back in the day. If we didn't want to pay the entrance fee we would just show the bouncer our boobs and let him touch, then he would let us in.

"I'll give you R500! Let me in for 5 minutes", I say.

Elik pays people off all the time and it always seems to work.

He looks at me and I pull out my wallet, count 5 R100 notes and give him. There goes my fuel money!

"Not like that!", he says. "Fold it and give me when you pass in".

I do that.

"5 minutes only!", he says.

This warder is bloody expensive. I'm paying R100 per minute!

Ya they fucked Athi up bad hey! He must be broken in every place! I wake him up and I force a smile and say hi. I hate him. Ever looked at an ex and wondered what exactly you saw in them? That's where I am right now. I spend the first 3 minutes trying to get him to speak and it's so frustrating.

He keeps saying he didn't do anything.

"Athenkosi! What happened? Did you say anything to the police about me? Did you mention my name at all?", I ask.

"No", he says.

I'm just looking out for myself here. I need to know nothing whatsoever was said about me. I don't want any part of this. And when the cops come for me next time. I need to have answers.

"What exactly happened?", I say.

He can't talk and starts choking and the warder says 'he's still high on that medicine they give him' and I must leave. Wow! Only now he tells me after he's taken my money.

I just wasted R500!

My phone rings and it's Elik.

"Baby I can't talk right now", I say.

"Why not?", he says.

"I'm in Groote Schuur!", I say.

"What? Are you hurt? What happened?", he says.

He's such a drama queen!

"No. I came to see Athi", Then I immediately realise that maybe I shouldn't have said that.

He keeps quiet for a while and I keep quiet too.

"Fierce. You back with that guy? Are you kidding me right now? After everything? Are you fucken kidding me!", he screams at me.

"No baby. It's not like that!", I say.

He hangs up on me.

He's getting used to this hanging up on me. I need to correct that! And how could he think I'm back with Athi! But right now I have bigger issues. I didn't get answers. I want to call Elik back and tell him the truth but I don't want him to know that I'm digging for information about this situation. That will make him mad. I'll send Elik nudes later and apologise.

The next visiting hour is at 7 pm so let me just take a nap in the car and wait it out. Elik's phone is on voicemail now! These men will drive me to an early grave I tell you. And Prof said Bunke is coming back. Another man problem coming soon! What did I ever do to deserve this?

I take my nap and have nightmares of being in jail eating pap with sugar water everyday. I didn't know you can have nightmares in the daytime! I resort to waking up and sitting and listening to 5 FM. They are talking about junk status and water shortages in Cape Town and drought and all things I don't care about right now.

At 6:45 pm I'm back at the ward. It's a different warder now and I have to bribe again. I offer R200 to this one and he takes it. That means I over bribed earlier! I need someone to teach me how much to offer.

Athi is awake this time and I stand against the wall facing him.

"Thanks Fierce for coming. You know you the only one who has visited me", he says.

I'm not here for him, I just want answers. But I smile at him and pretend to genuinely care yet deep down I'm like 'burn little bitch!'. Anything to get this bastard talking so I can get out of here. Just looking at him is giving me panic attacks and reminding me of things I so desperately want to forget.

He says he got a call and was told that they had information on him that could end his career and he had to come to a club in Longstreet with R10000. He says he was worried so he took R10000 and drove straight there.

I'm thinking how stupid can you be to blindly go to strangers with that money. He could have asked for evidence. Stupid.

He says when he got there, they took him to a room at the back and attacked him.

"Why would they do that to you?", I ask.

"I don't know", he says.

"Did they say anything to you at least?", I ask.

"No", he says.

"Was anything about me said?", I say.

He looks at me.

“No Athi, I was questioned by the police about this and I really need to know what exactly happened. They think I know about your drug dealings or whatever”, I say.

“Do you know the guys?”, I ask.

“No”, he says.

He looks very bad and I'm starting to feel sorry for him. He's really struggling with the talking.

“And the drugs?”, I ask.

“I don't know who put them there. I would never do that. You have to help me, please. I can't go to jail”, he says and he's crying.

I just stand there and fold my hands and wait for him to get it together.

“You know, I'm sorry for the way I treated you. I was just so angry. I never should have done all that to you”, he says.

I just look at him. Now he's reminding me of everything he put me through. At least he will know exactly how I felt when they lock him up in jail.

“You think maybe we still have a chance? We can work things out as soon as I get out of here? I still love you and I'll do better”, he says.

“No Athi. We have no chance. I tried so hard to make things work with you, you know. But you didn't appreciate me. I did everything for you and I was there for you and your stupid friends! What did I get in return? You beat me up and you raped me! I was pregnant you know? With twins”, I say.

“And no booboo, don't look at me like that. They were not yours. So this which you are going through right now, this is karma! This is the universe avenging my children! You deserve everything that's coming to you”, I say.

I walk out and don't look back. I hear a woman screaming in the background and I hear some shouting from the next ward as patients go through their pains. I carry my pains in my heart and I look forward and walk towards the exit.

I sit in the car and call Elik and thankfully he answers.

“What do you want?”, he yells.

“Just listen. Don't talk”, I say.

I don't give him a chance to respond.

“I went back to see Athi. He's gravely injured and the cops said he'll be going to jail for a long time. Some people beat him up bad in Longstreet. I don't know who did this to him or why they did it but whoever it is I'm grateful to them. He deserves it for what he did to me. So whoever did this, I thank them with all my heart”, I say. He sighs and stays silent.

“I love you baby”, he says after a while.

“And I love you more”, I say.

I do the hanging up this time. I'll chat with him when I go to campus.

I still think Elik is behind this but also, I actually don't want to know for sure. I don't know how I'm feeling. But at least now I know the police have nothing on me and I

won't let them intimidate me if they come again. I've been reading on what's right and what's wrong when you are arrested. I'll be more prepared next time.

CHAPTER 47

The week ended and the weekend went by, still no cops. You know when you are so nervous and agitated you want to go to the police station and ask if they are still coming to arrest you or not! I'm there. I'm trying to forget this whole mess so I've resorted to burying myself deep in my school work. I still can't drive past a cop car without getting a mini heart attack though, so I'm trying not to leave campus as much as possible. I can't believe how messy my life has gotten! Sometimes I wish I had dated Brain. I would be broke but I wouldn't have such big problems.

That loud talking auntie who said I had an abortion, she got fired yesterday. I don't even know on what grounds or who Elik spoke to but all I know is she's gone. Funny enough, I feel bad about that too. I mean I'm sure she needed the job and probably has kids. But again, in life it's important to not spread lies about people. So I guess she deserves it. I feel like I owe Elik a lot now. He keeps doing things for me and although he goes to the extremes sometimes, I'm sure he does them out of love.

I have decided not to go to the conference in Singapore and that just makes me sad. The others can go because they are almost done with their theses anyway but I have a long way to go. I lost so much time this year.

Elik says he has some business in Cape Town next Friday and we are going to Ghana in the evening of that Friday. I don't know why we are going to Ghana. When I asked he said it's a surprise. Is he taking me to his home? Can he do that? I mean, I don't think he can do that. But Ghana is a big country so maybe he's not taking me home. At least I don't need a visa to go to Ghana. I'm quite uneasy about this upcoming Ghana trip to be honest. I'm not sure what to expect. Am I even allowed to leave the country since the cops said I'm not off the hook?

I have been updating my WhatsApp status daily with these shoes I saw at Aldo. I'm hoping Elik gets the hint. I left the lab at 4 am so I'm only going in now and it's past 11. I'm walking absentmindedly, trying to figure out whether to run all my 96 samples at once or do half today and half tomorrow.

I walk into our lab and I find Bunke arranging his things on his old desk. My heart stops for a second and I catch my breathe. I wasn't expecting to see him there. It's so awkward, I don't even know what to say to him. It's not like I love him or anything, it's just I don't know. It's awkward. Brain and Ndivhu are on his desk talking to him and asking about America and stuff.

"Hi Bunke! Welcome back", I say.

Do I give him a hug? Do I shake his hand? What do I do?

"Hi madam", he smiles and hugs me. Awkward.

"Hi", I say.

"You look good! I missed you", he goes on.

Wow! Like seriously. He only emailed me twice and he's out here talking about 'I missed you!' Get outta here!

I sit on my desk and start up my computer.

"Madam", Bunke says, giving me a chip roll and a can of coke zero.

"Oh wow. Thanks. How did you know I was hungry?", I take the food.

He laughs.

"Because you are always hungry!", he says.

He still looks irresistible! And still has that body that had me walking across campus every night to his room. I need to get my head checked! I'm convinced something is not working well in there.

Everyone is excited in the lab today. We are complete once again. I'm not too excited, for my own personal reasons.

As the day unfolds, it just gets worse. Brain and Ndivhu just said they are almost ready to submit their theses for examination. Ndivhu? He's always on YouTube! I'm far from being done and I feel terrible. Brain and Ndivhu go out to celebrate their milestone at lunch leaving me and Bunke alone.

"Hey", he says and hugs me from the back.

"Oh hi", I look up at him and flash him a smile.

"You look sad. A beautiful girl like you should never be sad. What's wrong?", he says.

"It's nothing really. It's just, I'm not done yet with my work. I still need to make over 360 runs in triplicate on the Turbiscan and also do micro imaging of all my samples. So ya", I say.

"It's ok madam, I'll help you", he says.

He lets the hug go and pulls his chair to my desk and I go through all the things I still need to do. He says he'll help me with the experiments and analyse my data and I should concentrate on writing. I could kiss him right now, except that would be cheating on Elik.

Speak of the devil! Elik calls. Normally I would just answer my phone right here but I don't want to talk to him in front of Bunke. I don't know why, considering Bunke is nothing to me. Elik reminds me of Friday. Normally I'd be excited, mostly because it means I'll finally get some some after this long drought, but I just have so much to do and there's so much going on in my life right now, I'm stressed out.

The week goes by and a new week begins. Still no cops and no news of Athi. Bunke has been helping me out a lot and we've been working late into the night. We have even become friends again and he still calls me madam! We almost kissed the other day but I quickly managed to look down. I think I'm learning self control!

I told Elik that I'm in the lab at 6 am and I leave around midnight, everyday. He says I'm over doing it. But running experiments takes time and then the data

needs to be analysed and tests need to be redone over and over again until results make sense. That's just the way it is. He's a professor he should know that!

Finally it's Friday. I pack a bag for the trip. I pack a bit of everything since I'm not quite sure what we will be up to in Ghana. Could be the north and we do game drives, could be Accra, it could be the coast and I'll need some bikinis, could be rural Ghana and I need decent clothes. So I just throw in everything. I feel good today so I put on a blue jumpsuit that I got from YDE last year. I love the detail on the side. My labcoat will cover the jumpsuit and only leave the legs exposed. So the guys in the lab won't be asking why I'm all dressed up.

Ndivhu and Brain left the lab at lunch and said they are done for the day. Bunke also had to leave early because he had things to do in Bellville, so it's just me. And I'll see these boys on Monday. It's past 3 pm now and Elik's still not here! If he doesn't show up, I'm blocking him. He can't do that to me, I already updated my WhatsApp status with 'Destination Ghana - Touring Africa'. How will I explain to people if pictures of me in Ghana don't follow!

My phone vibrates.

"Hey gorgeous!" a message reads.

I smile and text back.

"Hey handsome!", I say

"Your car is really looking lonely out here. You should go home to your husband!".

"I don't have a husband!", I say.

"For now *wink*".

I smile to myself. Elik is so silly.

"I'm outside baby. Can I come up?", he says.

"Of course! Tell security you are an IT guy and I logged a call so you coming to fix my internet issues", I say.

I don't want to go downstairs and I'm hoping the security guard will let him in. We have a new guard and he sticks to the rules so much it's annoying. I quickly take off the lab coat, get my make up bag in my backpack and touch up my face and spray a little perfume. I need to look good and smell fresh.

A knock on the door minutes later and I open. Like, sometimes I can't believe how attracted to this man I am. His skin is a perfect kind of dark and his clothes sit so well on him, it's hard not to stare. I stand staring at him, inappropriate thoughts running in my head. The guys are not here and they are not coming back.

I pull him inside the lab and kiss him. I missed him so much! We don't even talk, we just start kissing. Next thing we are making out strong and my jumpsuit comes off and I'm face down on Bunke's desk. I really missed this. We've had so much sex on desks and in cars you'd swear we don't have beds!

I hear the beeping of an access card outside.

"Shit!" Elik says. He makes me stand upright so fast and uses me as a human shield! Seriously now! At least he uses his hands to cover my boobs while I cover my lady bits. Bloody jumpsuits! I had to remove the whole thing!

The door opens. In hindsight! Should I ever be caught naked again. I'll cover my face. That way the person will see everything but they won't know who it belongs to! Now I'm convinced that someone somewhere doesn't sleep at night busy bewitching me. Because the amount of bad luck I have is too much for one person.

Bunke is looking at us. I have no option but to look at him and our eyes meet. He shakes his head then walks out. It could have been Ndivhu or Brain, but it just had to be Bunke! And we just had to be on his desk! Elik doesn't seem worried. He actually thinks this is funny! I think it's not. Being caught having sex by someone you used to have sex with is something else! How will I look at Bunke again?

"So where were we?", Elik says.

He honestly thinks we would continue after this? He is some kind of special! I'm done for now. Elik says it's no big deal but I'm really embarrassed and I just want to get out of here.

"Who was that guy anyway?", he says as we walk out.

"One of my lab mates", I say.

I'm not about to spoil the weekend by telling him that was Bunke. The Bunke he doesn't like! We leave my car in front of the Department and drive in the one he

rented, to rez. He gets out with a black plastic bag but I don't pay much attention to it.

He already had his meeting this afternoon and we are flying out at 8 pm so we have a few hours to kill. He finally tells me we are going to Accra for his cousin's wedding tomorrow. At least he told me while I'm still in my room so I can pack an outfit to wear! I'm deeply worried. That means there will be his relatives at this wedding who know his wife. How will he introduce me?

He sits on the bed while I look for a pair of shoes to go with my outfit for the wedding. We catch up and he tells me how much work he had to do and he says I will finish my PhD I shouldn't stress. He says he handed in his resignation at the university so this is his last month of lecturing! Their company is expanding and they recently got another tender to do some electrical and mechanical upgrades in some hospital. So he needs to focus on that. I told him! I told him to quit lecturing a long time ago but he wouldn't listen!

All im hearing right now is money. New tender equals more money for Elik and that equals more 'girlfriend allowance' for me. I'm so happy for him. And at least I know that when I finish my PhD and can't get a job, Elik will hook me up.

He hands me the plastic bag he was carrying. Inside there's a box from Aldo. Inside the box are my dream black suede heels with a tassel in front. These will go perfectly with the dress I plan to wear at the wedding. The heels fit like a glove and are so comfortable, I could run a marathon in them!

"Thank you thank you thank you. I can't believe you bought me these", I hug and kiss him.

"How could I not have? You were practically begging for them everyday on WhatsApp!", he says.

What's that they say about being a lady in the streets and a freak in the sheets? Let's try that. He deserves to be thanked. My bed is quite small but we make it work. I thought I'd take control but he just flips me over and fucks me mercilessly on the edge of the bed. I hope the girl who stays in the room next door isn't in. I feel sorry for her ears if she is.

We just spoon and cuddle afterwards and I'm dozing.

"I'm getting you a new car", he says.

What? Where's this coming from? I don't have a problem with my car. I let him keep talking though.

"Your car is old now and let's be honest it's not cute at all!", he says.

That's insulting. It's a Fortuner and I love that car. It's gorgeous! I stay quiet still.

"I'm getting you something more you. How would you like a Jeep Grand Cherokee. I drove past one this morning on my way to the airport and I just imagined you in it", he says.

"What! Baby. Wow", I don't know what to say. I turn around and look at him. I'm not so sleepy now. Wow. What an upgrade!

This is the sweetest pillow talk I've ever had in my entire life! Did I give it up so good that he wants to buy me a Jeep?

I'm out of my mind with excitement. I'll be driving a Grand Cherokee soon. That car is badass!

We can go all night today I'm game. I'll put in all the work even. He deserves a big thank you and whatever my baby wants, he can get. I'll make sure he has an amazing weekend.

I'm over the moon and hugging him too much and talking too much as we dress up and go to the airport. I'm getting a Jeep Grand Cherokee y'all!

CHAPTER 48

I really hate flying, I think I need to see a doctor to prescribe something that I can take before flights to keep me calm. Every slight bit of turbulence sends me over the edge. I have to hold on to Elik the whole time! We flying economy, I don't know why but that's fine with me. I'm not that big on business class anyway. Passengers there are usually obnoxious and think they own the plane!

We get to talk. The old woman sitting next to us keeps looking at us over her glasses. I'm sure we are the most messed up people she has ever seen in her long life. The things we are talking about!

We talk about Elik's wife. She actually never left and she gave him one last chance to get his act together. I tell him that just means she's never going anywhere like Lumka said. He says he's still sleeping in the guest room though, she hasn't let him

back into their bed yet. Me and her we are the same. We never run out of chances to give this man nomatter what he does. But Komla needs to let this man back into her bed soon if she intends to keep him. We both know he can't go for long without getting some and if she's not giving it to him, and I'm in Cape Town, he will be out there picking up girls!

We talk about his kids. Those precious little things that look like him. Which reminds me, I need to get a morning after pill when we get to Accra tomorrow! We talk about earlier and I don't know why I feel the need to let him know how good it was and how I'm already looking forward to my next dose. It's never been a secret that I'm an addict. I check with him if I'm still getting my Jeep and he says of course, I ask if it can be black with personalised number plates and he says whatever I want. Isn't he just precious!

The woman next to us already knows I'm the other woman and her looks tell me she disapproves. We've been talking about Elik's wife a lot.

"Why didn't you bring your wife along instead?", I ask.

"She's not talking to me half the time and I just wanted to travel with you. You are more fun", he says.

"But this is a family wedding. So won't people be wondering why I'm there and she's not?", I say.

"I don't care what anyone says", he says.

That's bad because I actually care. But we are having a great flight and I made a promise to myself that I'll keep Elik as happy as he can be. I mean the man is buying me a Jeep for crying out loud! The least I can do is be a good girlfriend.

We land in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and have a 3 hour layover. Some airports are worse than bus stops! It looks like I just landed in Road Port in Harare and I'm looking for an overnight bus to Botswana! Ok maybe I'm exaggerating a little, but it's not far from that. It's a huge mess. There's so many people inside the airport and some are sitting on the floor even! The signs to the boarding gates don't make sense and it seems a lot of flights are delayed or cancelled. It's like Park Station but worse.

We have to walk all the way to the other side just for some peace and quiet. We laughing at a slay queen wearing heels that she now can't walk in. It's like she wants to kneel down and pray while pulling a suitcase this side and carrying a big handbag on the other hand. Who travels long distances in heels anyway!

We end up just sitting on a metal bench, somewhere opposite toilets. I sleep on the bench with my head on his lap. He has to stay awake because someone needs to watch my handbag. We should have flown through Dubai! In future I know to avoid this airport.

We leave Addis at 6:15 am and we are in Accra 5 hours 40 minutes later but it's 9:20 am still. This whole different time zone thing can be confusing sometimes. I

slept all the way because we will be at a wedding all day and I need to be fully awake.

Elik's cousin picks us up at Kotoka International airport in Accra. He just says "How are you?" to me and then switches to their home language Asante Twi. I have no clue what they are saying but I'm just loving listening to Elik speak this foreign language. His cousin looks coloured and even has the soft curly hair but Elik swears he's black!

I just look out of the window because I gave up trying to pick up what they are talking about. We drive to a suburb called Roman Ridge, where we will be staying, apparently. It's his cousin's place.

Some people are living the life out here! What do you need a 6-bedroom house with 3 bathrooms and a swimming pool and a huge garden for? When it's just you, your wife and one child? Maybe I'm just jealous because I live in a shack-sized room at rez. The house is beautiful though jealous down and apparently the wife already left to help with the wedding. The cousin allows Elik to use one of his cars and leaves.

It's just us now and we need to be at the venue in an hour. We shower and instead of dressing we decide to fool around a little. If there's one thing me and Elik totally agree on, it's getting busy. We will do it anywhere, anytime and in any mood. We have to take another shower afterwards and dress up. It's past 11 already and we

were expected to be there at 10:30! For our sake, I just hope Ghana also observes African time otherwise people will be leaving when we get there.

We get out the house at 12 and instead of driving to the venue, Elik decides to take this time to give me a tour of Accra. Saying things like "You see me and my friends used to love that cinema", "I had my first date at this KFC", "I used to play football here with my friends". He sounds so excited as he shows me all these places.

There are so many castles, markets and historic landmarks. We stop at some for selfies. We have a wedding to get to but I can see Elik is loving this so I let him be. We already missed the church service. I hope we won't miss the whole of the reception as well. We only get to the venue at 3 pm. The wedding started at 10:30. But hey it's not my wedding and I'm not even sure I'm invited so whatever.

We sit at a table at the back with some women. Then Elik leaves me there and goes to join his family! The women at the table just look at me like I shouldn't be there then blatantly ignore me. I'm just sitting, going through my phone and reading old messages trying to act like I'm fine. But the truth is I feel so out of place. It doesn't help that only the local language is being spoken. So I'm just there, lost, not understanding a single word.

I really hate weddings because they are a reminder of something that I might never have. If I stick with Elik I'll never wear a white dress and walk down the aisle.

I'll never say 'I do' and have a big cake and have my father give me away and all the joys that come with it.

One woman walks up to our table and asks to speak to me outside. She seems nice enough and speaks English to me. I could use a friend or anyone to talk to for that matter. So I get my phone and clutch bag and follow her outside.

She walks across the grass to a back room where the bridesmaids change I guess. I have to go right around, following the pavement because my heels are made of suede and we all know that grass and mud are not kind to heels. I walk in and there's like 4 other women in there. They are talking and laughing but they stop when they see me. They are all older than me and kind of remind me of my aunt.

"Ete sen?", I say and flash my smile. That's just as far as my Asante Twi goes. No one says hi back. Maybe I pronounced that wrong. I say hello in English and my smile is getting awkward because no one is smiling back. They close the door and make me sit on a one seater couch at the corner of the room.

Sometimes I think I'm slow, because it always takes me a while to figure out what exactly is going on. They all stand up and form a semi circle in front of me and look at me like I'm an alien! My slow brain is still trying to figure out what's going on here. Is this a cultural thing perhaps? Did I do something wrong maybe?

The 'nice' one who came to fetch me says they are Elik's aunts. They say Komla has complained to them before about Elik's inability to keep it in his pants and that he

has this one girl in particular that just won't leave him alone. They ask if I'm that girl. I just look at them. I told you I'm slow. So I'm still struggling to distinguish between rhetoric questions and questions that need me to answer them. It's hard to keep up as they all bombard me with questions.

The world is a very cruel place for some of us. They actually believe I bewitched their nephew and want to know which muti I used! Again I don't know if that's rhetoric or not. Maybe they are serious and want the muti so they can use it on their husbands?

I feel like crying but I've learnt that my tears only seem to work on Elik only and other people don't mind them. I'm terrified but there's no getting up from this couch. The one woman is poking me with an umbrella. I don't get it. You know people are silly sometimes! Why would you poke someone's arm continuously with an umbrella?

They want to know who I am, where I'm from, how long I've been seeing Elik, why I'm with Elik, where I met Elik, why I bewitched him. I'm not even sure whether to lie or to tell the truth. So I only answer the questions I want to answer and give half truths. I say my name is Qiqa, let's hear them try to pronounce that! I say there's nothing going on between me and Elik and we are just friends. I say we are not even travelling together, we just bumped into each other at the airport this morning and since he didn't have a plus one I offered to come with him. They don't buy it at all, but well, at least I tried.

One is on the phone and describing me to Komla. Did she just describe me as a girl wearing a dress up to her knees and black shoes? How many girls in the world fit that description! But whatever she said in her language to Komla must have been a better description because she hangs up the phone and says "It's her!".

"And you have the audacity to stroll into our home like you are something", umbrella woman says. It wasn't me though. Elik brought me here. I told him not to. They should be pulling his ears now not mine! And I am something! What's she talking about! I'm a lot of things in fact.

You know I told Elik that bringing me here was a bad idea but as always he didn't listen to me. Now I'm the one paying the price and being poked with an umbrella!

The 'nice' aunt takes my bag and goes through it. There's nothing in there really, just my bank card, my medical aid card, a Mac lipstick, a small powder brush, bobby pins and a pair of earrings. The woman takes my card and breaks it into half saying that's how they are going to 'chop chop' me today. Just great! Now I have to go and queue at the bank when I get back to Cape Town. The queues at the bank don't move because there's always those women who bank in lunchboxes bringing their coins and it takes forever to count 5 cents coins! I'm almost crying at this point but I'm biting hard on my lower lip to stop the tears.

They say they know how to deal with girls like me and have been dealing with them for centuries. For centuries? How old are they? They say when they are done with me I'll learn to close my legs and never open them again. I'm literally picked

up and shoved around and pulled by the weave. Thankfully I had this one sewn in because if it was a wig, it would be on the floor by now. I'm not even saying anything anymore I'm just struggling with my balance and trying not to fall as they push me from one woman to another.

They are talking in their language now. This reminds me of the night Elik's wife and her sister ganged up on me and kicked me like a soccer ball and I got out of the house running in just a T-shirt. If I stay with Elik I guess I have to expect more beatings and abuse like this. Have you ever been shoved and pulled and pushed by people you have never met before and who are insulting you in a language you don't understand? I have and it's not nice at all.

To my rescue, the door flies open and Elik walks in with that cousin I saw earlier. I'm so relieved! He is so upset I'm afraid he's going to kill someone. Now I can let go and cry. The past 30 minutes have been a nightmare. They are talking in their language though so all I hear is 'Komla' and Elik is mixing with English and is saying something about how ungrateful they are because he takes care of them.

Now voices are raised and other people from the big venue have come to see what's going on. Everywhere I go I seem to attract drama. I hope the wedding won't be disrupted because of this. I just want to leave. One of the women literally shoves me outside and I stumble down the door step. Does she know I could have twisted an ankle from falling from heels! I don't think she cares though.

Wait! I think I just got thrown out like rubbish! The things I go through! They close the door with Elik still inside. I get up and dust my knees, take off my heels and walk barefooted across the grass. I have to find my way through the small crowd now gathered outside. My weave is all over the place and my mascara is running down my face. But no one knows me here so to hell with them.

I make the walk of shame to where I think we parked. I don't even remember the car we came with. There are so many white cars here. I can't even walk straight. It's hard to when you know everyone is staring daggers at you!

I can't believe I just got thrown out of a wedding! I travelled half way across Africa to get thrown out like a dog. Like why did I even agree to come here? I knew it was a bad idea but Elik said 'trust me' so I had just gone against my better judgement.

Elik shows up minutes later and is having words with the umbrella woman who's following him. I just want him to get me the hell out of here. He is so furious when he gets into the car and we drive off. I'm just sobbing into my hands and he keeps swearing under his breath.

CHAPTER 49

I wonder if this love of ours is worth it. I mean Elik and I are always judged left, right and centre and we always have to fight for it and I always get beaten and embarrassed and harassed. We never seem to catch a break. Is it really worth it? Can't I just go to Zimbabwe and find myself a decent brother that will do right by

me? Surely there's someone out there that I can have a drama free relationship with!

But looking at Elik, angrily driving down uptown Accra, and swearing at every car we pass, I know I don't want to be with anyone else. He's mine.

We get to his cousin's house and Elik says we must take our things and we will stay at a hotel. That's fine by me. We drive for some distance and end up at Labadi Beach hotel. We get a nice room with a view of the swimming pool. It kind of reminds me of Sun City. I have such lovely memories of a long weekend I spent with Elik in Sun City, but that's a whole different story.

"Can you believe these people Fierce? I take care of them! I pay their children's school fees! Their own children do nothing for them and this is how they repay me! Let's see who's going to take care of them now!", he's furious. I want to tell him he was wrong to take me there in the first place but now might not be the right time to say that.

He says he will be back. That's fine by me. I need some me time anyway to review this relationship. I get into bed, dress and all and put a pillow over my head. That was so embarrassing. This is Elik's fault. He was supposed to bring his wife not me!

That man doesn't think sometimes and he's always putting me on the firing line. I won't point that out right now though. He's already too worked up and the least I

can do is be there for him. He's upset because of how I was treated anyway so I must be thankful. We are in this together.

I'm much better when he gets back. I don't even know where he had gone to. He's calmer now and we get to talk. He says the aunts are upset because when he and Komla have problems, she runs and tells them. So that's why they were so mad at me, because they just came face to face with Komla's biggest problem. And since they love their daughter in law so much, they thought to eradicate the problem for her. Oh well. I don't think he sees that he did something wrong here! He thinks the aunts were wrong for 'mingling' in his business. I won't say anything.

I convince him that he needs to go back to the wedding. I kind of want to be alone to be honest. I'm afraid if he stays here we will end up fighting. He's skeptical but I convince him that as long as I have his credit card I'll be just fine. I'll just grab a strawberry daiquiri by the bar and go chill by the poolside and read a book on my phone or something. He says ok and he leaves. I change into a bikini, put a kimono on, grab my shades then head downstairs.

There is life around the pool at least and they are playing 'Collabo - P-Square' so I want to join in the fun. I scope the area first looking for someone I can go hang out with. There's the old creepy tourist sitting alone, there's the lovey dovey kisser couple, there's a group of girls sitting with their feet in the pool, there's the selfie taking girl, there's families with children, then there's three guys sitting around a table with a bucket of beers. I think I'll join the three guys. I take off my

kimono, put on my shades and walk towards them in just the bikini. I trust my body game so I know I'm serving sauce right now.

I sit on an empty chair and introduce myself. You know guys are really nice people! They never turn away a damsel in distress. I tell them I'm backpacking across Africa and I don't want to sit alone. They say I'm welcome to sit with them. See, guys are the nicest people on earth!

They say they are local and this hotel is a good chill spot on weekends. I don't drink without a reason and it's important for me to stay sober today because I'm sure Elik will come back drunk. So I need to make sure he's ok. I have a virgin strawberry daiquiri and we hit it off with the guys. They tell me about places I should visit and the dos and don'ts of Ghana since I'm a female travelling all by myself. If Elik shows up right now and found me in a bikini chatting up guys, I'm as good as dead.

They say they don't mind driving me around Accra and showing me the city. I say ok. It's almost 6 pm. I just need to go up to my room and change. I run up, change into shorts and a vest then run down. I like guys because it's easy to just hit it off with them unlike girls! And these three, they are super nice.

I don't remember their names but I can tell one is attracted to me and his name starts with a J so I call him Jay. So, here I am in a foreign country and it's almost night and I'm driving around with 3 men, who were drinking and I don't even know their names! How smart of me! It's called being reckless but I'll call it living a little.

The city is dead because it's Saturday evening so most businesses are closed. We stop at a market where Jay's mother sells some stuff and he introduces me to her as the future daughter in law. What? But I'm silly so I humour him. I giggle and shake her hand. Poor Jay. I'm not about that life.

It's past 8 now and I still don't want to go back to the hotel. I ask if there's clubs nearby we can go to and chill a bit. They say there's one called Shaka Zulu in Dzorwulu Junction. I find it funny that a club in Ghana would be called Shaka Zulu. I'd expect that club to be in Durban. They say it's posh and happening but men have to pay an entrance fee of 100 Cedi each. That's like R900 for the three of them so no big deal, I have Elik's card. I tell them I'll pay I just need an ATM.

I get 1000 Cedi and we go to Shaka Zulu. This club! They went all out with the Zulu theme. They even have statues of Zulu warriors carrying shields and assegais (spears) and have Zulu inspired paintings! They did well though, I love it.

They let me in even though I'm not dressed 'classy'. Perks of being a girl. I actually don't want to eat or drink anything so I give the 700 Cedi (R1900) to Jay so they can buy drinks. He looks at me shocked. I say it's cool, money is not a problem. I'm acting like I'm rich and I have zero money problems. Tonight is all about pretence.

The guys were not lying. Shaka Zulu Nightclub is the place to be. I love the whole African setting, the ambiance and I love that it's mostly locals here instead of

tourists. There's a couple of sugar daddies with their sugar babies! It's sad to watch because some of these girls look so young! Anyway, I'm the last to judge.

I ask Jay to go and request 'Mad over you - Runtown'. It's the only Ghananian song I can sing along to. He comes back and 2 songs later they play it. I think I'm giving this boy ideas shame. He's probably making a baby with me in his head as I show him how to do Gwaragwara. He tries to show me how to do Azonto but my two left feet refuse to learn. I'm dancing with Jay and we having a great time and his friends are drinking. We all merry.

He's a student at the University of Ghana doing his third year in business management. That's so cute. I tell him I'm a student too, doing second year in Chemical Engineering in Cape Town. I can't say I'm doing a PhD. The last thing I need is him feeling like I'm way out of his league and he stops being interested in me. I don't want him at all but I love the attention I'm getting right now. After the afternoon I had, I need it.

It's only 10 pm when I remember that I'm supposed to be at the hotel. If Elik gets there and I'm not in he will go crazy. I don't have network here so he has no way of contacting me. And if he finds out I took off with some guys I don't know, he will kill me or them or all of us. I say bye to these strangers, get them a bottle of vodka and a round of drinks, swipe with Elik's card and leave. Jay says he will take me to the hotel then come back. I wish I could stay longer but I can't risk it. I've already risked it enough!

"So, can I see you tomorrow?", he says.

I think he's like my age or younger.

"I'm touring all day tomorrow", I say.

"I can come with you and show you around", he says.

"Umm, I'm doing it as part of a tour group and I already paid", I say. I lie so smoothly sometimes it scares me.

"Alright, afterwards? Can we have drinks at Shaka Zulu? Say 7 pm?", he says.

"We'll see", I say. I know I will be nowhere to be found but he's asking so nicely.

I give him my number. I don't even know why because he will never see me again and I'll probably block him as soon as he says hie. I kiss him on the cheek and thank him for a good evening. I say bye with a promise to see him soon and I run into the hotel and all the way up to our room. I have fingers and toes and intestines crossed that Elik is not back and I'm thinking up all kinds of lies to tell him if he is.

I'm so relieved when I see no sign of him in the room. I throw off my clothes, take a quick shower and get into bed. I quickly move the pictures I took with those guys to a hidden folder just in case Elik goes through my phone. I don't think he ever goes through my phone but you can never be too careful.

So those old ladies at the wedding thought they could kill my vibe? Nah, I'm boss of my own life. I'm a seed, when you bury me I sprout! They can keep their boring wedding I don't care! I had fun today and I wish I could hang out with those guys again! They were so nice. I'm more tired than I thought so sleep comes easy.

Elik wakes me up after midnight. It takes me time to wake up and by the time I'm fully awake, he's sitting on a chair with his head in his hands. He looks like he was in a fight or something. He is ruffled, his shirt is stained with blood and he doesn't have his jacket. I wonder what happened. And since when does he fight? Was it about me? He looks so deep in thought so I just keep quiet. I take off his shoes and ask him to come to bed. He looks up at me and his eyes are red and he smells of alcohol. He's not drunk though. He's just so angry, I wonder what exactly happened but I know now is not the right time to ask.

Talking to him when he's angry is the worst thing anyone can do. I help him out of his clothes so he can sleep. He will be better in the morning.

He switches off the light and without warning he grabs me and pushes me onto the bed and gets on top of me. He grabs me by the neck and I feel like I'm suffocating. Then he kisses me so hard, I'm sure my lips are bruised. I can hardly breathe. From the get go there's no gently or slow, it's a warzone. He just holds me down and flat out murders me. I feel like he will pull the weave right off my head and I'm sure my legs will be cramped in the morning. It hurts and it's so uncomfortable and I'm struggling to breath but he needs this. He needs to let his frustrations and whatever happened tonight go. He's in a bad space and this is me being there for him. This is the only thing that's going to help him release whatever pain or anger is inside him right now. I close my eyes and hang in there.

When he's done he whispers "I'm sorry", then turns and faces away from me. I'm sore and breathless, but this is not about me. I lie next to him, kiss his shoulder and hold him. I need him to know I'm here for him, whatever it is, I'm right here. My neck and actually most of my body hurts but that's ok. I'll deal with that in the morning.

CHAPTER 50

I had to wake up early today so that I could shower alone. I don't want Elik seeing the bruises from last night. I don't want him feeling bad about it. He was in a bad space and I know he didn't mean to hurt me. My neck is bad though and the bruises have turned dark green-black. I hope today is not that hot because I need to wear a hoodie so that I can cover my arms and neck.

It's 9 am and he's still sleeping. I will go down to the restaurant and get him a cup of coffee. I don't want to switch on the boiling kettle here. The hissing will wake him up and he looks so peaceful I don't want to disturb him. Since he's sleeping anyway, I might as well have my breakfast at the restaurant then take up a plate for him. All he eats is eggs, sausages and lots of bacon anyway. He always says he's a meatitarian! I don't know what it is with African men and meat!

I go through yesterday's pictures as I have my breakfast. Jay looks quite cute, he would make a good friend but again it's probably because he's tall and dark skinned, which is my taste. When I'm done I get that plate and that cup of coffee and go back to the room.

I was gone for a full hour! Elik's in the shower when I get to the room, so I pick out a jean and T-shirt from his bag so he won't be asking me "What should I wear?". I then take the time to quickly go through my emails. There's one from Bunke, saying he ran some of my samples and will analyse the data later. Wow! So even after he caught me naked with Elik he still cares for me enough to help me. That's just so sweet. I don't know how to respond to the email so I leave it.

"You showered without me", he says kissing me on the forehead.

"You were sleeping. I didn't wanna wake you up", I say.

"Why are you wearing a sweater? It's hot. This is Accra! It will be 30 something degrees today!", he says.

"I'll take it off when I get hot", I say.

I won't take it off. He can't find out about the bruises. He's already going through a lot of emotions this weekend and I don't want to add regret on top of them.

I go back to my laptop and he dresses up.

"Today we going home", he says.

"I thought we were leaving tomorrow evening", I say.

"Not home South Africa. Home Cape Coast, where I grew up", he says.

"But I thought no one stays there anymore!", I say.

"Ya, no one stays there anymore but I need to go there. I need to take you there", he says.

So we are going to drive 3 hours to see remnants of his home then drive 3 hours back? I don't see the sense in that. I would rather we tour Accra and go to the markets or go chill at Kwame Nkrumah memorial park. But if it means so much to him, we will go. I need him to be ok and I can tell he's not ok.

He doesn't touch the breakfast and the coffee is probably cold now anyway. That's a first! He loves bacon and sometimes orders bacon for desert! He's avoiding eye contact with me. I pack my handbag, get our caps, and shades and we go. I guess he gave back his cousin's car because we driving in a black Mercedes now. I guess whatever happened yesterday must have been really bad. He looks so uneasy and nervous, I don't know what's up with that. I hope it's not about last night.

We make a quick stop at a small super market and buy snacks for the road. They don't have coke zero so I have to settle for mango juice. We get some water, fruits, chips, sweets, chocolates, energy bars, smarties. You'd swear we are shopping for little children. Food is good for stress. We ready to hit the road now. I'm burning in this hoodie but it's fine, I'm not one to wear my scars with pride. I cover them up. I'll put on the aircon anyway in the car. Elik looks so not ok, like something is eating at him. I just want to hold him until he's alright again but he has to drive.

"So baby. What happened at the wedding yesterday?", I ask.

"I don't want to talk about it", he says.

"Come on baby, you have to talk to me", I insist.

"Not now Fierce, please", he snaps.

Alright. I'll drop it.

If he doesn't want to talk, I'll talk. I have a lot to talk about.

I start complaining about my PhD and how everyone is done or almost done yet I still have quite a bit to do.

"It's not a race baby. You will finish your PhD when you finish it! Graduation is next year April anyway so you still have some time", he says. Ya he can say that! He got his PhD in under 3 years! I'll get mine in 20 years at this rate.

I tell him about that day I spent detained at the police station. He just says the cops were wrong but doesn't really engage with it. Talking to him is a mission so I resort to turning up the volume and singing along to the whole Freedom album. I know every song word for word.

We drive towards the Cape Coast. The road is good, there are barely any potholes. There isn't much to see along the way, just dense vegetation and roadside stalls. We make a stop in Winneba and I buy the sweetest pineapple I've ever tasted in my entire life. I also buy a big watermelon. Elik looks at me like I'm crazy but I really want it and they don't sell it in pieces so I have to buy the whole thing.

The vendor chops it up for me nicely and puts it in a plastic bag. Elik buys some roasted meat from a stall. It looks like a giant rat to me but he insists it's rabbit! I think it's a rat. I will drive from here since someone is acting like a baby and is whining about the heat and being tired and the long distance!

He takes a notebook and pen from his bag and says he wants to sit in the back seat. He puts on earphones and says I must tell him when I get to Mankessim! So I'm going to chauffeur him now? I let him be though. I hope they are signs for this Mankessim place because I've never been here before.

We finally make it to Mankessim then he directs me from there. We get to his village. The sun is well up and it's quite hot outside. The homesteads are far apart and he directs me towards a gravel road, which just ends and I have to practically drive on grass with no road!

"There", he says.

I drive towards the 'there' which looks like old remains of what was once a home. The perimeter is no longer there but I can see there were a couple of free standing houses. I pull over under a tree for shade and wait in the car. I let him go out alone. Maybe he needs to do this on his own. I mean I don't even know why exactly we drove all the way here in the first place.

He walks around and I guess he's going down memory lane. He comes back to the car, gets my door, takes my hand and we go through the ruins.

"This was the kitchen here", he says.

Only like half a metre of wall is left of the structure.

"And that's were me and my brother used to sleep!", he says.

"That was my aunt's hut", he says.

There really isn't much to see but I nod anyway. The whole yard is covered in grass and weeds. I just hope there are no snakes here.

“You know this is where my life began. Back when my only stress was getting a beating from my aunt if I lost a goat. I was happy here. We didn’t have much but I had everything, you know”, he says.

He sounds so nostalgic. I hoped this trip would cheer him up not make him even more sad. I stand behind him and throw my hands around him and just stand there for a while.

He says he has more to show me, we should take a drive around the village. He drives this time. The first stop is a well close by where he says it was believed that there were mermaids that would take you and when you come back three days later you would be a traditional healer. We have those superstitions back in Zimbabwe as well. I take those superstitions seriously! I have no desire to be a traditional healer! Next stop is the primary school. He says they moved up to Accra after he finished primary school. It’s a typical rural Catholic school and it’s deserted since it’s Sunday.

The next stop is the seaside. We have to drive like 10 km or so to get there. We pass many stalls selling fish along the way. We get to a spot we can park at. There's no beach, it's just rocks. It’s so empty and we find a rock and sit listening to the sea. I can’t describe it as beautiful because it’s not really. It’s too rocky and quite dirty to be honest. But it’s peaceful and the air smells like fish. I have some of my watermelon and juice and an energy bar afterwards. When it comes to food, I don’t compromise. I eat. He just has juice and wants some of my watermelon!

I am sweating rivers under this hoodie. I honestly can't take the heat anymore. I've been trying to hold on but I will faint if I don't take this thing off. And if I faint he will have to take off the hoodie anyway so I might as well take it off myself. I take it off and try to quickly cover my neck with the weave but it's too late and he already saw the marks.

"Baby. I hurt you", he says.

I'm not sure if that's a statement or a question. He knows he hurt me last night, I just didn't want him to see to what extent.

"It's nothing baby", I say and lean back on him.

"I'm sorry", he says and wraps his arms around me.

"I know baby. It's nothing really", I say.

"I'm sorry", he says.

Oh my gosh! Can he stop already! This is exactly what I didn't want. Him sorrying me and hugging me and babying me and all that stuff. I turn my face to him.

"Look Elik. I love you and I'll always look out for you, in every way. Whenever you need me I'll be there for you, in every way. So let's stop with the sorries now, shall we? You didn't hurt me. I'm fine!", I say.

He looks at me with those eyes of his and I see so much pain in them. I wonder what they did to him yesterday. But I won't ask. He'll talk when he's ready.

We then sit in silence for a while, eating and listening to the sea.

"You asked what happened yesterday at the wedding", he says.

"Yes", I sit up straight.

I need to hear this. I've been waiting since last night to hear this.

"So I went back and things were fine. Then after the wedding the family called me aside. Everyone was going on about how disrespectful it was to bring you. They all just went off at me, talking about how I don't deserve Komla and all that nonsense! They should just take her if they love her so much!", he says.

It's a bit worrying though that he still doesn't see that he was in the wrong here.

"So I got tired of listening to them and went and joined my cousins and uncles and we were drinking. They too started going on about you and me! Like people just wouldn't leave me alone! Then uncle Matthew said I was just like my father, good for nothing, and sleeping with everything that wears a skirt. So that's when I lost it and punched him. How dare he disrespects the memory of my father like that! He punched me back and so that's how we fought", he says.

I think he's getting angry so maybe talking about this is not a good idea after all.

"You know I've treated that man like my father. I literally support his farming! I send him money for everything and this is how he repays me? He thinks I'm good for nothing?", he says.

He's definitely getting angry.

"You know Komla has told my aunts so many things about the problems in our marriage and those aunts go around telling everyone else. Now everyone is all up in my business! My own wife goes around telling people that I'm a cheater and I'm

useless! She actually told them that I'm useless Fierce! And they were all too happy to throw that back at me!", he says.

Ok, Komla was wrong there. She crossed the line. She's right he's a cheater but come on now, Elik is useful not useless. And I always thought Komla was miss goody two shoes! I'm shocked she would say that!

"And these are the same people who call me every month crying to me asking for money! Their own kids are living it up in the suburbs but don't do nothing for them. Then they turn around and tell me I'm useless! How? I don't get it. I shouldn't have come to this stupid wedding" he picks up a stone and throws it so hard into the water, it scares some seagulls away.

I'm not sure what to do or say. I can feel his pain. I get that he was wrong but they also had no right to make him feel like he's useless. That's just wrong and I'm mad at all of them for that! They have no right to break him! I'm the one left to pick up the pieces!

I stand in front of him so I can cradle his head.

"Elik. To me you are everything. You are not useless. They talk like that because they don't know you. I know you and I know you are a great man and a good father. Don't let them get to you baby", I say.

He buries his face in my stomach and holds on to me.

"I got you baby", I say.

I'm right here. He may have been wrong in his own way but I'm on his side. I'm team Elik all the way.

"I'm sorry for what I did to you yesterday. It was wrong. It's just I was so angry and..", he says.

"Shhhhh. It's ok. You didn't do anything wrong. I'm ok. We are ok", I say and keep holding him.

I know Elik is tough, I've seen him deal with his students at university, he's serious and he's strict. I've seen enough times to know he is tough. He's a manly man.

But I love how he breaks down the walls with me. He talks and he bares his emotions and he allows me to be there for him when he needs me. It's the least I can do considering how he's always there to pick me up when I'm down.

"That's not why I was so angry and hurt yesterday though", he says in a low voice. There's more?

"What happened?", I ask and move his head back so I can look at him.

"When words got heated, uncle Matthew told me that the woman I always thought was my mother, is not my mother. I've been lied to my entire life Fierce!", he says.

Oh wow. I'm not equipped to deal with this. I don't know how to deal with this.

What am I supposed to say now?

Tears are building in his eyes and I don't know what else to do than kneel and take him in my arms and encourage him to cry and let it out. I think I'm going to cry too. I can't stand to see Elik this broken.

CHAPTER 51

I honestly don't know what to do. My heart just sank all the way into my stomach and I'm hurting like it's me who got the news. I'm crying too now because it hurts me so bad to see him like this. And mostly because I'm a passive crier. If I see someone crying, I find myself helping them, even when I don't know why they are crying. My tears come easily. But these ones I'm sniffing back now are genuine.

Now it all makes sense why Elik was so messed up last night. The sun is going and we still need to drive all the way back to Accra. It's almost 3 now and I don't want us driving at night. But I'm willing to stand here in this scorching sun for as long as it takes my man to get himself together.

I swear the universe keeps throwing me harder and harder towards Elik. At this rate I will never leave him. How could I leave him when he's going through this? How could I even begin to think about it?

The problem now is that I'm not good at these things. I never know what to do or say. I suck at giving advice. I mean, look at me, I went through life following my own advice and how did that turn out? I made one terrible decision after another! My brain can't be trusted.

After a very long while he gets up and says we must go back to his old home. He looks drained so I ask him to have an energy bar and I offer to drive. We drive in dead silence and I park where we'd parked before. We get out of the car and he

takes my hand and leads me to what he said used to be the room he shared with his brother. There's some wall left on the other side so I sit there and he stands in front of me. He gently rubs the bruises on my neck then takes both my hands in his. My skin is turning black from the heat and gosh I'm so sweaty now. I just need a long shower when we get back to Accra.

"So I wanted us to come down here for a couple of reasons. I wanted closure. This is the one place I remember being absolutely happy at and it's the last place I wanted to visit before I walk away from everything. And I'm done with the family! I want nothing to do with them. Now it's just me and my brother and you and Peter and Paul and..... her", he says.

Yoh! That's a long list. What are we doing? Trying Trying to fill up the stadium? I thought he would say 'it's just you and me' now. Not this crowd he just listed! Did he just say it's just me and him and her (Komla).....all in the same sentence? Like he's actually ok with having us both forever? He's getting too comfortable in this relationship! I need to address that very soon.

"Please say you'll stay with me", he says.

I'm just looking at this man of mine being all serious while asking me nonsense! I keep quiet.

Elik has so much baggage and it just keeps piling. Is this the life I really want for myself? And clearly, he'll never leave his wife. So if I say yes here, I'll be binding myself to an eternity of side chickness.

But we established a long time ago that common sense is not common to me so I nod.

“Yes, I’ll stay”, I say.

I can’t leave him when he’s like this. And surprisingly I feel much closer to him and I just can’t imagine my life with him. I guess when I was created the heart I was given was a factory reject, it didn’t work right, it doesn’t know how to stop loving even when it should. He gives me the tightest hug ever and the most genuine thank you.

The sun is going down and we both agree we have to hit the road. He drives and I play DJ and tell him all sorts of stories to cheer him up, like the one time Ndivhu was in his room with the one girl and the other girl broke down his door and all security guards on campus had come to save the day. That girl was strong yoh!

It takes sometime before he starts reacting to my stories. At least now he’s talking. He tells me about his past. He says he and his brother stayed with an aunt while his ‘mother’ worked in the city. So when the aunt died they had to go to the city, Accra. I realise now I don’t know his mother. I wonder if she was part of those women that harassed me yesterday.

“So who’s your real mother, baby?”, I ask.

“I don’t know. After uncle Matthew said that I left. I’m done with that family! They can all go to hell”, he says.

“Did you at least talk to her?”, I ask.

I'm sure she's the right person to give him the answers he needs.

"No. I don't want to talk to her. I don't want to talk to anyone. I'm done with all of them", he says.

I understand. That's just anger talking. He will need to talk to them at some point and get to the bottom of this. He will need the closure or else it will haunt him forever. And should I stay with him, it will somehow haunt me too.

"I feel like my whole life is a lie, you know. I don't know what's true anymore", he says.

I can't even begin to imagine what he's going through right now. I can't imagine what I would do if I found out my mother wasn't really my mother!

I'm not sure if the things I want to say to him will help right now. I could say 'time will heal' or 'it doesn't matter who your birth mother is, you grown, you don't need her', or 'pray about it and stay strong' or everyone's favourite, 'everything happens for a reason'. All those seem hugely inappropriate at the moment though, so I opt for silence instead. I hold his hand. He needs to know I'm right here and he's not alone.

"I don't know what to do Fierce. She's always been my mother you know and now to know that she's not is destabilising my brain", he says.

Hay shame, poor thing.

"Growing up was very hard. My 'mother', I don't know what to call her anymore, didn't make much you know and since I didn't have a father, I had to grow up and

man up very quick. My little brother and I stayed with my aunt here in the coast. Well now I don't know if she really was my aunt at all", he says.

Oh no! I squeeze his hand. I have no words but I'm listening.

"You know my relatives did nothing for us, but yet when I started making money they started flocking and wanting a piece of that cheddar. I don't know why, maybe I was desperate for family, you know, desperate for a father figure and stuff, but I welcomed them with open arms", he says.

That's just sad. This money thing is not sitting well with him shame. I guess he worked hard and dished it out hoping to get appreciation in return. I'm just glad he's talking. He's really opening up to me. Maybe coming to these ruins was a good thing after all. I'm getting to know him. We've never spoken of his childhood before.

"I had to provide for my mother and little brother. I had to do what a man had to do. I ended up getting caught up with the wrong crowd in Accra and ended up spending 6 months in juvenile", he says.

What? He was in prison? Elik was a little criminal? Wow! I'm really getting to know him today.

But now he's quiet, maybe trying to read my reaction. He can't drop a bomb like that then keep quiet! He better start explaining right now. And I just hope he didn't murder anyone or else I'm out of here!

“Juvenile, as in prison for children?”, I say.

You never know you know. Maybe juvenile means something different in this side of Africa.

He nods.

“What did you do?”, I ask.

“Well, when I was 16, I ran with a group of older guys in the neighbourhood and we used to steal electronic gadgets and stuff and distribute them on the streets. I was quite good with the whole disabling of alarm systems and deactivating security cameras”, he says.

“You kidding me! How do you disable an alarm system at age 16?”, I say.

That was a rhetorical question but he answers anyway.

“It was easy really. I’d just trick the systems by attaching aluminium foil to the sensors. That way, the system wouldn’t pick up the disruption in electric flow when I picked out the magnet which transmits the current. So we would just get in and out. Easy. Cameras were even easier. I could control those remotely. Besides, it was many years ago and back then technology wasn’t as intelligent as it is today”, he says.

Why am I impressed by this? The fact that at 16 he could disable a whole alarm system in seconds is amazing! I know it’s wrong but wow! That’s remarkable! At 16 I would have never thought of anything like that. I was still busy putting S-curl in my hair, cutting my uniform short and writing love letters to my boyfriend in high school.

“So how did you get caught?”, I ask.

“Someone in the group was paid by the cops and snitched. So we were ambushed and we were caught. Luckily, I was a minor then and a first time offender so I just did 6 months”, he says.

Wow! How come he has never told me this before? I’m in love with an ex-convict.

At least we not talking about the issue of his mother now. This is much better to talk about. He says he remembers crying all the way from court to the remand centre and trying to get out of the moving car. I can’t help but laugh imagining that. He says he had to write his final high school exams inside and he did very well surprisingly. When he got out, he got a scholarship to pursue his degree in Singapore. He swears he never committed any crimes again after he got out.

“So how was it? In juvenile, I mean”, I ask.

I remember how terrified I was at the police station the other day. I can’t imagine doing 6 months! That’s half a year! I would die.

“It was bad. They used to make us work like slaves all day long! Then I had to study all night. It was hell. When I got out I was done. I never wished to go back”, he says.

He says the food especially, scarred him for life and he never wishes to go back.

Wow. Elik!

“That’s where I got this scar (points to top of his eye) that you hate so much”, he says and laughs.

It's so nice to see him show some teeth. I was worried he would be sulking and crying all day! And I love that scar by the way, it gives him a bit of that rough look. It's hard to see it anyway because of the overdose of melanin on his face. You have to be up close.

I think I'm good at this cheering up thing because he's laughing with me now and telling me funny stories of his fights in juvenile.

The drive back to Accra feels shorter and by the time we get to the hotel, he seems totally fine. I just can't wait to take a long shower and scrub this sweat off me. The sun really baked me today. Then maybe we can go down to the bar by the poolside and just relax.

CHAPTER 52

Elik insists that we go out but I'm thinking it's Sunday. Do people club on Sundays? People go to church on Sundays then sleep early because they have to work on Monday! I neither go to church nor work, but I think I'm correct. He insists though so I end up saying ok and dress up. I always have a clubbing dress packed whenever we travel because clubs are one thing we do very well.

"We going to Shaka Zulu", he says.

My heart literally stops beating. I promised to meet Jay there at 7 pm. It's almost 10 pm now but what if he's still there? I can't take that risk.

"No. You know actually, I think we should sit in and talk and just chill. I don't feel like going out", I say.

He just looks at me. I mean I'm already dressed up and ready to hit the dance floor so I know what I'm saying doesn't make sense.

"I need to drink baby. Let's go", he says.

"We can go to the bar downstairs", I say.

"Trust me. I know Accra. Shaka Zulu is where it's happening today", he says.

I say no. He says yes. I say no. He says yes.

This ex-criminal of mine is too stubborn! Yeses!

I'm not winning so I might as well come clean and hope for the best.

"Ok baby. I have something to tell you", I say and sit on the bed, expecting the worst.

I'm not scared of Elik at all but I know how he gets when I'm involved with other guys. He turns into the Hulk!

"What is it?", he says.

I hate confessions. I thought I had pulled yesterday off perfectly so I hate that now I have to expose myself.

"The thing is, I went to Shaka Zulu yesterday", I say and stop there.

"So? I know that", he says.

My eyes pop wide open.

"You know? How?", I hope he wasn't having me stalked!

"You swiped my card there", he says.

For someone intelligent, I'm very dumb. How could I have been so careless!

"I was bored baby so I googled and Shaka Zulu popped up and I was curious you know, because of the name and all, so I called a cab and went. I didn't even stay long you know", I give my poorly crafted explanation.

He laughs and puts on his jacket.

"Yeah right! You first got money from the other side of town then ended up at Shaka Zulu on the other side of town!", he says.

Ya ne! Kurough!

"It's fine really. I don't mind. I'm glad you got out. Now let's go", he says.

He's not angry? I thought he would be angry.

"Come baby. I want to drink. Let's go!", he says.

I grab my phone and follow him out.

But shut me! There's still the Jay issue. That he will definitely be angry about I know, so I'll just not mention it and keep hoping for the best. He's too possessive sometimes! As we drive I'm praying in my heart that Jay either didn't show up or he left when I didn't show up. I don't need the drama. Not today.

We get there and I scan the place as quickly as I can, I walk around as if looking for a good table. There's no sign of Jay anywhere. I'm so grateful right now, I could slaughter a goat as a thank you offering to the heavens! We get a table and get some drinks. He orders a bottle of Hennessy and I get a virgin Pina colada. I can't drink because I have to drive back to the hotel. Elik will be wasted in no time I know, the way he's drinking that Hennessy like it's tap water!

The night is going perfect. We are laughing, I'm dancing, I'm being ratchet, I almost fall, he laughs at me. We are having a perfect night. I'm happy that he's happy. He says he's fine about his mother thing. I can't be too sure but if he's happy then I'm good. My job is done. I really was worried about him.

If this isn't witchcraft then I swear I don't know what it is. I'm sitting opposite Elik after one of my dancing sessions and telling him about this one time I almost burnt down the lab, when I hear, "Fierce!".

I turn my head around and it's Jay! I want to get under this table, dig a deep hole and disappear. The boy kisses me on the cheek then sits down next to Elik! He says a brief hi to Elik then turns to me and completely disregards Elik! I think I want to die, right here, right now.

He sounds so excited. Doesn't he know he's signing my death certificate right now with his loud mouth!

"Fierce! You look beautiful! I waited since 7 for you! But it's fine, I'm glad you came", he says. Ah finish! There goes my Jeep!

I look at Elik and he looks at me but his face is emotionless.

"So? How was the touring? What interesting places did you get to see?", he goes on.

"Emm, umm, hi Jay. Elik this is Jay and Jay this is Elik", I say and sip hard and long on my Pina colada.

Jay says hi again and Elik says hi. I'm expecting Elik to erupt anytime now and go crazy. I'm so screwed. Like can't this boy see that I'm sitting with someone here!

He just goes on and on and he's so excited. And he says I should have come earlier so we could have gone out to eat. I feel like saying I need to use the bathroom just to escape but I'm not sure if leaving them alone is a good idea. I can never know what Jay will say. So I stay put.

"So what are you doing tomorrow? You can come with me to the University, I'll show you around. You can even sit in one of my lectures. There's hundreds of us. No one will notice", he says.

"And my mum really liked you hey, she wants to see you again!", he says. I'm so dead. My parents might as well start looking up coffin prices.

Elik drinks the rest of his alcohol and says,

"Let me leave you two kids to catch up".

He turns to Jay and says something in their language. Jay responds and Elik says something else then pats Jay on the shoulder and walks out.

I wonder what that was about.

Jay turns and looks at me like I killed Jesus.

I'm lost.

"So that's your husband Fierce? You are married?", Jay says, then looks at me with eyes saying 'I thought you were different' and he shakes his head at me and walks away.

My heart sinks. But you telling me, he seriously didn't see I was sitting with someone? Yes, I know I told him I'm single and travelling alone but still. If a girl is sitting with a man, you stay away and wait your turn! Simple.

I don't care about Jay right now. I'm worried about what is going through Elik's head. I run out and find him standing against the wall.

I just start explaining.

"Baby. I swear nothing happened and there were two other guys with us. I met them at the hotel and they showed me around and we went to the club and I left and went back to the hotel", I say.

"Come on Elik. I'm sorry I didn't tell you. It was nothing really. I was going to tell you", I say.

He laughs. He's actually laughing at me and I'm confused now.

"It's fine baby. I'm glad you went out. And I'm sure that boy wants you but too bad you are taken. It's good to know other people want something that's all mine, you know", he says.

I'm still expecting him to be angry though. He isn't.

I end up telling him about all we did and saw yesterday and the market and Jay's mother and all that. He's still fine with it.

Things change shame.

We go back inside and I dance and he drinks. We leave the club around 3 am and Elik is wasted and talking drunk.

"You Fierce. You know you are my baby and I will give you everything you want. I'll buy you whatever you want", he says.

"I want you to have my children. I wanna make a whole soccer team with you!", he says.

I'm sure if I asked for half a million right now I would get it. But I'm a good girl, I don't take advantage of drunk people.

I have to balance him on my shoulder and walk him out. He's so heavy and it doesn't help that I'm on heels. We make it to the car and I seat him in the passenger seat and belt him up.

I don't know how to get to the hotel. I'm not roaming and I didn't consider making a plan for WiFi. I didn't think I'll need GPS. I look for Elik's phone in his jacket and its off. Just great.

I walk out of the car and go to the bouncer and ask for directions. He says "go straight this way, turn right on next turn, turn left at the T-junction, count 1, 2, 3 traffic lights then on number 4 turn left, then go and go until you see a big tree on your left, then turn right and go straight down". Wow!

The guy even says, "If you see a bridge then you've gone too far. Come back!", Eh!

I start the car and try and remember the directions. Surprisingly, I do. I remember some of the turns from my drive with Jay yesterday. Helping Elik to the elevator then to the room is a mission. I just take off his shoes and jacket and let him sleep in his clothes. He's already asleep anyway.

CHAPTER 53

It's Monday and it's back to Cape town now and back to school. I've been at school for too long now yoh! I need to get done and get a job like everyone else. Now that I think about it, most people want to do Masters and PhD but because of Black tax they are forced to get jobs rather after their first degrees. Me, no. I can afford to stay at school for as long as I want. Isn't that why Elik wakes up and goes to work every morning? So that I don't have to? And technically he takes care of my Black tax too, he sends me the money that I send home. I'm a blessed girl.

I begged Elik a million times to go to his family before we leave and talk things out, but he's maintaining that they are all dead to him. I think he needs to face his mother and ask her whatever questions he has. But again, my man is as stubborn as a mule, so I'm dropping it. In due time, he will deal with this. I tried.

He hasn't mentioned anything about Jay. I guess he really didn't mind. Surprise surprise. He's growing up! He has to take panados for the slight hangover he's feeling. He really was wasted last night.

We have breakfast and check out of the hotel. Our flight is in the evening so Elik spends the time showing me Accra. I love how he lights up everytime he sees a spot that means something to him. We even drove past the juvenile detention centre where he spent half a year learning how not to be a criminal!

Accra is so rich in history and cultural heritage. There is museums and memorial parks and statues and local markets. It's amazing. I wanted a pineapple for lunch so we stopped at some market. It was so busy and crowded but I'm no tourist. I can handle this. I'm fascinated by listening to Elik speak his mother language. Small things make me fall deeper and deeper in love with this man.

We take many pictures. I'm sure people on my WhatsApp are always wondering who takes my vacation pictures that I put on my status since I'm always alone in the pictures I post. Everytime I travel with Elik it's like we have a normal relationship you know. We can hold hands, kiss and just be happy without wondering who's watching.

I wish we had more time to spend but it's fine, Elik promised to bring me back and take me around Ghana. That's something to look forward to. The flight goes through Addis Abba then on to Cape Town.

We get to Cape Town on Tuesday at 10 am. Elik promises to send me money to send home and for my upkeep. I have to take an Uber to campus as he has to fly to Johannesburg. The day is still young so I have to go to the lab. I feel exhausted and could use some sleep, but like Brain always says, 'sleep is for the dead'. I need to finish my PhD.

I hate that I have to face Bunke today. After what he saw on Friday, I'm too embarrassed to look at him. There's no other way though and it can't be avoided. I get to the lab and Bunke is sitting on my desk. He is updating my SPSS software

and says he ran most of my samples. I give him an awkward hug and I ask to buy him lunch. He says he can use a break so we go. He is acting normal. He's very quiet anyway so it's hard to read him. I just want to talk to him, I know if I don't explain what he saw I'm going to be feeling guilty and bad. I don't even know why I feel bad, I mean Bunke is in the past and he wasn't even my boyfriend to begin with!

We go to the cafeteria window and get chip rolls. I get a coke zero and he gets a juice. We sit on my bench. It's the first time I'm sharing this bench. I always sit here alone, watching the ducks and watching people. It's my thinking and reminiscing space.

He asks where I disappeared to this past weekend and I don't see the reason to lie. I tell him I went to Ghana with my boyfriend.

"Look B. About Friday. I'm truly sorry you had to see that", I say.

He keeps quiet and bites into his chip roll.

"That was my boyfriend. Remember the guy I told you about when we were in Venice?", I say.

"The one who married someone else behind your back?", he says.

"Ya", I say. I wish he hadn't phrased it like that but it's fine.

"You went back to him after everything he did to you?", he sounds very shocked.

"Ya. We trying to work things out hey. We getting there", I say.

"Is he divorced now?", he asks and I shake my head no.

He looks at me like I'm the reason for poverty in Africa!

"Come on madam. That guy is married. Nothing good will come from this. You are young and so beautiful. Don't you think you deserve so much better?", he says.

Is he serious right now? He's going to honestly sit here and lecture me about sleeping with married men! He's lost his mind.

"But you are married and you used to sleep with me!", I say.

Double standards much?

Ok maybe I shouldn't have said that out loud but I get very defensive everytime someone points out how wrong my thing with Elik is. Don't they think I know? I know.

It's just they have no idea the things I've been through with Elik. They have no idea the bond we share. I'm not just a side chick. He actually really loves me and I happen to love him too. It's a complicated mess. So my defenses go up at the slightest sign of being judged for my choices!

"I'm sorry. That came out wrong", I say.

He looks at me and drinks his juice.

"So, how long has it been going on? You said you had left him", he says without looking at me.

I mean to lie but the question caught me off guard.

"I don't know. It's been on and off for years now", I say.

He shakes his head.

"Can we talk about this like adults?", I say.

I don't owe him an explanation I don't know why I'm killing myself here! I'll give it anyway.

"Talk to me madam", he says.

I explain how complicated it is with me and Elik. I don't even know why I'm explaining myself. I mention that he's married but still gives me all the attention in the world. He strongly disapproves like everyone else! He says I need to stay away from that guy and focus on myself.

He says he cares a lot about me and will make sure I finish that PhD and we all graduate together. He keeps saying I'm beautiful. Maybe he thinks he still has a chance to get into my pants but that boat sailed a long time ago. It sailed deep into the ocean and broke down there so that it could never ever come back. I'm faithful now. I can't get with Bunke and end up being stuck between two men, both of which belong to other people!

"Madam. You need to get it together. Stay away from that guy. He's your bane, don't you see that?", he says.

I choose to keep quiet because if I open my mouth, I might burn bridges here. I still need him to help me finish my PhD.

He says it's my life and at the end of the day it's my decision. He says he was hurt to see me in that position with Elik though. He says I should be careful about doing things like that because what if it had been Prof who had walked in. He says reputation is everything.

I know all that! Kanti do people think I'm stupid? I know, just because I don't practice what I know, doesn't mean I don't know.

"Can I ask you something", he says.

"Yes", I say.

"The time you were sleeping with me, were you sleeping with him too?", he says.

That's a very strange question I must say. I didn't expect it.

"No. I wasn't with anyone then", I say.

The truth never set anyone free. If anything the truth will kill you.

We then go back to the lab and now that that's out of the way I feel better and can resume my school work in peace. It's back to boyfriend jeans, T-shirts, labcoats and sleepless nights. Good times.

The week goes by and I'm in the lab 24/7. This work doesn't end. It's like taking 1 step forward and 2 steps back! My brain is exhausted and oversaturated. Elik and I are great. He calls me every morning and we chat whenever we can and we video chat when we can. We are in a good place. And we understand how busy we both are.

He texts me this morning as I'm about to leave my room and is like, "Baby, I'm coming to Cape Town. I have a meeting in Waterfront".

I'm like, "Ok cool. I'll see you after your meeting then. You sleeping in Cape Town? *wink*".

He's like, "No I'm leaving this evening".

I'm like, "*sad face* ok baby. Keep me posted".

He's like. "I need a huge favour. Please ma".

I'm like, "Shoot".

He's like, "What does your day look like?"

I'm like, "Same old. I'll be in the lab".

He's like, "Can you babysit for me?".

I look at my phone long and hard and decide to call him. Babysit who now?

He says he has this urgent meeting in Cape Town and his wife is at work and the nanny who was supposed to baby sit the twins just called and cancelled and he needs to head to the airport so he has to bring the twins with him. I thought they would be in day care! But ok whatever. I say sharp, I'll babysit.

I now have to call Bunke and ask if he can run my samples. I'm sure he is going to stop helping me soon. I can't keep expecting him to do my work when I'm not there. I drop my plans of going to the lab and start working on my write up in my room. In 2 hours I head to the airport to meet Elik and pick up the kids.

They show up and he's like,

"I owe you big time baby and thanks for doing this. I really need to rush now, I'll see you later", he says.

"Hey guys. Listen to Fierce ok? Be good", he hugs them.

He is so adorable with them I just find myself smiling.

"Love you daddy", they both say.

Awwwww. That's so cute.

I take the kids, each on one hand and walk towards the exit. They look alike and I have no idea which one is Peter and which one is Paul. Elik has to go left towards car rentals and I go straight down to the undercover parking bay with my step babies. They are so grown now!

I don't know how to drive with children so I put them in the back seat and strap them with seat belts. I hope that's how it's done. I head down to campus. They are arguing about Naruto and they are just so adorable. One says Naruto is a child and the other says no Naruto is a grown up. I'm just smiling at myself, listening to them.

"Hey guys. There are two versions of Naruto. The one is a child and the other an adult", I say.

"I told you", they both say to each other at the same time. Goodness me. So what exactly were they arguing about?

Their speech is well developed I must say. I don't know much about children anyways.

We get to my room and they are looking at me like they need me to tell them what to do. I have no experience with kids and I have no idea what to do with them. I always thought I don't like children. But these 2, I love them. They are so beautiful.

I don't know maybe it's because they look just like their father but with a complexion.

They say they already ate breakfast so they are not hungry. I don't know how I'm going to spend today. I'm trying to see what I would have done if they were my children. They are calling me aunt Fies and that just sounds wrong. But the mispronunciation is just warming my heart. I ask them to walk with me to the Department so I can show them off. They are too cute. I take them to the lab and tell the guys they are my kids and Bunke looks at me judgingly and spoils the whole mood.

For lunch we drive through McDonalds in Bellville and we get three happy meals. We then go to the pool house on campus and have our lunch sitting on the grass. They have really warmed up to me and just looking at them, I can't help but wonder if my children would have looked like this as well. Would they have been just as precious? Would I have been a good mother?

These kids can talk yoh! The one, Paul I think, tells me how he dropped his tablet in the swimming pool. Apparently, he wanted to see if the tablet could swim. Then it went all the way to the bottom and drowned. He says he didn't tell daddy because he's afraid daddy will be upset with him. He says so he's saving money in his piggy bank so that he can buy a new one. Goodness me. Wasn't there an adult supervising them by the pool? Anyway, that's none of my business.

I think I'm going to cry. These boys are so sweet. They deserve to be spoiled. I take them to Tygervalley and go to MTN and get Paul a new tablet. I promise not to tell their daddy if they don't and we make a pinky swear. The tablet set me back R5500! That's fine because the money I have, I got from their daddy anyway. We then go down to Toys R Us and I tell them they can pick two toys each.

We get to campus. They say they need to take their 'afternoon nap' because in day care they are made to sleep in the afternoon. I ask why they sleep and they say so that they can grow. Wow, these kids! I take them to my room and let them sleep. I just sit there with tears in my eyes. They are adorable. It's like looking at one person twice.

Elik calls and he's done with the meeting. I have to step out so I don't wake up the angels. He says he'll be coming down to campus to fetch them. That just makes me so sad. I want to keep them forever.

He says, "Get ready, I need to take you somewhere quickly before I go back to Joburg. I'll be there in 15 minutes". I say ok, I'm ready as I am. When he says he's outside, I wake the twins up and I feel bad because they just slept not so long ago. We go. I opt to sit in the back seat with them so they can sleep on my lap. I don't know why Elik keeps looking at the rear view mirror and smiling.

"So how was your day? Did they give you any trouble?", he says.

"Shhh. Not so loud. Let them sleep!", I say.

He laughs at me.

We drive to the N1 and off ramp to Century City and stop at the Jeep dealership. I'm already excited as I get out of the car because I think I know what's happening here. The guys at the shop greet Mr Nkrumah and say it's good to see him again. They went all out and put a ribbon around the car and a bouquet of roses on top. Now I'm ready to cry. I can't stop thanking Elik. Just like that, I'm the new owner of a brilliant black Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited.

The team keeps saying congratulations and I still can't believe it. I don't know, I thought maybe Elik wouldn't buy it. He says he can't stay but has a second to squeeze in a kiss and an "I promised to take care of you. This is me keeping that promise". He then leaves for the airport. I kiss the babies goodbye. They are sleeping.

Oh come here you beautiful beast, let me drive you. You know that smell of a new car! And how silent the car is when you drive it. These are things that make you want to roll down the window and drive with your hand out. When I park at rez people look at me like they have never seen a human being before! I'm sure now everyone thinks I have a blesser! Or a very expensive prostitute.

I left Elik a thousand thank you messages, I love yous, voice notes and even took a video in the car, just showing off my new baby. He only responded later with an, "You are my girl. You deserve the best things in life" and a "Thank you for buying Paul the tablet". They told him so quick! Now I know never to trust them with secrets!

He calls later and I'm still thanking him. I wish he was here so I could show him exactly how grateful I am. He says the tablet Paul 'drowned' was a R600 children tablet not the fancy one I bought him. Oh well. How was I to know! Paul didn't tell me!

I'm not even going to the lab tonight, I'm too over excited and I just want to lie on my bed and count my blessings one by one.

CHAPTER 54

I'm the busiest bee I've ever met. I'm so swamped I barely get any sleep! It's so bad that sometimes I doze off while sitting down. I could be talking to someone one moment and I'm asleep the next. I drink litres of coffee everyday just to stay awake. I'm trying to finish my thesis and I've made tremendous progress so far.

I still try and call my mother as often as I can because if I don't she accuses me of forgetting her! I'm getting tired of sending money home. You know sometimes I stop and think, don't my parents wonder where I get all the money I send them from? I know they met Elik at the funeral, but are they ok with us being together without him marrying me? My mother firmly believes that I'm a virgin because let's be honest, I'm the most decent girl you'll ever meet when I'm home. I wear long dresses, I'm polite, I'm respectful, I'm educated and I just carry myself gracefully. If only she knew how short some shorts I wear are!

I've been so occupied I haven't even had the time to enjoy my car. I registered the car already and got myself a personalised number plate! But now I have to pay insurance! No man, this is unfair. Why am I the one supposed to pay insurance. The person who bought the car should pay insurance!

On other news, Komla is on a mission to harass me. I block her on one number and she resurfaces with a new one. She sent me a silly message saying:

"It wasn't enough to steal my husband. Now you stealing my kids!".

I guess I left an impression if they still talk about me.

I'm being wrongfully accused here. I swear I didn't steal anyone's kids! I'm sure those cute chatterboxes told their mother all about 'Daddy and Aunt Fierce!'.

Sometimes I think Elik does these things intentionally. He obviously knows that his kids talk too much yet he still left me with them all day. I miss them though but I know Komla will never let me anywhere near them. I found her phone in my bag today. I'd forgotten how I'd 'stolen' it at the hotel that time. I don't know what to do with it.

I haven't seen Elik in a while but we talk on the phone all the time. He says he's fine but I don't think so. He's been showering me with gifts and money so much I know he's definitely not fine. When he's stressed he buries himself in work and takes it out on me by buying me everything he thinks I 'deserve'. I got 5 pairs of heels this month alone and 6 bundles of 30 inch Brazilian hair! I'm not that tall so 30 inches is a bit of an overkill. I had to give Brain's girlfriend 3 bundles of the Brazilian and some of my shoes and dresses. She was so happy, she cried and my

heart melted. I think I really like her. It's just that I'm too busy to play happy friends right now. I have even stopped considering taking her boyfriend from her. He still wants me though and he lets me know every now and then.

There's so much negativity in this world, I can't believe it. People have come up with all sorts of crazy explanations of where I got the Jeep from considering I don't work. The warden asked me the other day. He was like, "How did you afford such a car when you don't work? Or are you sleeping with ministers now?".

How narrow minded!

I told him, I save up and if he saves up he might afford one too.

I was a bit rude about it but I'm just tired of that question.

Word on the street is that I'm sleeping around with some old ministers that's why I have these cars of mine. Brain's girlfriend says they are just jealous and I should ignore them. I really like her.

I have to drive to the campus in town to collect some chemicals for our lab that were delivered to the wrong campus. We need them urgently so I can't afford to ask the driver to go and pick them up. He will go through many departments and probably return with them later in the afternoon. So I'll just go.

The lady at the department I'm directed to is those middle aged, holier than thou women who love making you feel bad for not going to church. She then starts asking me which church I go to. I say I'm still church hunting and haven't found one I fit in. I've given worse answers to that question before but she is nice about it that's why I was honest.

She says I must come to hers next Sunday. She then asks me when I'm getting married. Why do people ask the woman when she's getting married? It's not like you can propose to yourself! That question should be directed at men. I say I don't believe in marriage and you should have seen her face! I tell her I'll be turning 26 tomorrow, so marriage is really not on my to do list. That's when she sits me down and gives me a whole lecture about the beauty of marriage and having that one man that is all yours coming back to you every night.

Then I don't know how it went from marriage to cheating. She says what's worse than a cheating husband is the woman he cheats with. She says, how do you sleep at night knowing another woman is crying because of you? She says the tears of that woman will be your curse and you will look for happiness and never find it. This feels like a personal attack! She asks if I have a boyfriend and I say no. I just want to get out of here. She gives me a pamphlet from her church and says she wishes to see me on Sunday. I feel terrible inside.

She has to walk me to the car so she can carry the other box with Hexane. When she sees my car it's like her jaw will drop off her face to the ground.

"This is your car? Where did you get it? My word, it's brand new!", she says putting the box in the boot and walking around opening every door.

"Yes, it's mine", I say.

She stands in front of me with her hands on her hips like she's my mother.

"Where did you get this car?", she says.

I feel like I'm being accused!

"I bought it", I say.

I must have just said I have rich parents and stopped there but I'm pretty slow.

"This is a R900 000 car! Where did you get that much money from? You said you are a student!", she says.

Mother Mary in heaven please pray for me.

I have no answer to that.

"You know what my child, I'm not trying to be mean or to pretend like I know you or something. But if a man, who's not your husband, buys you such a car, what are you giving him in return? If he can spend so much on you, he owns you and he will do whatever he wants with you because he owns you. Please come to church", she says.

I assure her it wasn't a man, that I actually have enough money to buy the car myself.

She doesn't buy it and says she'll pray for me.

I can't wait to get out of here. Why do people enjoy spoiling my day and making me feel terrible? I try never to step on anyone's toes or judge them. I'm nice and I keep to myself. Why can't everyone else do the same?

I call Elik as I drive out and I feel so down. You know sometimes when I review things I say after the fact, I realise I sometimes sound dumb as hell.

"Elik, do you own me?", I say.

"What?", he says.

"Do you feel like you own me?", I say.

"What are you talking about?", he says.

I tell him what the woman said about the car.

"You know what baby, you listen to so many voices, they confuse you. You need to stop listening to people. Me and you know what we have. Forget everyone else", he says.

"I know but...", I say.

"But nothing. I love you, you know that right?", he says.

"I know", I say.

"Good. Now I have a meeting to get to so I can't talk for long. I'll call you later alright?", he says.

"Alright baby. Love you", I say.

My heart is still sore though. But Elik is right. I need to quieten these external voices and do me. I turn up the radio as I hit the N2 and the song that plays is like it's playing for me. Elik's words fly out of my ears and I'm back to depressed stage. The song playing on radio is 'Four Years Old by Chris Brown'. It has me feeling very emotional as I look at my life.

I mean, I have everything I want. I have the money, the weaves, the clothes, the shoes, the cars, the travelling. I afford to take care of my family and I have a man who buys me gifts. I have the life. Everything that I want that money can buy, I have. But how about what I need? Do I really have what I need? Do I even know what I need or I have been so ok with my situation with Elik for so long I forgot what I really need.

I feel like I've been stuck on stupid for a very long time. For a moment I consider passing by the pharmacy and buying pain pills but I come to my senses.

I get back to campus and text Bunke to come and help me with the boxes. He really hates my car I know. He made that very clear.

My spirits are too low today though so I don't mind him and his opinions.

"You alright madam?" Bunke says as I hand him the box.

Why did he have to ask, now the tears are going to come!

"No", I say.

"Why?", he says.

"I'm not ok B. I'm a mess. You were right!", I say.

"What's wrong now?", he says.

"Everything is wrong. My whole life is wrong. Everything is just wrong", I say.

"Come on, don't cry", he says but it's too late.

He hugs me as I cry my eyes out. With the water shortage in Cape Town, maybe I should offer to donate my tears. I cry so easily.

I'm sure people passing by are wondering what's wrong. When I'm better, Bunke says I can go to your room and he'll run those samples. I say I can't. He can't be doing all my work for me. It's not fair. I have to put on my big girl panties and own this life I chose.

This Naija king is so kind though. He's one of the kindest people I've ever known. Even when he points out that I'm wrong he isn't mean about it. I'd thought considering our history he would hate me or be awkward but somehow he's there for me than most.

Bunke is still helping me with experiments and Brain is helping me with data analysis. I'm almost there. Things are falling into place. I still have my Fortuner and I park it side by side with the Jeep outside rez. They look so majestic. My sweet black and white babies.

I have been so busy I haven't decided what to do with the Fortuner. I'm considering giving it to my father but I still need to find a way to get it home. I'm sure Elik could have it taken there but I don't want to ask him for everything. I want to do somethings for myself.

I have had so little sleep in the past month, I have eye bags. I try and put cucumber slices over my eyes sometimes but they don't really go away. I don't even have time to go to a spa, or do my nails or anything vain like that. I look so plain. I miss Elik so much. He always makes me feel so much better.

Anyway tomorrow is my birthday but I'm not in a celebratory mood. I'm skipping it this year. I didn't even send hints to Elik and I know he's so busy chasing that paper, he won't remember. But that's fine, I really don't feel like a birthday this year. I don't even want anyone wishing me a happy birthday!

It's my birthday today. I said I'm skipping my birthday this year. If I keep this up, I will graduate on time after all. My mother calls and I guess it's her way of saying happy birthday when she says 26 years ago at this time she was in labour and couldn't wait for me to just be born already! She says that every year.

The guys in the lab forgot my birthday. I know I said I'm skipping it but they should have bought me a cake like they did last year! I'm upset with them and snappy and the poor guys don't know what they did wrong. Ndivhu tells them to ignore me because it's probably that time of the month! I give him the eye and he apologises immediately.

I've been busy all day anyway. My phone vibrates and it's a message from Elik. It reads,

"Happy birthday my queen. I got you lunch. Go and collect it at the staff diner". I smile. He remembered! He could have gotten me anything in the world but he chose to get me a R40 lunch from the staff diner. It's 2 pm but I can still eat. He's so thoughtful. The staff diner is our beginning. Where we first met.

I could use a break so I tell the guys I'll be right back. I walk across towards the student centre. When I get there, guess who's sitting there by the corner. Elik! And he brought the two rascals with him. They run up to me when they see me. I'm so happy. This is the best surprise ever. It's just the three of them. It's after lunch so

there's no food left. Actually there's no one left. I don't even see the serving ladies. I then hug my step babies and take them by hand and go greet their father.

"Hey", I say and give him a quick kiss.

I don't think kissing him in front of these kids is appropriate. I'm shocked Komla hasn't poisoned them against me!

"Hey. Happy birthday", he says.

"I can't believe you came all the way down here. And you brought these two with you!", I'm so excited.

"You know you would kill me if I forgot your birthday! I still want to live! Plus, you've been going on about Peter and Paul, so I thought I should bring them", he says.

He's so precious.

"Let's go and pack. We going to Sun City. Our flight leaves in 3 hours", he says.

"What? No Elik", I say.

"Come on Fierce. For your birthday!", he says.

He's being unfair now. He can't just show up and say we are going and I should just pack up and go.

"I'm really busy. I have so much to do. Can't we do this some other time?", I say.

"We always celebrate your birthday baby. I'm begging you", he says.

"No baby", I say.

I don't know what's wrong with him. I do appreciate that he's here but I can't just up and leave like that.

It takes a lot of convincing and I say yes eventually. I wanted to skip my birthday this year so I can work in the lab!

“And the kids?” I ask.

“Komla will pick them up at the airport”, he says.

I sigh.

We go to my rez and the kids are telling me about their friends and stuff and that they missed me. They are too cute.

I say I will go alone into my room so I can change and pack.

“Can we squeeze in a quickie”, Elik whispers in my ear.

“No. Are you crazy! The kids!”, I say.

“We will leave them in the car”, he says.

“Elik they are kids! You won't leave them alone in a car! And don't you ever leave them alone anywhere for that matter!”, I say.

I wasn't aware that I'd raised my voice. Is he crazy?

“Your presents”, he says. He takes out a big bag and says he didn't know what to get me so he got a bit of everything! Wow Elik!

He pulls me in for a kiss and tells me to make it snappy. I give him my car keys so he can look at the Jeep then run into rez. I throw in a couple of clothes and change into shorts. I make a mental note to keep a bag packed in future since someone doesn't discuss travel plans with me anymore! I quickly go through my presents, there's dresses, running shoes, lingerie and gift cards from so many stores I

wonder when I'll get the time to use them. The best thing among the presents is a fuel card! I will no longer pay for fuel with my own money. Oh happy day! That's honey to my soul.

We get to Joburg and I don't know what goes on in Elik's head! You'd swear he's trying to get me killed or something!

He says, "Baby, please take the kids to Komla. I need to quickly go speak to someone at customs. Let's meet outside ABSA".

He says that so easily like it's a normal thing to say!

You should have seen how my eyes popped open. This man! He still doesn't see anything wrong and kisses the boys and tells them he'll see them soon. Then he takes my bags, walks away and leaves me with the kids!

I take a deep breath and walk towards the exit for departures. I have reached a new low. I have one kid in each hand and they are excited as always but I'm too nervous to really pay attention to whatever they are saying.

"Mummy", Peter says and runs forwards. I'm left with Paul in the hand. I could turn around and run back but the automatic doors only open from the other side and luck is not on my side today, because no one is exiting to give me that gap. I still have Paul in my hand and I think I'm squeezing the poor boy's hand too hard. I have no option but to walk.

Komla is with her sister! How much more bad luck can I have in one day! This duo doesn't play when it comes to beating people up.

“Bye aunt Fierce”, Paul says and hugs me. I’m too frozen to hug him back. I need to start standing my ground with Elik! He can’t always be sending me into the lion’s den and I just nod my head and go. I just hope these women won’t do anything dramatic in front of these kids. But I’m not going to linger around to find out.

“Where’s your dad?”, the sister asks the kids.

She looks at me like she’s ready to slap a bitch.

“They are going to Sun city”, Peter blurts out.

If he wasn’t so young and so cute, I would have kicked him in the mouth.

I’m not going to wait here to be beaten. I run away. Literally run. On high heels no gal. I have to get inside ABSA just to be safe you know. Elik shows up some 30 minutes later. I want to slap that smug look off his face but there are so many people around.

“Thanks baby”, he says.

I’m not talking to him. He left his car at the airport so we walk down to the parking bays and drive. He keeps saying he loves me and asking what I want. He’s an idiot. We get to Sun City 2 hours later and it’s getting dark already. I’m still not talking!

I only start talking to him when we get to our room and his hands and body convince me that he’s not such a terrible person after all. Afterwards, I’m no longer upset at him. He said sorry when I was in a whole different dimension and I found myself forgiving him. So we good now. He says he didn’t want to see Komla that’s why he made me take the kids to her. So he thought it was a great idea to

have me do the drop off instead! I think he wanted her to know that he will be with me, but I don't know the reason behind it.

CHAPTER 55

You know when you wake up with that morning after glow and you got it good all night and you have breakfast delivered to your room and you feel like a million dollars. Plus you have the man of your dreams in your arms and he can't stop telling you how amazing you are! You feel like you've made it in life. Like you are the It girl. That was me this morning. I was tired but my heart was excited and my soul was at peace and I was feeling myself.

Elik has the sweetest tongue in the whole world, excuse the pun. When he showers me with compliments I just become putty in his hands. I still get those goose bumps I felt the first time everytime he hugs me from behind and kisses my neck. I think he knows it because he does it quite a lot now.

We had an early morning game drive in Pilanesburg and got to see four of the big five then got back to the hotel for breakfast. There are so many zebras in that game park yoh. If I could poach 10 no one would notice they are missing and I would be able to feed my whole village. After breakfast we did some quad biking around the resort, had a helicopter ride over the North west province and just walked around Sun City taking pictures. Me posing and him playing camera man. Teamwork.

He has thing of putting his arm over my shoulder and balancing on me when we walk. He drops all his weight on me and I always feel like I'm carrying a sack of maize on my shoulders. He knows I hate it but he does it all the time anyway. We had a very weird conversation as we walked back to our room.

"What's your favourite element on the periodic table?" he asked from no where.

"Do people have favourite elements?", I asked.

I didn't know that was a thing! Like who asks someone what their favourite element is! There are 118 elements there and they are just that - elements!

"Fine. What's your favourite transition metal then", he says.

I don't know why we were being all nerdy and the question was bizzare. No one shows favouritism to elements! We don't discriminate.

"I don't know. I guess I would say gold. No it's platinum. Both actually. I guess I'd pick those two if someone held me at gun point", I said.

I wasn't really taking the conversation seriously.

"Why those two?", he said.

"Well, I don't know. Let's see. Platinum is highly unreactive and it has that precious silverish-white colour. Then gold because it's gold. That bright metallic yellow lustre just screams 'Le good life'. I also would pick it because it's highly unreactive. I hate unstable elements, they make our jobs hard", I said.

"How about you?", I felt the need to ask.

"That's easy. My favourite elements in the periodic table are F (Flourine), I (Iodine), Er (Erbium) and Ce (Cerium). Get it? They spell your name!", he said.

He's so silly but he's so adorable while being silly!

I wish one day when I have his kids, they will have his eyes. I don't even know why he was blessed with such beautiful eyelashes! He doesn't need them! Some of us have to spend 90 minutes lying on a table in a salon getting fake lashes on. It's just not fair!

Now we are chilling in the Valley of the Waves, the fake beach of Sun City. If I didn't live in Cape Town, I would think it was amazing. It's midweek so it's not that packed. It's mostly old rich people trying to finish their retirements before they die and tourists taking advantage of our weaker currency and couples like us who don't have an 8-5 kind of job. So there I am, shades on, umbrella drink in hand, lying back on Elik's chest. I'm feeling myself. He's going through his phone and says it's work related. After that last time I went through his phone and ended up having my heart broken, I learnt an important lesson. Stay away from your man's phone if you want a long happy life!

"Baby, the front tyres of my car just got busted", Elik says.

I'm not sure if he's serious or not because he seems so calm. He has this calmness about him sometimes that's confusing. He could be angry but just look at you blankly. It took me sometime to learn to read him.

"What? How?", I say sitting up.

He shows me his phone. These fancy cars come with these apps that notify you of these kinds of things. I'm yet to activate mine for the Jeep.

"Who would do something like that?", I say.

"You know who", he says.

"That loony of yours? She followed us here?", I say.

We laugh.

He says she's the only one who could have done that.

I now refer to Komla as a loony because some of her actions leave you wondering about her state of mind. Some messages she sends me leave me wanting to pray for her. I'm sure she calls me that too with her friends and in laws, since she likes broadcasting things that are better off kept secret!

So thank you very much Komla for spoiling my day! Can't a girl be allowed to celebrate her birthday in peace! I gulp down the drink. I've never been one to waste food!

"Let's go see what's going on", I say.

"No leave her be. She just wants attention and I won't give her that gratification", he says.

"How will we leave if she damages the car?", I say.

I need to be back to campus tomorrow!

"We'll be just fine", he says.

I know. But I cringe thinking of that Mercedes damaged. It's too fierce to be defaced.

So we go on and talk about Komla. You would swear we are talking about some shebeen queen from the township, not his wife. The more he talks, the more I realise he resents her and is still punishing her for what happened in Ghana. I

can't figure out why he's still with her though or why she's not leaving him. I feel like I'm stuck in the middle.

"She needs to grow up!", he says.

"But baby was it necessary to make me take her kids to her? You know how she is", I say.

"They are my kids too! What's the big deal?", he says.

Sometimes I wonder. What's the big deal? Are you kidding me? He can't see what the big deal is?

His phone rings and it's hotel management informing him that some women are vandalising his car and saying they have already called the cops. We were going to ignore her but now with police involved and all, maybe it's best we go. I have to talk him into going. He says we should just ignore it. He says that's why he pays insurance. I manage to convince him to just go and handle it. Actually, he will go and I will stay right here on this fake beach with my pink drink. This is his mess not mine. I don't have a wife!

But Elik acts like he hates me sometimes! He insists that I come with him.

I say hell to the no.

He says,

"Baby, I need you to be there so you can stop me if I'm about to do something I will regret".

Emotional blackmail, really now?

But I'm so dickmatised, whenever Elik says jump I just ask how high. So against my better judgement, I wrap the sarong around my waist, pack up our things and I go with him.

I strongly believe that either I have an in built drama magnet or I was bewitched by a very strong witch who died and now can't undo the spell or I'm possessed by a chaotic dlozi (ancestral spirit). I need to seriously consider visiting a sangoma (seer) for answers.

I can't believe this woman followed us all the way down here! She drove all the way from Joburg for what? To fight? What does she think that will accomplish? Shouldn't she be at work or something? You would have thought by now she will have accepted that Elik is ours. It's not like I took him, I get a fraction of his time anyways.

If I accepted that why can't she do the same and we can all live in harmony. We could even sit down and draw up a roaster of who sees him when and maybe give each other tips on what makes Elik happy. She can be president in the kitchen and I have no problem overseeing the bedroom matters. See, we could have peace and make Elik a happy man.

Elik and I have been at this for so long now, it feels like a normal relationship and I don't feel guilty anymore. It's not like we trying to hide really. I could be second wife. Who am I kidding. Second wife, me? No. Never. Hell would freeze over if that ever happened. I'm happy where I am right now.

We get there and the cops already restrained Komla and her sister! This sister is so loyal to this 'save Komla's marriage' movement, you'd swear she's getting paid for it. She reminds me of those women who riot and burn tyres in the middle of the road then threaten to take off their clothes when police try to stop them.

Doesn't she have a husband of her own to worry about? He's probably out there doing much worse than Elik's doing! I'm scared of that woman. I still have nightmares of her trying to beat me up and me running away.

I'm just hoping they can't see it's me behind these shades and big sun hat. There is a small group of people watching. People love things! I'm sure they are expecting someone to start fighting someone and people to start weaving pulling and insulting each other. They won't get that unfortunately. I'm more graceful than that. I'm nice, I don't fight, ask Mbali! I get beaten though.

The Mercedes looks perfectly fine to me! These women didn't even do anything to this car. You call letting the air out of tyres vandalism. Pssh! Amateurs!

I stay with the crowd pretending to be an onlooker as well. Elik goes and talks to the cops, then comes back to me.

"Let's go baby", he says.

"No Elik. Tell them to let them go. Come on", I say.

"No. Isn't she's a criminal now? Let her be treated like one", he says.

"Come on baby. Don't be like that", I say.

"She came all the way here on her own. No one invited her. So let her deal with it!", he says.

"Don't do that baby. Just tell the police to let them go. Please", I say.

Komla and her sister are screaming, at me I guess, and they are not helping the situation. I'm trying to plead their case here can they just shut up for a second!

"Seriously baby. Listen to me", I plead.

I guess I'm just feeling bad because contrary to popular belief, I have a functioning conscience.

"Drop it Fierce, geez! I said no!", he says.

"Elik, I'm just saying...", I try to reason with him.

"You know what, go to the room!", he says.

"What?", I ask. Shocked.

"Just go", he says, then walks away and leaves me standing there like a statue.

Why is he now angry at me? What did I do? I'm just trying to make him see that there's no sense in what he's doing! I'm the peacemaker here. One side of me is telling me to run after him but the other side convinces me not to. I won't give Komla the satisfaction of seeing Elik mad and walking away from me and me running after him. I just stand there. How did we go from laughing minutes ago to this so fast?

He actually left me! And I can't see where he went to now because I had turned to look at Komla and her gaga sister. The cops actually take them away in their car!

They should have known not to come here. What did they think would happen? They expected a bed of roses and champagne and hugs and kisses? Hay suka!

I wave down a shuttle to the Palace of the Lost City and jump in. Now I'm hurt that Elik abandoned me. Why am I doing this to myself? Why can't I just get out of Elik's life already! He's broken and broken people break other people.

As the shuttle drives to the palace, I'm sitting there wondering why I have to go through all this. I jump off and head all the way up to the King Tower and stand up there looking down at everything. The views are amazing! I would have taken a picture if I was in a better mood. I go back down to our room. I was really having a good afternoon now I'm just upset. I need to think, so I go down to the spa and luckily, they have an opening. I just need a 60 minute full body massage so I can close my eyes and think.

Should I stay in this mess of a relationship or do I go? Do I accept this drama as a normal part of my life or do I give Elik an ultimatum and make him pick between me and Komla? I try to relax and enjoy the massage but I can't. I can't reach a decision. Leaving him is not even an option. My brain rejects it as soon as I think of it. I love him too much to consider starting all over without him. I don't exactly know what's going on between him and Komla but I need to be on his side. I have that blind loyalty. So, with that said, I've made my decision. I'm not going anywhere.

I go back to the room and put on a dress. I search everywhere for Elik! I even went through the maze and spent almost an hour getting lost, just to go look for him at the bar at the end. His phone is off. I'm worried sick about him. I really don't understand what happened there. I don't think I did anything wrong. I was being a voice of reason. I have been searching for hours! I give up and go to our room and wait.

I don't know whether to go back out there and look for him or what. But if I find him and he doesn't want to talk to me, then what? I'm going out of my mind. I'm not suitable for this side chick post. I don't have the right qualifications. I never got the rule book. I got it wrong a long time ago and now I'm in too deep. I think girls in my situation are not supposed to love the man just give him sex and take his money, and the job is done. But I love him and I would still love him if he didn't have all this money.

It's past 10 when the door opens and he walks in. I thought I would be relieved but I realise I'm actually very angry with him. He could have handled this so much better! He needs to grow up! As soon as he steps in, I jump off the bed and scream at him. He ignores me and just sits there with his head in his hands. After a minute of shouting alone, I stop. You start sounding mad when you talk alone! Besides I think he's hurt and not angry so I feel the need to be kinder to him, to embrace him and hold him till he's ok. I guess whatever is going on between him and Komla runs much deeper than I thought. He will talk when he's ready.

"I'm sorry Elik", I say.

Why am I even the one apologising here!

He gets up, kicks off his shoes and gets off his clothes. He switches off the light. We always do it with the lights on but when the lights are turned off I know what's coming. He needs the lights off so he doesn't have to look into my eyes. He tears my dress off me, literally. It was thin material anyway. He just grabs me and throws me on the bed and is not even trying to be gentle about it. I think he means to give me a love bite on the neck but it feels like a hate bite. He actually bites me and I wince. It hurts. His fingers are digging deep into my skin and his weight is crushing me. I close my eyes and bite hard on my lower lip. I bite so hard I taste blood.

But I won't stop him. He needs this. He needs to be ok. This is my way of saying 'I'm here for you baby'. I would actually say those words out loud if he wasn't choking me so hard. I'm gasping for air. I can hardly breathe. It feels like an eternity before he's done. This is all about him.

Just great! Now I have bruises and bite marks to cover up in the morning! And I have to wake up early and throw out that dress so he doesn't see it. But at least my baby will be ok now. We will be ok. I need to cover up all evidence so he doesn't feel guilty. As always, he says "I'm so sorry" and faces away from me. I hold him and assure him he didn't hurt me and that I love him and that I'm right here. He doesn't see the tears roll down my eyes and to protect him from himself, he will never know.

HAPTER 56

You know when you are trying to sleep but your thoughts won't leave you alone? It's like when you close your eyes, the pain doubles over and keeps intensifying. It's like that pain you feel when you are having period pains. You just keep wiggling like a caterpillar in labour trying to find a position where you don't feel the pain that much.

I toss and turn and toss and turn until I can't anymore. I keep seeing Athi's face in my head. Tonight's session with Elik took me all the way down to lane Athi when I lay helpless on the floor. I don't know how because I was ok after Elik was done. I was hurt but I was ok.

I get out of bed and go to the bathroom and wash my face. I take a closer look at my neck and it looks bad. I told Elik it was ok but was it? Is this that I'm seeing in the mirror ok?

I walk back and switch on the lights. Elik is sleeping so peacefully, I hesitate to wake him. But he has no right to sleep while I'm awake because of him! I know how he hates being woken up but screw that! I need him to wake up. I would love to take that champagne sitting over there and pour it in his ears. But I actually respect him and this thing called love makes us not want to hurt the one your heart chose.

"Wake up!", I say and shake him till he wakes up.

He takes so long to wake up it's like a truck trying to accelerate! It takes forever!

"What the hell Fierce! I just slept! Geez", he says.

"I need you to wake up", I say.

"What? No man, leave me alone!", he says.

I can see he thinks I'm playing. I pull the covers and drop them on the floor.

"Fierce what's going on? I'm trying to sleep here", he says and puts a pillow over his head.

I pull that pillow and throw it on the floor. He groans and takes another pillow and covers his head. I pull that one too and dump it on the floor. I clear the bed of all pillows. If he wants them he should get up and pick them up!

I've been described as childish before.

I'm clenching my fists so I can stay calm. I feel like punching him square in the face. But who hits a sleeping person?

He whines and complains but he wakes up eventually.

"What are you doing?", he says.

"We need to talk", I say.

"Can't it wait till morning? What time is it anyway?", he says rubbing his eyes and being all grumpy.

"It can't wait unfortunately. It's 2:17 am", I say.

He lies back and groans in his throat. Waking him up is a nightmare.

"Elik sit", I say.

He looks at me but he actually sits! I'm surprised. I thought he would continue trying to sleep. I throw him a pillow.

I'm not sure how to begin. I had a whole angry speech prepared in my head but now I just forgot so I might as well just say it as it is.

"You hurt me again!", I say.

I show him the bruises and teeth marks. This guy actually bit me! Like bit me bit me with his teeth! Funny enough Bunke used to be a biter too! Why do men like biting me though? It's not on.

He looks at what I'm showing him and then looks down and rubs his hands together. Good. He's waking up.

I pace the room, trying to breath and calm down. I refuse to cry and I refuse to be mean. I'll still be sleeping with him tomorrow so I need to approach this like an adult. I pull an ottoman and sit opposite him.

"Are you awake now?", I say.

"What do you think?" he says.

Giving me attitude, I see.

"Elikplim do you remember Athi?", I say.

"Yes. What about him?", he says.

"He raped me. I never really told you what happened", I say.

He's looking at me now.

"He threw me against the wall and then held me down on the floor and raped me. It hurt so bad, physically and emotionally. I tried to scream but he slapped me so hard I thought my jaw was broken. I just lay there and took it. I started thinking that I deserved it. I felt so powerless and I hated every second of it. I didn't press charges because I didn't want to think about it. I wanted the memory gone from my brain. At the end of it all I hated Athi with a deep passion", I say.

He looks at me and I'm sure he doesn't know what to say so I keep talking.

"I felt the same way tonight. I felt like you were doing what he did to me. And I'm afraid next time, in response, I might just hate you too", I say. I'm so calm now and my voice is stable.

"I'm sorry baby", he says.

I've never met anyone who apologises as many times as Elik!

"No don't apologise. I'm not mad anymore. I just want us to talk about this. I need you to understand. Can we talk?", I say.

He nods.

"Cybertron", I say.

"Cybertron", he agrees.

Now he's fully awake.

"Ok. I'll go first. I don't enjoy it at all when you sex me when you are angry. It hurts. But I let you because I love you and I want you to be ok. I didn't say anything last time because I didn't want you feeling terrible about it", I say.

He takes my hands and looks down.

“Elik, me and you, we have bomb sex! Our sex life is off the charts and you know when it comes to that I never say no. So I'm afraid if these angry episodes continue, it might take that away from us. I might stop enjoying you. I'm going to be scared of you and that's the last thing I wish for”, I say.

I just hope I'm making sense. I usually just talk and don't make much sense.

He sighs.

“You know I know it's wrong, but I do it anyway. I'll be so angry and all charged up. I hope you know that it's never meant to hurt you. I hate the feeling afterwards. I feel like a monster”, he says.

“I know but it does hurt me!”, I say.

He looks at me and I look at him.

I need him to hear me.

“Remember back when you asked me why I had slept with that other girl and I said I have needs”, he says. I nod.

How can I forget Mbali! He had said he loves me too much and has some needs that he had to get elsewhere. I hadn't asked then what those needs were. I was afraid to know. Now I know.

“That's what I meant. When I get very angry I just lose control of myself and I never wanted you to see that side of me”, he says. I think he's ashamed and that's making me feel bad. I care too much about him. But we have to talk about this.

"Hey. Look at me", I say and raise his chin. He can't hold the stare.

"Elik. I love you with everything I am. We are good together and we make amazing love! If you want it rough, that's cool, you know I'm always down for whatever! We can try that but it has to be two sided! I need to have a say", I say.

He looks at me like it's the first time he's seeing me. I don't mind roughing it up a bit as long as I'm part of the equation and I'm not just a constant!

"Come here", he says.

I sit on his lap and he rests his head on my shoulder.

"It won't happen again. I swear", he says.

It won't happen I know. I won't let it.

"I'm sorry for what that dog did to you. No one will hurt you like that again. Not even me. I'll protect you. I promise", he says.

I know he will. He has never said it but I know he went through all that trouble to get Athi arrested.

"Next time you get angry can we try talking about it, maybe? Please don't shut me out. When you left me today I was pained. I looked for you everywhere! We lost precious time we could have spent it together you know", I say.

He hugs me tighter.

"You know that I'm trying this whole talking about things business. I never had to talk about anything. I had to take it like a man and walk it off. But you teaching me to talk and I appreciate that. But it will take a while to get there. I'm trying", he says.

I know he's trying. He opens up to me.

I kiss him on the forehead. I love it when he does that to me so I hope the feeling is mutual when roles are reversed.

"Why are you still here?", he says.

"Here? In Sun City?", I'm not sure I understand the question.

"No. Why are you still with me? Why are you so patient with me? After everything", he says.

I need to think of an answer. That's a good question. Why am I still here again?

"No one has ever loved me like you do. And I don't think any girl out there could take half the bullshit I put you through. Why haven't you left me yet?", he says.

Let's see. Good looks. Good sex. Good wallet. Good mind. Good heart. Good soul that my soul is drawn to. Soulmate. I know deep down inside him there's a whole lot of goodness and willingness to do right. You just have to dig a little deeper to see the man he truly is.

"I love you, unconditionally. And I know you are a great guy, baby. I don't know. You just complete me in a way I can't explain", I say.

"I know you tired of hearing it, but I'm sorry. For everything. And this *runs finger over bruises on neck* will never happen again. I swear", he says.

We just sit there for a while. I feel much better now that that's off my chest.

Now I can sleep in peace. The moment reminds me of back then when it was just us two. Before I knew Komla existed. He didn't have as much money then as he does now, but still he treated me like a princess.

I fit myself into his body and let him hold me. I'm glad I spoke up. He might have never known so never stopped or worse he might have thought I enjoyed it! I don't know which one is worse.

"You know I love you, right?", he says.

"I know", that much I know.

It's time for me to sleep now.

CHAPTER 57

Talking to Elik was a great idea. Not just for me but for us. It brought us closer together and now he's sworn to protecting me. He really hates Athi shame because 'he laid hands on his baby'. He says he's glad I told him about the rape because although he knew it was bad, he had no idea how exactly I had felt. He says hearing me say it made him understand and see how what he was doing was hurting me. He actually thanked me for talking about it!

He says I should stay away from Athi's case. He says he knows I'm going to want to find out what's going on and start feeling sorry for him and then start trying to help him. He made me promise to stay away and I promised.

I had to go back to school the next day. I'm not sure what happened to Komla and her sister or who bailed them out. I never asked. I'm back to my normal life. By normal I mean sleeping 3 hours, sitting in front of a computer for long hours, drinking cup after cup of coffee all day and night and hanging out with Brain, Ndivhu and Bunke all day.

When I first met Elik he would shut down when something was wrong. I always talked about things and I always cried and I didn't mind being emotional with him. He on the other hand was a 'man'. I encouraged him to do the same. With time he started talking and opening up bit by bit. We still not there but it's progress and I know he tries shame.

I think growing up without a father, having to be a provider from a young age, going to juvenile and being constantly told to man up affected him deeply. So he runs from his problems instead of facing them head on. But he knows I'll never make him feel bad for crying or talking about things. He's my man and I'm his safe space.

Three weeks passed. I don't remember when I had my last period so I start getting scared that maybe I'm pregnant. I went to the pharmacy last night and picked up 2 pregnancy tests and 2 HIV tests, just in case one is faulty. I mean, after my miscarriage I never went back on contraceptives. I've been meaning to but I haven't gotten around to it. I'm very careless. And Elik and I don't know what the words using protection mean. Besides, although he swears that he's 'faithful' now, if the past has taught me anything it's that he can't be trusted. I just feel the need to know my status.

I do the HIV ones first. This is self torture! Having to stab my finger then squeeze the blood into the well of the test kit, then add the diluent that comes with the kit, then wait for 15 long minutes to know my fate! Its torture. While waiting, I go and do the pregnancy tests then come back and sit on my bed with four kits in front of me. 15 minutes later, there is only one line on each. I'm negative and I'm not pregnant! I do a young victory dance.

What I did is irresponsible though. What if I was positive and pregnant and I'm alone in my room? Isn't this how people get anxiety attacks and end up committing suicide?

I don't know how I'm not pregnant. I guess it's just my luck. I'm not even going to consider that maybe I can't get pregnant anymore. Like what if I was only meant to have those two kids only? Or what if Komla has done juju on me so I don't have her husband's children? Some of these wives will do anything to keep their husbands sometimes! You can't be sure.

That thought has been haunting me all morning so I end up calling my aunt. I don't know who else to call. We speak at length and I end up telling her I had a miscarriage. I just dropped it on her like that without warning. She thinks I mean I just had it like right now.

She says,

“Ok my baby. After you are done with the hospital, you need to come home for cleansing. Don't feel pain. It happens”. I'm not really big on cultural rituals so I just rolled my eyes. I felt pain when I spoke about the miscarriage. I didn't speak about it. I just bottled it up and had other things to focus on so never really dealt with it. I think I might need counselling.

She says, “And you can't sleep with a man before the cleansing. Make a plan to come home as soon as you can”.

I then have to tell her it happened months ago and I somehow had slept with a man after that. She freaks out and yells at me. I don't know what I did wrong! She's the one who said I must go all out in the bedroom!

But the final verdict is that I should go home. That whole phone conversation had me shook. What's the big deal? Is a cleansing ritual really necessary? Women go through miscarriages all the time and bounce right back without doing anything. Why can't I do the same?

“You see Fierce, this thing of you youngsters not following tradition will only bring you problems in the future!”, she said before hanging up. These adults need to

make up their minds. Do they want us to follow tradition or to go to church? They can't expect us to do both now! Personally, I do none of the above. I'm still church hunting and as for tradition, I just take part when I'm home because I'm expected to.

I call Elik and tell him I need to go home sometime and also tell him about my plan to ship the Fortuner to Zimbabwe so my father can use it. I actually wasn't sure how he would react considering he bought it! He says it's cool and we should go this weekend. I tell him I'm very busy so I'll consider going next week. And he says we should go this weekend! He says his Mercedes deserves to see Zimbabwe's potholes.

You know Elik doesn't ask, he tells.

Just after I tell him I'm considering going home, he says,

“Ok then, we will drive down on Friday and come back on Monday”.

This man!

“Who said you are coming?”, I say.

“I did”, he says.

“No Elik! I'll go alone. I'll drive down then fly back”, I say.

“No. You will put that car on a train to Joburg, then from here you will drive it and I'll drive mine and then we'll drive back together”, he says.

“No baby”, I say.

“Stop fighting me on this and focus on more important things like getting that car ready for the road. Is it serviced?”, he says.

I can't win.

I think this man needs any excuse to travel with me! He once had a series of meetings in Dubai and he took me with him. There had been no need to take me because he had back to back meetings but he had insisted and I'd ended up touring Dubai all alone. I'd only see him in the evening and he would be too tired and want to just sleep.

Long story short. Elik won. I'm going to Zimbabwe on Friday. Today is Tuesday. I call Toyota Bellville and they are fully booked. I call the one in Kuilsriver and they come and fetch the car for servicing and say they will drop it off in the evening. I'm sending it to Joburg tomorrow, by train, so I'll pick it up in Park Station.

Meanwhile I need to work harder on my thesis since I'll be gone all weekend. If Elik didn't exist, I would be a doctor by now!

I tell the guys in the lab that I'm going to Zim for a wedding and will be back on Monday. I didn't know what else to say. Bunke didn't buy it and he gave me that disapproving look. I don't know how he's still helping me!

I get to Joburg just before 8 am, take the Gautrain to Park Station then pick up the car at the Shosholoza Meyl Train Station. I hate driving in Joburg CBD! There's so many one ways you won't believe. It's confusing and the taxi drivers drive like they are in Need for speed! It's utter chaos! And there's so many people! Sometimes I

wonder where all these people stay. It's like half the population of South Africa is in Joburg CBD!

I finally make it out of the city centre after almost 3 near accidents. I'm meeting Elik at the office. I get there and he comes out with Lumka. I don't like going into the office because the people working there know his wife and I don't like how they look at me.

I gave up a long time ago trying to tell Elik to look simple so people don't see a cash machine when they see him. But he doesn't listen! So now I just let him do whatever he wants.

Sometimes I wonder why Lumka likes me so much. He treats me so well and calls me when he has problems with his side chicks. Shouldn't he be team Komla? He's been friends with Elik since university so he knew Komla first. Anyway I'm not complaining. It's nice to know that someone is rooting for me.

These guys bought so much groceries, ZIMRA (customs) officials at the border will have a field day confiscating it! Zimbabwe customs has this ridiculously short list of what can be brought into Zimbabwe and what not. And only Elik Nkrumah will think buying groceries at Woolworths, to take home, is a good idea! We have Shoprite, Boxer Superstores and Cambridge Foods for that!

He says he also bought solar panels and a generator! Because apparently my brother said my father said my mother said she wanted solar in her home like

other people. So he's been talking to my brother behind my back? The last time Zibulo asked for Elik's number I didn't give him! So I don't know how he got it. Does Elik know that we are not married? Sometimes I think he forgets. He has no business talking to my family. When I point that out, he says I must stay out of it, it's got nothing to do with me. Ouch.

I enjoy watching Lumka with Elik. Their friendship is beautiful to watch! I wish I had a ride or die friend like that too! I hug Lumka goodbye and he says I must take care of Elik. Seriously? Shouldn't Elik take care of me?

Anyway, we hit the road. Elik drives his Mercedes and I drive my Fortuner. We go through Botswana this time, it's nearer. Driving such a long distance alone sucks. It's so boring and even the music starts irritating at some point. Elik drives like he's on steroids, so he leaves me behind. He keeps waiting for me everytime and says I must stop driving like an old woman. We will ignore the fact that I'm driving a Toyota and him a Mercedes-Benz! So the power of our engines is on whole different levels.

I got caught by a speed trap in Botswana, somewhere after Francistown. I was trying to catch up with Elik! The cops jumped onto the road from nowhere. I almost ran over them. They were hiding in the bushes to trap speeding cars? That seems dangerous. They can't be jumping in front of cars! Overspeeding ones for that matter! I should have just kept driving. Mxm. I had to pay a spot fine because I'm passing through so they couldn't give me a ticket. Thankfully they agreed to take Rands.

We get home just before sunset and I'm so exhausted. I hate driving long distances. My father seems more excited to see umkhwenyana (son in law) than he is to see me! The way my family has welcomed Elik as if he's part of us is very disturbing. These people have always been cultured and strict but they have pushed aside the rule book at the first smell of money. Even my eldest brother Zibulo is home. I know that one is just here to cash in. Him and Elik are friends now! They have even been speaking to each other on the phone and I didn't know.

My little brother, Inflation, is so tall now it's like they are feeding him growth hormones and fertiliser! He will be my height soon at this rate. At least he's excited to see me unlike everyone else here. I need to get him out of this village soon and put him up in a boarding school in South Africa. I'll have that talk with Elik.

Our cars look so out of place side by side in the yard. I want to laugh at Elik. His car is covered in dust! Mine is better. I haven't yet told my father that the car is now his. I'll do that tomorrow. My aunt will be coming down tomorrow evening as well, she agreed to take the bus so I don't have to drive all the way to Bulawayo to fetch her.

It's like no one cares I'm here so I might as well go to sleep. I want to shower but there's no shower and it's hard bathing inside a Blair toilet with a candle. I'll just have to bath in the morning. I ask to be excused as they off load the groceries and

solar panels and generator! I still can't believe Elik is on that light-up-Fierce's-home tip!

You know the situation at home is quite weird. My father has two wives. So the left half of the home belongs to my step mother and the right half belongs to my mother. My father's room is in front, near the gate. But because my mothers don't like each other much it's always awkward when I'm home. We completely ignore that half of the family.

I'm grown now though so I know that whether I like it or not, my step family is my family too. I go and say hi to my stepmother and her children and just let them know that I'm around. Her youngest daughter looks so much like me it's really scary. Then I go to sleep in my mother's hut. I'm so tired I just fall asleep.

No one woke me up this morning and when I eventually woke up, everyone was busy and not giving me much attention. They even had breakfast without me!

Mother is upset. Apparently she wanted the solar system to be installed in her half of the home alone but my father wouldn't have it. So now it's the whole home. Which just makes sense.

I'm of no help here, Elik has taken all the attention and everyone is treating him like a king and completely disregarding me. I must say though, I'm loving watching

him work and the way he carries himself is admirable. He's so polite, it's attractive. At least he's wearing a black T-shirt! Last time we were here he went to help slaughter the cow wearing a white T-shirt!

There's a few men from around the village helping with the work and I now have to join in making them tea. I hate this unsliced bread. It's a mission trying to slice it then spreading butter on one slice and jam on the other to make a sandwich.

I ask to speak to father alone when he gets a chance and he takes me by hand to his house. Only now does he ask about my health, the journey and my overall wellbeing. I say I'm fine and assure him that everything is going well in my life.

He says "why did you bring two cars instead of one?". I tell him the white one is his. I'm giving it to him. I make sure to emphasise that it's mine not Elik's. I've never seen my father's tears but today I saw them. He hugged me and actually cried on my shoulder and recited all our clan names, even ones I've never heard before. Some sounded made up. I think I'm daughter of the year.

He then goes outside and shouts at everyone to gather around. It's 16 of us. I didn't notice we were so many here! It's my mother and her 3 children. My step mother and her three. Then father and Elik and 6 other men from around.

He makes a whole speech about how his daughter has bought him a car and how proud he is. Elik keeps smiling at me as I blush from my father's praises. He looks navy black next to my brother. My brother is quite fair skinned. I always make fun

of Elik's dark complexion but I actually really love it and wouldn't have it any other shade.

Father asks Elik to 'remind' him how to drive. And there goes Elik, father, Zibulo and the 6 men! I'd forgotten how big a Fortuner is. They all fit in there.

At least now I can talk to my mother. She says we must go and fetch water at the river. I say we must take Elik's car and put all the buckets in there. She insists that we carry the buckets on our heads, because that's what women do. I don't think I can still carry a 25 L bucket of water on my head but we'll see.

You know my mother really doesn't know me. She thinks I'm still that innocent high school child of hers. I wasn't even that innocent in high school but I managed to keep my grades high and behaved at home so I maintained a clean reputation.

She first goes on and on about how great Elik is. I wish they could stop worshipping him already! We get that he's awesome. Ok maybe I'm a little jealous. I'm used to being the one everyone talks about when I'm home. But now Elik has replaced me.

She then asks me when we are getting married. I have no answer to that because it's never happening. She then reminds me that I can not sleep with Elik before he pays lobola. She says otherwise I'll be worth less cows and Elik won't respect me. I just nod. I don't know what else to say. The way she values cows over me is

making me question her parenting skills. I guess it's true that no matter how important you think you are, one day your parents will exchange you for cows.

She thanks me for the car and says she's proud of me and she applauds my choice in Elik. He has them wrapped around his little finger. He bought them presents and when they say, "We don't have this", his response is "Let's go and buy it".

She says he's well mannered and was raised well and I shouldn't mind that he's pitch black because the beauty of a man is not on his face but in his wallet. What's she talking about! I think Elik is the shit! I think he looks really really good! So I don't know what she's trying to say. And who describes someone as pitch black! That's rude. But well, to each their own.

I change the subject and ask my mother why she doesn't like my step mother. She says because that witch stole her husband. I ask why she stayed married to my father then. She says because marriage is a lifetime commitment. Once lobola is paid, you don't leave. I don't know about that. She also quickly slides in that had she left I would never have been born!

She then says,

"Men will be men. He will cheat but because he cheats on you it doesn't mean you should be upset or start packing or acting the fool. If he treats you well but sees other women, what's the problem with that? You just have to be strong and

accept that he's a man, he's just being what he is", she says. I don't know about that too.

Her views on life are totally different from mine. I understand what she's saying because that's what we preach in the village. We say 'indoda yinkonjwa kodwa umfazi liwule!' (A man with many women is a boss but a woman with many men is an abomination'. So a man can go around doing whatever he wants it's cool. Also no one has ever been known to leave their marriage simply because their husband is cheating!

We carry our buckets and walk back. She updates me on everything going on in the village and whose husband got who pregnant and who the livestock thieves these days are and who bewitched who.

I haven't seen Elik much really and I'm sulking. So when they get back I go and ask to talk to him. They delivered those 6 men to their homes. My mother insists that father drive her around in the car and he says yes. Clever man. Mother would have caused a scene.

As soon as they leave, I go with Elik to the hut he's sleeping in. I need to talk to him. I last really saw him in Sun City and I've been in Cape Town since. I feel like since we got here he's been neglecting me. I don't even know why that's upsetting me.

He's sitting on that prison type bed in this hut. I'm glad I had the sense to buy bedding before coming.

"So why did you bother coming with me if you knew you would act like I don't exist!", I say.

He sits there and just smiles at me.

"No I'm serious. You've been acting like I'm not even here! You've spent the whole time running around with father and Zie!", I'm just sulking.

"You are cute", he says.

"You are annoying! I'm being serious here", I say.

"Are you jealous?", he says still smiling.

"Jealous of what? I'm just stating facts!", I snap.

"Awww you are jealous! You just want my attention. That's adorable", he says.

He's so silly.

"Come. Give your man a hug. You know you want to", he says.

He's an idiot but I give him the hug anyway. I've missed him. He stands and keeps teasing me for being jealous and wanting his attention. Then we start kissing and he gently pushes me against the wall and keeps kissing me. I haven't gotten some in a while and now my hormones are just getting too excited. I think I'm not thinking because I take off his T-shirt.

"No baby. You said we can't do it here. Remember?", he says.

"There's no one around and they will be gone for a while", I say. He's skeptical but I convince him it's just fine and he should stop resisting already! The rest of our clothes follow on the floor. My brain stopped working the moment he kissed me. He turns me to face the wall and I arch my back and push against the wall. He holds one hand over my mouth to stop me from making noise.

I'm in 7th heaven when the door opens and my mother walks in. I thought they would be gone a while! She screams but just stands there with her hands over her head. This can't be happening right now! Elik turns me so he can be out of my mother's view but that just leaves me facing her. This is the second time he uses me as a shield! It's not funny!

Elik still has one hand holding both my hands behind me and the other on my stomach. I'm totally exposed! My mother is still standing there with her hands on her mouth, like what the hell?

"Go away, please", I scream at her.

She walks out and I can hear her talking to herself as she closes the door.

"What is he doing to her?".

Even that time Bunke walked in on me, or the time I sat naked with a cop pointing a flashlight at me in Elik's car, I wasn't this ashamed. I have never been embarrassed like this. I don't think I can face my mother. She's been preaching the no sex before marriage gospel all day today. So now she'll know she was just wasting her oxygen.

Elik tries to tell me it's not that bad. Yes to him it's not that bad! It's not his mother who just walked in on him butt naked and bouncing on a man! Now I have to explain to my mother that I'm not a virgin. I don't think I can face her and I hope she doesn't tell my father. Elik asks if we can continue. Like, what's wrong with him? What goes on in that big head of his?

I quickly dress up in case she comes back. I tiptoe out of the hut and I don't see her outside. I don't see anyone. Elik quickly sneaks out, finds Zibulo in his hut and they go, I don't know where to, leaving me alone to deal with this mess. I don't know what to do right now. Do I go to my mother or does she come to me? I go to the kitchen and just sit there battling with my thoughts.

It's been an hour and mother hasn't come to me. I've been with Elik on chat and he says I must go and talk to her and get it over with. He says she'll understand. I don't think she will. She'll be very disappointed in me and I'm afraid she'll want Elik gone. Network has improved so much these days I'm impressed.

Elik says he's waiting at the growth point and I should tell him when the coast is clear otherwise he's driving back to Joburg and leaving me behind. He is a piece of work!

I think I will go to mother, no matter what happens I will never be the worst child in the family! There's my two useless brothers.

She's in her hut knitting.

"Mama", I say.

"Come. Sit", she says.

I sit on the floor against the wall facing her. I can't look her in the eye.

"I shouldn't have seen that! I should never have. Now I can't unsee it! My poor eyes are scarred for life!" she says shaking her head. Talk about being overly dramatic!

"When did you start having sex Lastborn?", she says.

"Recently", I say.

She keeps quiet.

"I'm sorry mama", I say.

"It's just that I thought I heard someone crying, so I came to check!" she says.

This is too awkward for me.

"Was he hurting you? What was he doing to you?", she says.

I don't know how to answer that second question.

"He wasn't hurting me", I say.

"Were you having sex? Standing? How? In broad daylight?", she says.

I'm not sure how to respond to her questions. I have no wish to explain the theory of standing sex positions to my mother and that when it's good you sometimes moan a bit too loud and scream his name and you swear and that might sound like you are in pain, when in fact you are having the time of your life.

"Can we forget that you saw that, please mama. I'm truly sorry", I say.

"Forget? How can I forget what I saw? Oh my eyes. I need new eyes", she says.

Is she serious right now?

"Do you love him?" she asks looking up at me.

I might as well tell her. She has seen me being fucked, I don't think it gets worse than that.

"He's a good guy but it's complicated. I love him though", I say.

"Is he going to marry you?", she says.

"I don't know", I say.

It's a no but that might not be too helpful right now.

"So you don't know if he'll marry you but you are sleeping or standing or whatever that is, with him?"

"It's complicated mama", I say.

She sighs loudly.

"Lastborn. You can't just be sleeping around with men. You need to get married!", she says.

"Yes mama. I'm sorry", I say.

"Eey. This child. Go and make the fire, and kill a chicken for supper", she says.

I hate killing chicken. When you cut off the head it, it can still run around and that's just disturbing to watch.

"Yes mama", I say.

"Wait. Don't go yet. Who said you can go?", she says.

I wait. But she said I should go and kill the chicken!

"Sex is sacred. Don't just give it away. Do it with your husband in your bed. Don't ever let anyone see you doing it. Especially me please. Don't ever let me see that again! I'm scared of what I might see next time. My poor eyes!", she says.

Can she stop now!

"Can Elik still stay?", I ask.

"Yes he can. But you two will not be having sex in my home. Do you understand!", she says.

I nod.

"Now go", she says.

I leave.

"Lastborn", mother calls as I leave her hut.

"Are you sure umkhwenyana wasn't hurting you?" she says.

Ground, please open up and swallow me right now!

I just want to die. Can my aunt get here already. I wish it had been her and not my mother who walked in there. At least she would have probably laughed about all this and made jokes about it.

CHAPTER 58

Awkward. That's the best word to describe the rest of my day. A big fat elephant in the yard! I'm sure my mother is thinking of ways to save my lost soul right now. She's probably wondering whether to hold an all night prayer and burn candles

and incense to cleanse me or to brew beer and kill a black goat and call for the intervention of the ancestors. I'm sorry she saw that, make no mistake, but I'm an adult. I'm 26 for crying out loud. Girls my age have up to 3 kids! I feel so naked and I wish she could stay indoors forever. I'm even considering locking her in from the outside. I can't look at her and I don't know if she's angry or disappointed or shocked or just plain traumatised. Or maybe all of the above.

So lets back pedal a bit. So my mother means to tell me she truly believed I was a virgin? She thought Elik just enjoyed looking at my face and buying me things nje? Like he was waiting for marriage? Didn't she wonder how her unemployed student daughter managed to buy a Fortuner and give it away? I had her fooled then. That's the good thing about not getting pregnant. There's no evidence of sex and people can actually believe you are a virgin!

I text Elik and brief him on how the conversation with mother went and ask when he's coming back. He says he's not coming back, he'll sleep in the car at the growth point till Monday when we go back. I tell him to stop it and just come back already and he says he has no wish to look at my mother anytime soon. He says he wishes he could take a flight to Ghana right now so he can be very far from here. I tell him he has to come home at some point!

His reply reads,

"I'm not coming. I can't look at mums babe! She just saw me chowing!"

Chowing? Seriously?

I don't know who's more dramatic between my mother and Elik. I can't stay on the phone long, I have chores to do. I can't deal with him right now. He's even asking if we can leave for Joburg tomorrow early morning before anyone wakes up. I say no. I still have a cleansing ritual to go through although he doesn't know. Besides we already said we are leaving on Monday so he has to be strong.

Anyway, if I'm to keep living I better kill that chicken. My mother knows I hate doing it but I won't complain today. That would just be asking for trouble. I'll do it. I bribe my little brother to run after the chicken I'm supposed to kill. Hanging out with Elik and Lumka has taught me to pay people off if I want anything. So I'm using that skill on my little brother. Because let's be honest, I'm no longer cut out to run after chicken!

I'm going to cook everything today and do the dishes, all on my own. Maybe that will appease my mother's spirit. As I expected, murdering the chicken was a messy job. The knife was too blunt so it took a long time to cut off the neck. My manicure is ruined and I told you this thing remains alive long after it's dead! So I'm trying to hold it down but it's trying to run away so the result is me being sprayed with blood from the open neck and my little brother laughing at me.

Mother comes and says I must go and meet my aunt because the bus just passed. She says she will pluck the feathers off the chicken so long. She shouts at me because I didn't boil the water for plucking the chicken. I think she just needs an excuse to yell at me. She stops, looks at me and shakes her head. I can not! I take

Inflation and we go to the bus stop. I didn't even clean up, I'm all bloody and even though I washed my hands, the blood under the nails didn't want to come out.

Elik is still AWOL! The last text he sent said he and Zie would only come at midnight when my mother is sleeping. I wonder what he's telling Zie to keep him at the shops. The bus comes and my aunt is as bubbly as always but she says I shouldn't come near her because I'm smelling like something dead. It's just chicken blood no need to be a diva! Now my only fear is that my mother needs to be told that I had a miscarriage. I don't know how much she can take in one day. Imagine finding out that your daughter is not a virgin and she was pregnant not so long ago. She will have a heart attack mos and probably kill Elik!

As soon as we get home, my mother approaches and just from the way she's walking I know it's not good. She tells Inflation to go away. Poor kid doesn't know where to go so he just walks towards the gate. She doesn't even greet my aunt, she just goes off. It's like she has been waiting all day for someone to tell all this to and humiliate me. My mother will humble you shame. I could be 50 years old one day and she would still slap me if she wanted to.

"Did Lastborn tell you what she's doing these days!", she says to my aunt.

"No. What is she doing?", my aunt says.

"She's having sex! Can you believe it!", she says.

"Oh no! You don't say! Fierce is this true?", my aunt says.

She looks genuinely surprised! The same woman who told me to go and do somersaults on Elik is acting this shocked right now! I've never seen such brilliant acting in my life!

"Lastborn tell your aunt what you did", my mother says.

I look at her. I don't know if she's serious or not.

"Tell her. Woo, so I'm talking alone. I'm crazy, I'm an idiot, when you look at me you just see a mad person talking alone! I'm making all this up! I'm a liar right?", she says.

Huh? Seriously I don't know. She just went on and insulted herself then she turns around and says that's exactly what I was thinking.

I keep quiet though. I do not wish her to introduce the back of her hand to my face. Those two have met so many times before they don't wish to meet again.

"Lastborn tell her! Tell her you know how to sleep with men now. Say it", she says.

"I know how to sleep with men now", I say in a low voice.

"Say I don't mind if I'm not married, I just sleep!", she says.

"I don't mind if I'm not married, I just sleep", I say.

"Tell her you don't even do it right, you do it standing!", she says.

What? I'm not saying that.

This is ridiculous. I'm not 10 anymore! But I just stand there and let her go on and on. My aunt is not helping! She acts so shocked, I'm shocked. These women! Yoh! I wish they could lower their voices though, I don't want my step mother

overhearing this and spreading the news across the village. I'm golden girl down here, can we keep it that way?

Mother then tells me to go and start cooking so the elders can talk. I don't need to be told twice, anything to get me away from here. I cut the chicken up into pieces and I don't think the pieces will be enough. I might need another one but I can't find Inflation.

I ask my mother which other chicken to kill and I think she chose this one on purpose just to make me run. This chicken can run! Imagine chasing a chicken at 50 km/hour wearing a long dress and flip flops! I fell twice and have been running around the whole yard, but still can't catch it. I'm just glad Elik isn't here to witness this. He would be laughing at me for years to come! Only after forever when the chicken gets tired do I manage to catch it! I cook in silence. The smoke is killing my eyes but today I have no rights in this household!

And Elik thought he was clever! My father went to the shops and found him and Zie and forced them to come home to eat. Father suggests that we make a fire outside and we all sit around and eat as a family. I guess Elik is officially a member of this family now. I don't know whether to laugh or cry watching Elik. He looks so nervous he can't even hide it. He pulls the hood of his hoodie over his head and I look at him and shake my head and he takes it off. He can't do that here! When I kneel down to wash his hands, our eyes briefly meet and I almost laugh at him, his hands are shaking!

Somewhere in the middle of eating, my mother just had to. She's really unforgiving!

"Mkhwenyana, when are you marrying my daughter?", she says.

Awa mama! Why? Did watching us Kama Sutra really affect her that badly? We have learnt our lesson. Please forgive us. We will never do it again.

I feel sorry for Elik. He almost chokes on the pap he's eating. Thankfully my father saves the day by saying,

"Leave the children alone. Don't put pressure on them".

Elik's not eating anymore, he's been rolling the same ball of pap for a while now and he looks like he's ready to run away. Poor thing. I've never seen him so uneasy before. He always talks himself out of situations! But today he's dead quiet and all timid and looking down. He says he has a headache and I actually laugh as my aunt starts fussing over him, feeling his temperature with the back of her hand and offering to make all sorts of concoctions to heal him. I thought they are not supposed to touch umkhwenyana! After making him drink 2 cups of water, they eventually let him go to sleep. He sighs out loud and I can see how relieved he is.

My aunt asks me to walk her to the hut she will use, she wants to take something. She's pleasantly surprised to see that there's light here. We have solar power now. 'We now live in a city', as my mother has been saying. As soon as she closes the door, she's like,

"So? What happened? Tell me. What was that your mother was going on about?"

I tell her how mother walked in on me and Elik this afternoon.

"And you were doing it standing?", she says.

I blush very hard but nod my head. The secret is out anyways. There's no use lying.

"You go Fierce! No wonder Ghana man is doing all this *points at lights*. You are serving him red velvet cake with a fork and knife! When you are done with him all he thinks about is taking out his bank card!"

This woman is too much!

"And your mother walked in and saw you in action?", she says.

I nod. I want to stop talking now.

She laughs so hard I want to crawl under the bed and hide. She says my mother must be traumatised because all she knows is missionary, at night, with the lights off. I don't want to talk about this further. This is my mother we are talking about. It's deeply disturbing to even think about it.

But she's not done. I also feel like playing the 'headache' card now but the dishes are waiting for me outside. I need to go and do them before my mother calls me 'ivila elikhuthele embhedeni kuphela (Lazy but only hardworking in bed)'.

"No wonder Ghana man looked like he had been struck by lightning! They caught you in action!", she can't stop laughing. I'm glad she finds this funny. No one else does.

"You doing great baby! Whatever tricks you pulling on that man, keep doing them. They are working. He bought you a car to give your father and lit up the whole

home and you not even married. When he marries you, clearly he will buy you a country!", she says.

She finally lets me go and do the dishes and says she needs to sort out the herbs for tomorrow anyway. She says she hopes they are genuine because she bought them in an Indian shop in Bulawayo. I'm not really interested.

CHAPTER 59

I'm thankful for my aunt because in all of this she's the only one who makes me feel better. And I know one day when my world comes crumbling down and my secret with Elik is out, she will stand by me. I'm scared to imagine how disappointed my parents will be on that day. But it's soothing to know that someone will be there to hold me up.

I know all my mother wants is for me to get married! Maybe for her marriage is goals, like it's an achievement of note! But not for me. If marriage happens for me in future then that's alright. If it doesn't, that's alright too. It's not even on my priority list. My goals are to build a legacy for my children and to break boundaries in engineering and to travel the world and to have enough money to give me a comfortable life.

I don't believe in marriage really. I did years ago because I thought every relationship was supposed to end up as a marriage, you know. That's what everyone had me believing. It was always 'when are you getting married?', 'you'll make a good wife one day!', 'who will marry you dressed like that?' and all those

comments that made me believe marriage was inevitable and was actually an accomplishment.

But now I know better. Marriage is not for some of us. That boat sailed and left me behind a long time ago. I obviously can't marry who I want and I can't even begin to imagine starting from zero with someone else who's not Elik. I actually don't want any other man near me, ever. If I ever get done with Elik, then that's it. I'll be done with men, for good this time.

Elik is who my heart wants and if it means riding on the back seat for the rest of my life then I guess that's what I'll do. Is it really that bad? What if that's my fate? I mean, not all of us were cut out to carry diamonds on our fingers. Some of us are just here on this planet so we can attend other people's weddings and try and catch the bouquet every time the bride throws it. Besides I have an ugly signature anyway so I don't mind if I never sign a marriage certificate.

My parents must just chill. If it's cattle they want, I'll give them that. I'll buy them a whole kraal when I start working! No need to wait for a man to bring them home. These are thoughts that I need to let go of because all they do is make me sad and guilty and just plain miserable.

When I'm done washing the dishes, I put out the fire and go back to my aunt. She said I must hurry back because we need to talk. I'm staying far far away from my mother today. I know she means well and she doesn't hate me at all but she treats me like I'm 10 sometimes and that woman can shout yoh! I don't blame her

though. Years of sharing a man you had initially thought would be all yours are enough to make anyone bitter.

It's no secret that my mother dislikes her sister wife. I don't even know why her anger isn't directed towards my father rather. He's the one who went out and brought another woman home! I don't get why my mother stays resentful! I'm sure my father still loves her in his own way.

It must have hurt though knowing that she wasn't enough for my father and having to watch her husband love another woman. I can't imagine the feelings of hurt, betrayal and lost love she must harbour in her heart.

Is this how Komla feels? Am I the source of her pain? Is she going to be another angry black woman because of me? Will that affect those cute twins I love so much? If her life is a series of misery, is that on me? Am I terrible person?

Damn! I hate it when my conscience starts trying to act all holier than thou. Our people have practiced polygamy for the longest time so why can't we accept that maybe men were actually crafted to provide for more than one woman at a time? Komla must just accept my presence in her man's life. Clearly, I'm not going anywhere. Technically me and her are both married to Elik. Her legally, me otherwise.

But when tables are turned would I accept Mbali in Elik's life? That's a resounding NO with a capital N. You know what, these thoughts are giving me a headache so I'll shelf them for future consideration. For now, my aunt is waiting.

I find her sitting on the bed and she invites me to sit next to her. She's not making jokes anymore, she just looks serious or concerned, I can't tell. She says we must talk about the miscarriage. Honestly that's the last thing I want to talk about. As much as I dislike her grilling me about my sexual escapades, I'd rather talk about that. Anything but the miscarriage. Usually I ignore my problems long enough until they disappear on their own. I was hoping to do the same with this one.

She holds me for a long time and tells me I'll be ok. I haven't even said anything. I tell her I'm fine and I'm over it. She says I don't need to pretend to be strong, I should allow myself to feel and let the pain run through me. What's she talking about! I am feeling! I am feeling just fine and the pain doesn't live here anymore.

I tell her I didn't even know I was pregnant until after the fact. She's adamant that there's no way I would go through that and just get over it. Why is she trying to tell me how I feel when I'm the one doing the feeling and not her? She wants details but for once she's not asking like those women that gossip with their neighbours over the fence. She's soft spoken, which is out of character of her really. It's weird.

How far were you? Who was the father? How did he react? What exactly happened? What did they do to you at the hospital? Was the father there for you? I modify the story so much it's so far from the truth now. I can't mention the

trouble with Elik, Athi, pills or alcohol. So if I leave all that out, there's no truth left. I say it just happened spontaneously and I don't know what induced it. I mention how Elik sat right there by my side the entire time.

I don't want to talk about this but she keeps pushing and forcing me to talk. The more I talk, the more I feel so hurt. The pain is coming back and this is not what I signed up for! Where is this pain coming from? I didn't have it 5 minutes ago but now, boom! I'm hurting like a bride who just got left by her groom at the altar!

"Cleansing is not just about cleaning your womb, it's also about healing your spirit and piecing together your soul", she says.

The more I talk the more I relive that day and the more I cry. She makes me keep talking though and somehow I want to keep talking.

"Fierce, you need to sit down with umkhwenyana and talk to him about this. Make him tell you how it made him feel and how it affected him. You know men bottle things up and those things pile up into a dangerous ball. Then those things turn into anger and that anger starts manifesting itself in other ways. He could wake up one day and suddenly he's someone you don't know. He's not coming home, he's beating you or worse. And you don't know that he's just channeling a pain he never let out. It's your duty as a woman to keep your man together! If you say you love him then you have to keep him together. He could make a million dollars a day and have everything money can buy, but he's still flesh and still needs a woman to hold him together. Be that woman!", she says.

Elik looks like he has it all together though. He doesn't need me to remind him of this. We promised to try and get over it and look into the future. And since when is my aunt this wise? All she ever talks about is getting freaky and giving me tips on how to keep my waist small and my skin glowing! I had no idea she could talk things that actually make sense.

“Respect him, love him, take care of him and be his friend. Talk to him and make him feel like you would be lost without him and make him feel like a man. Men like that! And like this one of yours who buys you these fancy things, appreciate him Fierce. Don't take him for granted. Love is rare to find these days and if you have it, hold on to it and do right by your man. Don't listen to these so called independent women who say you don't need a man bla bla. You need a man!”, she says.

I'm just in her arms feeling like a baby. I feel like I'm in premarital counselling.

“You didn't lose those babies alone so don't shut him out. Remember he lost them too. So talk to him and make sure he knows you are in this together. Talk to him baby, don't leave things hanging because one day you wake up and you are full of resentment and don't recognise each other anymore. And I'm sure this one wants to be there for you, so let him”, she says.

Preach auntie preach! I'm your student, teach me! She's spitting wisdom and knowledge left, right and centre today. I'm moved.

“But above all, do what’s best for you. Never mind what your mother and your father want! They are old and dying. You take care of yourself and live to the fullest”, she says.

Did she just say my parents are old and dying?

This is a different side of her I’ve never seen before but I like. I like very much. I ask that my mother should never hear of this. She says it’s fine, she will take my secret to the grave. She sounds so caring right now I can't help but tell her how much I love her. I feel much better actually and now that the tears are drying and the smile is coming out, I might as well get some sleep, we need to be up before sunrise for the ritual.

I wake up in the middle of the night. I had a terrible nightmare. In the nightmare it was a full moon and I was sitting on the stones by the kraal, on my own. Then I see someone walking towards me with two kids in each hand. As they get closer, I see that it’s Replace with two kids, a boy and a girl, that have eyes I know from somewhere. The kids start asking me to give them names. They are scaring me, so I run. I keep running but they catch up and demand that I give them names. I wake up sweating. I really hate nightmares.

My aunt is sleeping and I don't want to sleep again in case I dream again. The dream felt too real. I gently get out of bed and walk across to Elik’s hut. If anyone sees me I’m going to pretend to not know where I am and say I’m sleepwalking! It’s

so dark out here. Me and darkness have never been friends. Except if that darkness is on a man. Get it?

I knock and knock as softly as I can and he eventually opens the door. He's shocked to see me, he says he thought it was my mother coming to beat him up. In the middle of the night? He's being dramatic now.

I ask to just lie down a bit and that he holds me for a while. I can't sleep. He's grumpy because he was sleeping but he holds me anyway and goes back to sleep. I can't afford to sleep. I think I'm very inconsiderate because I force Elik to wake up. It takes a lot but he wakes up eventually. And thanks to the solar, now we have light!

I wait until his grumpiness subsides and he is awake.

"Elik. I lost our kids", I just say.

He looks at me lost and I think it doesn't register. I wish my aunt hadn't made me relive the trauma I went through, now the wound is open and bleeding.

"The miscarriage baby", I clarify.

"It wasn't your fault. You know that right?", he says and cradles me.

"I know. But still it hurts so bad!", I say.

I'm on the verge of tears now.

"I know baby. But we are in this together and as long as we have each other, we will be good", he says.

"How did you get over it?", I ask.

"I didn't. I'm still dealing with it. But one of us needs to be strong. I need to make sure you are alright. That's my job", he says.

I feel so safe with him. We just sit there and hold each other and we start talking about that awkward supper we had. He says every time my mother looked at him he just wanted to get up and run away. He keeps asking that we leave in the morning but that's not happening. We will leave on Monday as we said we would.

It doesn't take much for him to cheer me up. He really gets me. I've even forgotten that terrible nightmare I had. It was probably just emotions leaving my being anyway.

"Baby, please give me some some", I whisper.

I guess we are both twisted in our own ways. When he's angry he wants to rough it up like an animal and when I'm overly emotionally I just want to close my eyes, lie back like a corpse and have him passionately love every inch of my body. He looks at me with those eyes wide open!

"Are you trying to get me killed by your mother?", he says.

"Please baby. I need this", I say.

"No, I don't have a death wish! I'm not doing it", he says.

"Please baby, just a little bit", I say.

"No, I don't want", he says.

"Come on baby, please", I keep begging and trying to touch him but he's not budging!

"Please, pretty please. Just 5 minutes, please please please", I say.

"Ok fine, I'll do it under one condition!", he says.

"Name it", I say.

"I make love to you and in return you get me out of here tomorrow!", he says.

"Come on. You know I can't do that! We've been through this already. We told them we are leaving on Monday!", I say.

"Oh well then, suit yourself, clearly you don't want all of this", he says.

I try to touch him and he doesn't want and I'm giggling like a schoolgirl.

"Stop bullying me. I don't want", he says.

"Come on Elik, I'm begging here. Just a little bit", I want to laugh though. He's acting like I'm abusing him or something.

I can't let him say no. I take off the pyjama top and let him look. He forgets I know his weaknesses!

"No, I'm not looking. What you trying to do is not working", he says and covers his eyes with his hands.

He's something else!

"Ok fine. We will leave tomorrow! Will you do me already!", I say.

I will have to come up with an excuse why we need to suddenly leave.

"Do you swear?", he says.

"I swear", I say.

He really wants to get out of here shame so I'll get him out. My mother's eye has traumatised the life out of him.

I can't believe I spent the last 5 minutes begging him! I'll get him one day, he'll see.

"You can't make noise though baby", he says. I giggle.

"I'm serious!", he says.

I don't make promises I'm not sure I can keep, but I'll try my best.

"I love you Fierce. You know that?", he says and then kisses me before I get my chance to return the confession my love.

This prison type bed has springs and they are all squeaky squeaky so this is not going to work. We are only trying to bond here, we don't want to wake the whole village up! We resort to pulling the mattress onto the floor. That's much better.

I'm so addicted to Elik it's not even funny! There's no cuddling afterwards. That's not a luxury we can afford right now. I have to go back to the hut I share with my aunt. Elik and I can't afford anymore drama. Imagine if I fall asleep and then be seen leaving in the morning!

CHAPTER 59

I'm thankful for my aunt because in all of this she's the only one who makes me feel better. And I know one day when my world comes crumbling down and my secret with Elik is out, she will stand by me. I'm scared to imagine how disappointed my parents will be on that day. But it's soothing to know that someone will be there to hold me up.

I know all my mother wants is for me to get married! Maybe for her marriage is goals, like it's an achievement of note! But not for me. If marriage happens for me in future then that's alright. If it doesn't, that's alright too. It's not even on my priority list. My goals are to build a legacy for my children and to break boundaries in engineering and to travel the world and to have enough money to give me a comfortable life.

I don't believe in marriage really. I did years ago because I thought every relationship was supposed to end up as a marriage, you know. That's what everyone had me believing. It was always 'when are you getting married?', 'you'll make a good wife one day!', 'who will marry you dressed like that?' and all those comments that made me believe marriage was inevitable and was actually an accomplishment.

But now I know better. Marriage is not for some of us. That boat sailed and left me behind a long time ago. I obviously can't marry who I want and I can't even begin to imagine starting from zero with someone else who's not Elik. I actually don't want any other man near me, ever. If I ever get done with Elik, then that's it. I'll be done with men, for good this time.

Elik is who my heart wants and if it means riding on the back seat for the rest of my life then I guess that's what I'll do. Is it really that bad? What if that's my fate? I mean, not all of us were cut out to carry diamonds on our fingers. Some of us are just here on this planet so we can attend other people's weddings and try and

catch the bouquet every time the bride throws it. Besides I have an ugly signature anyway so I don't mind if I never sign a marriage certificate.

My parents must just chill. If it's cattle they want, I'll give them that. I'll buy them a whole kraal when I start working! No need to wait for a man to bring them home. These are thoughts that I need to let go of because all they do is make me sad and guilty and just plain miserable.

When I'm done washing the dishes, I put out the fire and go back to my aunt. She said I must hurry back because we need to talk. I'm staying far far away from my mother today. I know she means well and she doesn't hate me at all but she treats me like I'm 10 sometimes and that woman can shout yoh! I don't blame her though. Years of sharing a man you had initially thought would be all yours are enough to make anyone bitter.

It's no secret that my mother dislikes her sister wife. I don't even know why her anger isn't directed towards my father rather. He's the one who went out and brought another woman home! I don't get why my mother stays resentful! I'm sure my father still loves her in his own way.

It must have hurt though knowing that she wasn't enough for my father and having to watch her husband love another woman. I can't imagine the feelings of hurt, betrayal and lost love she must harbour in her heart.

Is this how Komla feels? Am I the source of her pain? Is she going to be another angry black woman because of me? Will that affect those cute twins I love so much? If her life is a series of misery, is that on me? Am I terrible person?

Damn! I hate it when my conscience starts trying to act all holier than thou. Our people have practiced polygamy for the longest time so why can't we accept that maybe men were actually crafted to provide for more than one woman at a time? Komla must just accept my presence in her man's life. Clearly, I'm not going anywhere. Technically me and her are both married to Elik. Her legally, me otherwise.

But when tables are turned would I accept Mbali in Elik's life? That's a resounding NO with a capital N. You know what, these thoughts are giving me a headache so I'll shelf them for future consideration. For now, my aunt is waiting.

I find her sitting on the bed and she invites me to sit next to her. She's not making jokes anymore, she just looks serious or concerned, I can't tell. She says we must talk about the miscarriage. Honestly that's the last thing I want to talk about. As much as I dislike her grilling me about my sexual escapades, I'd rather talk about that. Anything but the miscarriage. Usually I ignore my problems long enough until they disappear on their own. I was hoping to do the same with this one.

She holds me for a long time and tells me I'll be ok. I haven't even said anything. I tell her I'm fine and I'm over it. She says I don't need to pretend to be strong, I

should allow myself to feel and let the pain run through me. What's she talking about! I am feeling! I am feeling just fine and the pain doesn't live here anymore.

I tell her I didn't even know I was pregnant until after the fact. She's adamant that there's no way I would go through that and just get over it. Why is she trying to tell me how I feel when I'm the one doing the feeling and not her? She wants details but for once she's not asking like those women that gossip with their neighbours over the fence. She's soft spoken, which is out of character of her really. It's weird.

How far were you? Who was the father? How did he react? What exactly happened? What did they do to you at the hospital? Was the father there for you? I modify the story so much it's so far from the truth now. I can't mention the trouble with Elik, Athi, pills or alcohol. So if I leave all that out, there's no truth left. I say it just happened spontaneously and I don't know what induced it. I mention how Elik sat right there by my side the entire time.

I don't want to talk about this but she keeps pushing and forcing me to talk. The more I talk, the more I feel so hurt. The pain is coming back and this is not what I signed up for! Where is this pain coming from? I didn't have it 5 minutes ago but now, boom! I'm hurting like a bride who just got left by her groom at the altar!

"Cleansing is not just about cleaning your womb, it's also about healing your spirit and piecing together your soul", she says.

The more I talk the more I relive that day and the more I cry. She makes me keep talking though and somehow I want to keep talking.

“Fierce, you need to sit down with umkhwenyana and talk to him about this. Make him tell you how it made him feel and how it affected him. You know men bottle things up and those things pile up into a dangerous ball. Then those things turn into anger and that anger starts manifesting itself in other ways. He could wake up one day and suddenly he’s someone you don’t know. He's not coming home, he's beating you or worse. And you don’t know that he’s just channeling a pain he never let out. It’s your duty as a woman to keep your man together! If you say you love him then you have to keep him together. He could make a million dollars a day and have everything money can buy, but he’s still flesh and still needs a woman to hold him together. Be that woman!”, she says.

Elik looks like he has it all together though. He doesn't need me to remind him of this. We promised to try and get over it and look into the future. And since when is my aunt this wise? All she ever talks about is getting freaky and giving me tips on how to keep my waist small and my skin glowing! I had no idea she could talk things that actually make sense.

“Respect him, love him, take care of him and be his friend. Talk to him and make him feel like you would be lost without him and make him feel like a man. Men like that! And like this one of yours who buys you these fancy things, appreciate him Fierce. Don’t take him for granted. Love is rare to find these days and if you have it, hold on to it and do right by your man. Don’t listen to these so called independent women who say you don’t need a man bla bla. You need a man!”, she says.

I'm just in her arms feeling like a baby. I feel like I'm in premarital counselling. "You didn't lose those babies alone so don't shut him out. Remember he lost them too. So talk to him and make sure he knows you are in this together. Talk to him baby, don't leave things hanging because one day you wake up and you are full of resentment and don't recognise each other anymore. And I'm sure this one wants to be there for you, so let him", she says.

Preach auntie preach! I'm your student, teach me! She's spitting wisdom and knowledge left, right and centre today. I'm moved.

"But above all, do what's best for you. Never mind what your mother and your father want! They are old and dying. You take care of yourself and live to the fullest", she says.

Did she just say my parents are old and dying?

This is a different side of her I've never seen before but I like. I like very much. I ask that my mother should never hear of this. She says it's fine, she will take my secret to the grave. She sounds so caring right now I can't help but tell her how much I love her. I feel much better actually and now that the tears are drying and the smile is coming out, I might as well get some sleep, we need to be up before sunrise for the ritual.

I wake up in the middle of the night. I had a terrible nightmare. In the nightmare it was a full moon and I was sitting on the stones by the kraal, on my own. Then I see someone walking towards me with two kids in each hand. As they get closer, I see that it's Replace with two kids, a boy and a girl, that have eyes I know from somewhere. The kids start asking me to give them names. They are scaring me, so I run. I keep running but they catch up and demand that I give them names. I wake up sweating. I really hate nightmares.

My aunt is sleeping and I don't want to sleep again in case I dream again. The dream felt too real. I gently get out of bed and walk across to Elik's hut. If anyone sees me I'm going to pretend to not know where I am and say I'm sleepwalking! It's so dark out here. Me and darkness have never been friends. Except if that darkness is on a man. Get it?

I knock and knock as softly as I can and he eventually opens the door. He's shocked to see me, he says he thought it was my mother coming to beat him up. In the middle of the night? He's being dramatic now.

I ask to just lie down a bit and that he holds me for a while. I can't sleep. He's grumpy because he was sleeping but he holds me anyway and goes back to sleep. I can't afford to sleep. I think I'm very inconsiderate because I force Elik to wake up. It takes a lot but he wakes up eventually. And thanks to the solar, now we have light!

I wait until his grumpiness subsides and he is awake.

"Elik. I lost our kids", I just say.

He looks at me lost and I think it doesn't register. I wish my aunt hadn't made me relive the trauma I went through, now the wound is open and bleeding.

"The miscarriage baby", I clarify.

"It wasn't your fault. You know that right?", he says and cradles me.

"I know. But still it hurts so bad!", I say.

I'm on the verge of tears now.

"I know baby. But we are in this together and as long as we have each other, we will be good", he says.

"How did you get over it?", I ask.

"I didn't. I'm still dealing with it. But one of us needs to be strong. I need to make sure you are alright. That's my job", he says.

I feel so safe with him. We just sit there and hold each other and we start talking about that awkward supper we had. He says every time my mother looked at him he just wanted to get up and run away. He keeps asking that we leave in the morning but that's not happening. We will leave on Monday as we said we would.

It doesn't take much for him to cheer me up. He really gets me. I've even forgotten that terrible nightmare I had. It was probably just emotions leaving my being anyway.

"Baby, please give me some some", I whisper.

I guess we are both twisted in our own ways. When he's angry he wants to rough it up like an animal and when I'm overly emotionally I just want to close my eyes, lie back like a corpse and have him passionately love every inch of my body.

He looks at me with those eyes wide open!

"Are you trying to get me killed by your mother?", he says.

"Please baby. I need this", I say.

"No, I don't have a death wish! I'm not doing it", he says.

"Please baby, just a little bit", I say.

"No, I don't want", he says.

"Come on baby, please", I keep begging and trying to touch him but he's not budging!

"Please, pretty please. Just 5 minutes, please please please", I say.

"Ok fine, I'll do it under one condition!", he says.

"Name it", I say.

"I make love to you and in return you get me out of here tomorrow!", he says.

"Come on. You know I can't do that! We've been through this already. We told them we are leaving on Monday!", I say.

"Oh well then, suit yourself, clearly you don't want all of this", he says.

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I'm so addicted to Elik it's not even funny! There's no cuddling afterwards. That's not a luxury we can afford right now. I have to go back to the hut I share with my aunt. Elik and I can't afford anymore drama. Imagine if I fall asleep and then be seen leaving in the morning!

CHAPTER 60

My aunt is sleeping when I get back into bed. I probably smell like Elik and I hope she doesn't say anything when she wakes up. It doesn't take long for me to fall asleep. I'm woken up at dawn because apparently this is my new dawn. A new beginning for me. And when the sun rises today I will be reborn. I'll call it closure; the day I close that chapter of my life and let go of all that never was.

I really don't want to do this cleansing thing, I just want to sleep. But tradition is tradition. I may not be big on it but I respect where I came from so I will go through with it. That's the real reason I came down here in the first place so I can't back out now. My aunt says it will be quick quick and then my unborn kids will be with the ancestors and my womb will be ready for more children. But their ancestors are somewhere in Ghana so all this doesn't add up but I won't point that out.

Besides, if I could choose, I would rather my kids go to heaven instead of to ancestor-land. But I'm not well versed in the order of the spirits, so for all I know ancestor-land and heaven are one and the same thing! After all my aunt is a

uniform wearing christian so I can trust her when it comes to spirit things. I really think she has good intentions for me.

So I'm standing outside our compound and it's still quite dark outside. The morning breeze is too cold and I'm shivering. At least I'm dressed in a bikini otherwise this could have looked a lot like witchcraft. A bikini just made sense because it's designed to deal with water and that's what we are dealing with here.

But sometimes we bother our ancestors and give them headaches unnecessarily you know. Wena how would you feel if you were an ancestor and you are dead and you are sleeping, then people wake you up at 4 am asking for favours! If my ancestors are anything like Elik and hate being woken up, then this ritual is not such a smart idea.

This is the most awkward thing I've ever done or that has ever been done to me. Imagine being washed in the smelliest of herbs and handing over children that were never even born to ancestors you are not quite sure exist! I mean, I'm a scientist and I need things to make practical sense before I can accept them as true. And in terms of my spirituality, I'm still a work in progress and I don't know if I'll ever get there. Some never get to cross the line before they make it home! I might just be one of them.

I think of the kids I saw in my dream last night. I really think they had Elik's eyes or is my imagination playing tricks on me? Well this situation is already weird so I don't think anything I say can be any worse.

“Auntie, I think I saw them last night”, I whisper. I know it sounds crazy. They were never born so there is no way.

“Who did you see?”, she says.

I tell her about the nightmare I had. I don't care if she says I'm crazy. To my surprise, she listens attentively and asks me to retell her the dream without skipping anything.

“Then give them names”, she says.

Ok now I don't know who is crazier between me and her. She says it might have been just a dream or maybe the ancestors were reaching out to me and giving me a message. She says either way I must give them names, if not for them, then for myself.

She says some things you have to do for yourself, to soothe your heart and heal from within. That thought is creepy as hell. If I do this, next thing I'll be believing in ancestral spirits! Then next thing I'll be getting callings from underground to be a sangoma (seer)! I have no desire whatsoever to be a sangoma!

I would make an interesting sangoma though. I'd mordenise the whole thing and make it stylish. The gate to my home would be a toll gate. You'll pay entrance fee there and leave your shoes outside my gate. Then I'd be there with my bones on a Persian rug, wearing 6 inch heels and a 30 inch Brazilian weave. I'll have a speed point machine so my clients can swipe when I'm done talking to their ancestral spirits for them.

My aunt says there is no harm, I should give them names. She says that from the time a baby is made, although the body may not be complete, its spirit would already be whole. So in a way, when you lose a pregnancy it's just like losing a live baby. I don't know how she knows all this but let me do it anyways. Otherwise we will be standing here till sunrise and have to explain to people why I'm wearing a bikini and covered in herbs.

"Can you give me the names", I ask her.

"No my baby. They should come from your heart", she says.

I search my brain for names. Jane, John, Meli, Musa, Ntokozo, Qhawe, Sisa, Thuba, Ntando, Nebuchadnezzar, Malachi, Strawberry, Jupiter. I don't feel any of them. I keep listing names in my brain and struggling to find one that speaks to my soul. Finally I find the ones I want.

I stand with two stones in my hands. I name the boy Mlondolozzi meaning 'the guardian', because if all this is true, I'll need him to be his sister's guardian. I name the girl Noxolo meaning 'mother of forgiveness', because I could use a whole lot of forgiveness. I throw the stones and say the words I've been told to say.

When that is done, I'm ready to go back home. I'm stinking from that herb concoction. It's like something crawled under my skin and died there. Sies! But I feel much better, it's probably all in my head but I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders.

We go back home and if I'm going to bath outside, I have to do it now before it gets too light. Afterwards, I just want to sleep to be honest. I haven't gotten much sleep. What with the nightmares earlier, begging for some from Elik and eventually getting it and being woken up at dawn to disturb the ancestors!

I don't get to sleep much though before my aunt wakes me up to go prepare bathing water for everyone. Then she goes back to sleep! Man! This sucks! I would have thought my aunt would continue babying me but I guess she doesn't want my mother shouting at her. Everyone is scared of my mother.

I'm sleepy but the yard needs to be swept and the fire needs to be made and water needs to be boiled and buns need to be fried. I do all that quickly. I grew up doing this all the time, so it's not rocket science. When I'm done, I scoop a cup of boiling water and sit there, waiting for the rest of the people to decide to wake up and join me. I don't have lemon so I have my hot water as it is.

My father comes out of my stepmother's hut and walks across to his. I look away. I cannot. I know his routine though, he will be out soon with a toothbrush and will come for a cup of water in the kitchen. Exactly 15 minutes later, he emerges just like I said he would.

"Morning baba. How did you sleep?", I say.

"Morning. I slept well. Can I get a cup of water please", he says.

I hand him a cup that I put next to me. I already knew he would ask for it!

He thanks me.

“Baba, Elik and I have to leave today. I got a phone call from school and they need me back urgently”, I say.

My father is the only person who still treats me like a princess, although I think he pays more attention to Elik than to me these days.

He says it's fine, I should go and take care of my business. He's thankful that I came in the first place and that I 'bought' him a car. He goes to brush his teeth and then comes back to give me back the cup and goes back to his hut. My mother is up now and so is my aunt. They are already talking so loud. So early in the morning!

Minutes later my father comes and asks me to walk with him to the kraal so he can show me how the calves have grown and so we can talk.

“So, my child, tell me something. Umkhwenyana, I saw a line on his ring finger”, he says.

I keep quiet. I didn't get the question, all I heard was a statement. My heart is beating fast now. I can't have anyone here know that Elik is married.

“Was he married before?”, he says.

I didn't expect this question. I could say he was and his wife died in a tragic accident many years ago or he is divorced or I could say that line is a birthmark or that he's a godfather of some gang so wears a loyalty ring. Anything but he is married! I don't want to kill my old man. I hate how rings always leave a mark when you take them off! I have to think fast.

"He was married, yes. His wife left him for another man", I say.

I can lie it's ok, no one will ever know. I just hope I will remember all these lies I tell one day.

"That's sad. He is such a good man", he says.

I agree. They don't make them like that anymore.

"What are your plans with him?", he says.

"I don't know baba. We haven't discussed the future yet", I say.

"Mmmm, I see. Don't wait too long though, I would love to see my grandchildren before I die", he says.

That's just sad. Elik is not available to make future plans with. He already made his future plans with someone else. As for grandchildren, I won't rule that one out yet. I'm feeling broody these days and when I look at pictures of Elik's kids, I find myself wanting my own.

We are at the kraal now and we stand watching the cows and I'm pointing out that many of them have ticks so maybe it's time to take them to the dip. He agrees and also says there's been reported outbreaks of foot and mouth and he needs to vaccinate all the cows but he doesn't have the budget for it. I tell him I'll give him the money when we go back home.

"Blom and her calf are now yours my child. I'm giving them to you", he says from nowhere.

Blom is a cow. Yes we name our cows! My father just gave me a cow and its calf! That's a big deal! My wealth just keeps accumulating. I thank him and give him a

big hug. He is a good father. I wish I could do more for him. I'll get that PhD, get a job and give him the life he deserves. In the meantime, he has to accept the handouts I get from Elik.

He tells me how proud of me he is and how although it's against tradition to bring a man home with me, he has chosen to look aside because I've proven to be trustworthy and he respects my decisions. He says he wishes me and Elik can stay together because, "I've seen how that man looks at you my child. He loves you". I feel like crying. He has no idea how messed up his daughter's life really is.

We walk back home as I insist we have to leave as soon as possible. For some reason I'm excited by the idea of us going. I guess I want to be with Elik and be just the two of us. Besides, the whole situation is getting uncomfortable and I need to get us out of here.

My mother and aunt started breakfast without us. Zibulo, Inflation and Elik are nowhere to be seen. They are around though because Elik's car is here next to my father's. I go and find Elik. He is sitting on the edge of the base of the bed with his head in his hands. The mattress is still on the floor! He looks up to see who walked in.

"And then?", I say.

"Baby. I need to go outside but I'm scared", he says.

He actually looks scared I can't help but laugh at him.

"You know no one else knows about that incident. It's just mother and she didn't tell anyone", I say.

"Still", he says.

"Don't worry. We are leaving right now. Pack up. I'll go and tell mother and aunt", I say.

Poor thing. He's still terrified of my mum and she didn't say anything! So what if she had given him the 'talk'? He would have committed suicide mos!

"Are you serious?", he says, lighting up.

"Yep. Isn't you sold yourself for sex last night. I'm just paying up", I say.

I give him a quick kiss and go to tell my mother and aunt that we are leaving.

It takes a lot of explaining and more lies before they accept that we have to leave. I pack up my bags into the car, give my mother money, give my father the money I promised him and pack up a plastic bag of roundnuts. We all standing next to the car now waiting for Elik. I imagine he's in there pacing, scared to come out. I'm sorry but I can't help him right now. He's on his own. He makes the walk of shame from the hut towards us. My poor baby. His eyes are glued to the ground. My highlight of the day is watching Elik say goodbye to my mother. He puts the T in timid! He's like a child caught stealing sugar.

I thank my aunt for everything and promise to send her some money as soon as I get to Johannesburg. She says there's no need but I'll send her anyway. I'm sitting in the passenger seat, ready to go, when my mother taps on the window. I roll down and she leans in. I'm thinking she has something important to say.

"Next time do it lying down, on your back. That's how it's done", she says. She's saying it to me but she says it in English and Elik is right here! I see him blink so fast from the corner of my eye. My goodness, mother! Why? I don't even think Elik is breathing right now. My mother just had to remind us that she saw us. We haven't forgotten and we are still hugely embarrassed about it. It's even worse for Elik. He is terrified.

"And Lastborn. Be careful. Don't let a man treat you like you are his wife before he marries you. If you are busy giving him all the benefits he would get from a wife, why would he see the need to marry you? Why would he see the need to pay lobola for you when you are already his wife for free? So don't be playing wife there. You are not married", she says. I'm just glad she said that in our language. I wouldn't have wanted Elik to hear that. She probably thinks I live with Elik! Like I cook, clean, and and do all those wifely duties? That's bad. But she knows I'm in Cape Town and he is in Johannesburg so what is she saying?

"Yes mama. Bye bye. We really need to go. Keep well. I will call you", I say. We need to leave before she continues talking. If she starts the sun will set and we will still be here listening to her!

Elik breathes a huge sigh of relief as we drive out of the gate. We headed back to Joburg now. Then it's back to Cape Town for me tomorrow.

CHAPTER 61

So we got back to Johannesburg from home, spent a night and I flew back to Cape Town. That was over a month ago. I've worked my behind off this whole month and thanks to Brain and Bunke, I finished my lab work today. That calls for a celebration. I'm literally going to throw a party here and buy these boys presents.

I'm not done done but I'm so close I can smell that degree! From now on it's just writing and discussing results and editing things I've written in the past years. I'm hoping to send Elik my final draft by end of month for proofreading, then have my supervisor do one final editing, then it can be sent away for examination. I await that day with red eyes.

I hardly talk to Elik. He's been extremely busy chasing that paper since we got back and I have been focusing on my thesis. So we barely talk and we both ok with it. He's a baby sometimes though, so to make sure he knows I haven't forgotten him, I send a good morning when I wake up and a goodnight before I sleep. He doesn't always respond but that's fine. That's what I want actually. I won't be wanting to have a conversation. On a good day he will call and we stay on the phone for up to an hour. Last week I skyped with Peter and Paul. Those kids can talk! Yoh! They always have so much to say! Elik just sat there with them laughing the entire time and telling them not to bother aunt Fierce so much with their stories. I didn't mind. I adore them.

I promised myself I won't go to see Elik until I finish my thesis. This is the last stretch and I can't afford to get distracted now. I need to keep running until I cross

the finish line. I'm almost there, I just need to keep at it. My greatest desire right now is to graduate with the other guys.

Today was the last day of my practicals. So I'm taking the day off. I'm not going to do anything. I'm taking a break to celebrate myself. With everything that's happened to me, I'm shocked that I'm still here, soldiering on. I can't believe I made it this far. Many a times I thought I would fall of the rails and never get up again but somehow I did. I'm starting to believe that maybe there's a higher power somewhere above that strengthens me.

I drive to Zevenwacht and get a cake by Limnos bakery on my way, then get drinks and snacks from Woolworths. I drop those in the car then go back to buy gifts for the guys. I'm feeling quite generous today. My bank account is quite healthy these days because for some reason Elik is making up for being too busy for me by making it rain on my account. He's sent me so much money this month alone, the bank called me to verify the 'frequent deposits of large amounts' into my account. His response everytime I thank him is, "I work hard so you can have everything you want". I'm not complaining.

I get Ndivhu Skullcandy earphones. The ones he's using now are poor quality and we hear what he's listening to. It's annoying, so at least if I buy him these, I'll be doing everyone a huge favour. I get Brain a Need for speed game. He has been going on and on about how he's failing to pirate it but really needs it. I can't believe a simple game is R850! I always thought it's like R50 or something! Anyway, I did say I'm feeling generous today.

Then Bunke is the hardest. He's more than just a lab mate to me. He's someone who has always been good to me and who helped me complete these experiments. Besides, we have a history. I don't know what to get him. I get him a R2000 mall gift card. That way he can buy whatever he wants in any shop in this mall. I know it's a lazy gift but I couldn't think of anything to get him.

The guys are so happy with the gifts it's making my heart dance. You know when you buy someone a gift and you can tell they really love it! It's fulfilling. I expected Bunke to ask me where I got the money from seeing that I used to be the one asking for money from them all the time. I already had an answer that would make him take several seats! So thankfully he didn't ask. He actually said, "Thank you madam" and gave me a big hug.

The mini party didn't last all day as people had work to do. Although the guys are done with their theses, they still have projects to do and articles to write. But the spirits remain lifted. I'm still maintaining that I'm not doing anything today. I'll spend all my time online.

I'm having my coffee at 1:30 pm, watching an episode of Vampire Diaries, not bothering anyone, when there's a knock. Bunke gets the door then comes back with a box the size of a shoe box with my name on it. I assume it's Elik but it could also be a letter bomb from Komla who knows! I open it with care. I know I'm too dramatic but I actually open it in a fume hood. Just in case it actually is a letter bomb or a voodoo doll from Komla. You can never be too careful.

It can't be Elik because the name says "Lastborn". If it was Elik it would say 'Fierce'. The box is empty! Obviously, someone is playing tricks on me! I'm about to throw it into the bin when I see a note sticking out at the bottom. It's a folded paper like a sticky note but a little bit bigger.

I step outside the lab, call Elik and ask where he is. He says he's in Johannesburg. I ask if he sent me anything and he says no. So now I don't know who's behind this but I'm curious.

The note reads,

"Find me! Leave your nerdy friends out of this and let's see if your brain works"

Below that is

"CLUE 1: The writing is in $C_6H_8O_7$ ink and will appear when temperatures rise".

I haven't figured out what exactly is going on, so I tell the guys and show them the note.

" $C_6H_8O_7$, that's citric acid!", Brain says. We list all the citrus fruits we know until Bunke says the clue must be referring to lemon juice ink. And lemon juice ink only shows when the paper is warmed up. We warm it up over a small Bunsen burner flame and voila! words appear. It's like a Harry Potter movie except it's not magic it's science.

The words that appear say:

“Well done. Now stop cheating and work alone!”

How did this person know I would ask for help from my labmates? I hope whoever they are they are not watching me right now. That's just creepy. But I'll work alone that's fine. I can do this.

“For the next clue go to a place of words, an abode of knowledge

When you there, seek the guardian whose eyesight fails!

Hint: Lithium, Bromium, Argon and Ytrium”.

I read the message a second time. That's easy. Whoever wrote this gave the answer away. The chemical symbols of Lithium, Bromium, Argon and Ytrium spell LiBrArY. And 'abode of knowledge' duh! Now I have to find the one whose eyesight is failing, whatever that means. It sounds like something from an ancient scroll!

I'm half excited and half scared but I will play. I tell the guys I'll be right back. They try to convince me not to go because what if the person wants to kill me or worse. What's worse than being killed? I say I'll be just fine and promise to call if anything goes wrong.

I get to the library and present my student card to the security guards. I need to find the one whose eyesight is failing. I have no clue what that means but the answer is in here in this huge building. I walk around all floors of the library trying

to decode the riddle and looking out for anything suspicious. I've been up and down and round and round but nothing.

You know what, screw this, I'm no longer playing! I have more important things to do. I walk back down and greet the librarian. I've been at the university for so long, I know a lot of people. She says hi and asks how school is going. I say great.

Why didn't I figure this out sooner! She's wearing spectacles and is the 'guardian' of the library, so obviously it's her the riddle is referring to!

"Mrs Adams. Is it you?", I say.

"Is it me who did what?", she says.

"Do you have something for me?", I say.

She smiles.

"I thought you'd never ask. I've been watching you go all around the library! Here", she hands me a white envelope.

"Who gave you this?", I ask.

"I'm not telling. Keep going, you will find out soon enough", she says.

So adults also have time to play games like this? My watch reads 2:10 pm. I open the envelope and it's yet another riddle! How long will this go on for! It reads:

"I'm impressed you figured this one out! So your brain works after all!"

CLUE 2: A pile of rocks 670 m off the ground. They say it resembles a crouching sphinx. Are you willing to make the climb to claim your prize? A man at the top with a white rose will be your answer”.

I think the riddle refers to Lion’s head but I google just to be sure. Yes, it’s Lion’s head. You have got to be kidding me. This person expects me to hike up Lion’s head! Midweek? In the afternoon? Alone? That’s just ridiculous. It’s an hour hike and another hour down. I only hike early morning on some weekends and on full moons!

I have to quit this game but my heart is so excited. Having solved this library riddle all on own has made me all hyped up. I’m one curious being! So I go to my room, change into running shorts, a gym T-shirt and trainers then make the drive to Lion’s head. I call Elik on my way and he says he’s busy so can’t really talk and will call me in the evening. I don’t tell him I’m chasing after a stranger because he will freak out and tell me to go back to campus.

It’s almost 4 pm when I get there and there’s a few people making the climb. I have time to waste shame! I’m sure I would have finished at least 1 page of my write up by now. I’ve put my life on hold to chase after clues! Halfway up, as I wait my turn to ascend the chains, I laugh at myself. This is ridiculous. But I’ve come this far already so I might as well. I eventually get to the top and it’s a small space really up there so it doesn’t take long to find the man with a white rose. He just looks like another hiker to me. I’m tired now and thankfully it’s not that hot today.

I say hie. He asks for my name. He's satisfied with my response. He gives me an envelope and a bottle of water. I'm more thankful for the water really because I didn't bring any up here. The man refuses to tell me who gave the envelope to him or who he is. He just tells me that the 'price is near' and I shouldn't give up now. You mean to tell me that I climbed up a mountain just to get an envelope? You've got to be kidding me!

I rest a bit and talk to this stranger watching Robben Island from a distance and the blue sea below. The views are spectacular but I have to make my way down. I always think going down is harder than going up because you really need to balance your knees and there's a higher risk of slipping when going down. By the time I reach the bottom I'm exhausted. It's something to 7. The sun will set just before 8 pm anyway so I can afford to take a 10 minute break to catch my breath and snack on a protein bar.

Bunke calls to check if I'm fine and I assure him all is well and tell him how I've been running around like a headless chicken chasing after clues. He says I must be careful.

When I feel well rested I open the envelope. There's a piece of paper and it reads:

CLUE 3: GPS coordinates.

I punch those on my phone and the destination is Signal Hill. Well at least that's just 3 km up from here and I can drive there. I drive up, slowly, avoiding falling over into the ditches on the road side and carefully around the many bends. I'm

wondering who could have gone to so much trouble to see me. I've ruled out Komla. I honestly don't think she could have thought of this. No way! Well, except if she hired a mad scientist to slaughter me!

And Signal Hill? I haven't been there since Elik left Cape Town. It was too painful for me to return there. We used to spend many evenings there together. It was our little hangout spot so when he left I couldn't bear going back alone. It brought back so many memories. Even now, I dread walking down that road but I've already come this far with these clues so I might as well.

I'm there in no time and I park. There's a couple of cars around, none of which I recognise. I walk around and round and round but I don't see anyone I recognise. I decide to approach the guys who do the paragliding. They are packing up and look ready to leave.

"Sorry, hi", I say.

"Hello", they say.

"Umm, I'm looking for someone", I say.

I realise I don't know how to describe who I'm looking for because I don't know who I'm looking for!

"Who?", they say.

"I don't know actually. You know what, never mind", I say and thank them.

This was stupid. I'm going back to campus. As I get to my car, there's a sticky note by the window. At first I thought it was a parking ticket. It reads:

CLUE 4: In Lord of the Rings they called us Ents. This particular Ent is yours. Find me there”.

Another clue! Hell no, I'm done. Someone is having a field day with me! But my brain wants to keep playing! The Ents in Lord of the Rings were the talking trees that helped bring down the wizard Sauron in the battle of Isengard. Whoever this is, they must really know me well. Maybe they have been stalking me for a long time. It's creepy.

I'll find the Ent though. But there are so many trees around here. Tree? 'This particular tree is yours'. I remember my tree with Elik, I had picked it because it had a low branch where we could both sit on and watch the city lights below. I'll just check that one out. I dial 10111 on my phone and position my finger over the call button. I'm ready to call the police if anything suspicious happens.

My heart is pounding faster and harder than usual. I find myself dreading whatever it is that's waiting for me. This is usually how horror movies start. I always laugh at the stupidity of the characters in movies when they walk towards danger but here I am falling for the same old trap.

I jump over the edge and there is someone sitting under our tree! Whoever it is is facing away and resting against the trunk of the tree so I can't really see them. I make a very wide circle to get in front of the person so that there's some distance should I need to run.

I swear I'm going to kill someone one of these days! I will kill them with my bare hands! He honestly had me go through all those clues and puzzles and riddles just to come and meet him? Couldn't he have just come to campus? Besides, he said he was Joburg!

"Seriously?", I say.

"20 hours later, you finally make it!", he says.

"Elikplim!", I say.

"Yes baby", he says and gets up.

I'm excited actually so I run into his arms. I wish I wasn't so sweaty but well, it's his fault. He had me climbing a mountain for him, literally!

"You could have just called me you know!", I say and hug him tighter.

"Where's the fun in that?", he says.

"How did you know I would come?", I say.

"I didn't. I hoped you would. When the librarian called I knew you would see this to the end. I know you. You don't quit", he says.

"And if I hadn't come?", I say.

"Well then, I would have executed plan B", he says.

He refuses to tell me what plan B is or how he pulled this off. I can't believe I spent my afternoon chasing the wind, drove halfway across town to get here and even hiked up a mountain!

I suggest that we go and sit on the wall rather and he agrees.

"I know you like a challenge", he says.

“A challenge? That was hardly a challenge! Your clues were too simple! Try harder next time!”, I say and push him a little.

He laughs and we kiss. He is too precious.

He lifts me up and sits me on top of the wall and now our eyes are level. His brown eyes, with those bushy eyelashes always make it impossible for me to stop blushing. But looking into them right now makes me feel like I have entered a space that I will always want to live in for forever. It's like I'm home.

When we fight or cry or make love, he always looks into my eyes and looking back into them makes me feel safe, like I belong. Whoever said the eyes are the windows to someone's soul was wrong. They are doors. You walk right through them! Seeing my reflection in his eyes makes me blush even worse. I'm sure I look so silly right now giggling and blushing.

There is still a number of cars in the parking lot. Probably tourists and people waiting for it to get dark so they can watch the city lights. Either way I keep kissing him and telling him how much I love him. This is Cape Town. Public display of affection is not a problem at all.

“Cybertron?”, he says. That's our 'jokes aside, be serious' word.

“Cybertron”, I agree.

He takes a deep breath and takes my hands in his. He says he really needed to talk to me that's why he's here. I hope he's not here to break up with me again! I will push him over the hillside if he does!

And the scavenger hunt he sent me on. I think it was thoughtful and different. It was nice to do. He's full of tricks these days I see! I need to come up with tricks of my own.

"I had to bring you here because this used to be our spot and we have so many memories here", he says

Alright. I don't see why whatever he has to say required me coming all the way here! But I'm Miss Understanding so I look at him with puppy eyes. I tell him to get on with it because he's wearing black and it's getting dark. Soon I won't be able to see him! He laughs at that. Then he just goes full on serious on me and tells me to just listen.

"You know I wanted to say this to you and I knew I would forget, so I wrote it down", he says.

He pulls out a piece of paper from his back pocket, unfolds it and starts reading. He's too much, I can't help but smile.

"Dear Fierce.

You know I've never loved anyone the way I love you. You get me in no way anyone has ever done. You love me and you are not afraid to show it. I love that about you", he says.

He's looks up at me. Why is he being so serious? And why is he reading a speech? I know he was a lecturer but I don't need a lecture. But those eyes, yoh! They will be the death of me.

"Remember when I first met you at the staff diner?", he says. How can I forget!

"You looked beautiful and you kept insisting on giving me back my money! And you kept looking at me while waiting for your food", he says. What? I was stealing glances, how did he even see that!

"That business card I gave you that day, is the best thing I've ever given away in my life. It got me you", he says. He's doing all the talking today and I'm doing all the shut upping and listening.

"I know I hurt you countless times and when it comes to you, I seem to always get it wrong. I keep hurting you over and over and over. But even when you swear you are done with me, somehow you always find it in your heart to take me back. I don't know how you do it, I just know that I'm grateful that you do. So thank you for never giving up on me", he says.

Awww, ain't we being overly emotional today! I wonder what happened.

"I remember how you were there for me that time in Ghana. I would have lost my mind if it wasn't for you. You kept me sane. Thank you baby for that and for always being there for me", he says.

I swear someone is cutting onions here and soon soon I'll be crying. But still, he's not done.

“Remember Venice? A year had gone by without seeing you. You said you didn't want me anymore! But you were in my arms that evening. I asked you if you wanted to leave and you said no. Not that I would have let you leave anyway. I wanted you and seeing you at that conference just reminded me how foolish I had been to have let you go. I never wanna be that foolish again.

Oh and remember that time you were so mad you hit that girl who was flirting with me with a bottle? You didn't want anyone near me and that was so cute”, he laughs a little.

I correct him in my head. That wasn't cute, it was embarrassing! But let him keep reading.

“I love that you laugh at my unfunny jokes at times, that you love the same stupid movies as I do and that you play video games with me. You are awesome like that. And I love how you feel the need to defend me. Remember at Taboo when you wanted to hit that bouncer because he was shouting at me? That was so beautiful to watch. You actually told that big guy to leave me alone or he would experience your full wrath! You wanted to protect me!

I don't know how you manage to love me honestly. I know I'm a full blown mess and I have so much baggage but yet you keep loving me and helping me anyway.

You make me a better man. You make me want to work harder so I can give you everything you deserve”.

I look at him and I’m not sure what to say really. I just nod. I'm not sure whether to smile or cry or add on this emotional rollercoaster. I think he looks nervous or maybe he’s just feeling cold, I don't know. He’s just making me emotional right now with this letter of his.

“Ok, get it together Elikplim”, he whispers under his breath. I think he meant to say it in his mind.

I can’t stop smiling but at the same time tears are filling my eyes. He makes me so happy. How can something so beautiful be so wrong? I wish I could stay right here for the rest of my life, frozen in this moment with him. He lifts me off the wall and puts me on my feet.

“I still have so much I need to say to you”, he says.

I think we have attracted a crowd but he doesn’t seem to mind. Maybe he needs these onlookers to hear as well. I just stand there not sure what to do.

Then he goes down on one knee and I can’t believe my eyes. I can't. Is this really happening or what? Maybe he has a knee injury shame or he's just tired! Why else will he be kneeling down? And why on one knee though? Now everyone thinks he's proposing and they are all going 'awwww' and 'ncoow'.

“Fierce. You are everything I want in a woman and I want to love you the way you deserve and to treat you like the queen you are. You are the one person I can’t imagine living without. The absolute love of my life. My soulmate. My baby”.

Then he goes all Ghanaian on me! I don’t know much of his language but I’ve picked up a few phrases over the years. Mostly to impress him. That knowledge is coming in very handy today. He sounds so genuine and so sincere as he says,

“Wo kuta m’akoma mu safoa and medo wo kopem me wuda. Woye me wiasa, me do ne m’adee nyinaa (You hold the key to my heart and I will love you till the day I die. You are my world, my love, my everything).

“You are all that to me and more and now I’m asking you to be my wife. Lastborn Fierce Nkomo, will you marry me?”

CHAPTER 62

My eyes pop wide open like what is happening here? Maybe I dozed off and now I’m just dreaming. Elik is still on one knee with a ring sitting perfectly in a maroon velvet box. The ring is gorgeous. I’m in love at first sight. I can’t be sure but it looks like a 2 ct round cut diamond, set in platinum, with white gold around the diamond. Gold and platinum, my elements! So he was taking notes in Sun City?

It’s perfect. I’m just glad it’s not gold gold, you know yellow gold, rose gold is even better. I love gold as an element but I hate golden rings. White gold is the way to

go and I'm glad he went with it. It's like silver but better. I always liked sparkly things.

The biggest fear I had of ever getting engaged was that someone will bring me those big rings that fit almost half the finger and I'll walk around like I'm a godfather of the mafia or something! But this one right here, this one, this is the one. It is the Lord of rings! Elik really knows me, I'll give him that. And looking at him on one knee asking me to marry him, is making me feel all kinds of emotional.

He still looks as good as he did those years ago when I first laid my eyes on him. And I love me a black man, not black the race but black the concentration of melanin on the skin. And this black chocolate of mine is just the perfect shade for me. He looks like he was made with me in mind. It's probably just love that makes me look at him like he's God's gift to earth but still, jealous down, he was well created.

As he's kneeling here in front of me, I wish I had a crown to place on his head. Because this man is king, my king. And maybe I should say yes so I can crown him a king every waking day! I want to be the one who holds his hand so he knows he'll never be alone. I want to be the one to remind him to always keep his head held up high so the crown doesn't fall. I know he is a manly man, all tough and made of steel, but even those need a woman to give them a hug and hold them with love. And my heart is jumping up and down just from seeing him on his knee.

I'm just standing here with my brain working overtime trying to process everything at once, as fast as possible. I need to think fast, I can't just stand here all night looking at Elik and not saying anything. I feel so scared and so overjoyed at the same time, it's confusing. In that split second, a thousand thoughts cross my mind and I am overwhelmed by a mixture of different emotions.

I feel:

Joy - Because I love this man with my body, mind, spirit and soul, and I think I'll do anything for him as I think he would for me.

Confusion - Wondering what triggered this proposal. Why now? What happened? I had accepted my fate of being his side dish for life. Now that I'm being offered a promotion, I'm not quite sure how to handle that.

Anxiety - If I say yes, will I end up paranoid and beating up girls like Komla? What exactly will my future look like? Will I have a mental breakdown along along the way as he goes around loving on slay queens and end up in a psych ward?

Hope - There's a future for me and Elik after all and maybe we can be the power couple. Him a multi-millionaire Engineering Professor and me a multi-thousand-inaire Engineering Doctor. Our kids would have the best life can offer. They will have everything me and Elik never had growing up.

Anger - How dare he thinks I'm worthy to be a second wife! How dare he not divorce her first then try and marry me then! How dare he!

Relief - Because I never thought this day would come for me. I never thought marriage existed in my path. I'd given up and made peace with filling in my marital status as single for the rest of my life.

Fear - What if I accept this ring but Elik doesn't change his sleeping around ways? What then? What if he messes up again and I'm left out in the cold? What if he breaks up with me again, what will I do?

Doubt - Does he really want to marry me or is he just feeling sorry for me because I have given him the best years of my life and have shown undying loyalty?

Uncertainty - He's already married so how exactly is this going to work? Do I want to be a second wife? Will I manage? Do I want that kind of life?

Terror - I'm terrified by the thought of what Komla and her King Kong sister will do to me if I say yes. They will probably cut off my finger to make sure no ring ever sits there ever again.

Silly - I'm wondering if I can keep the ring if I say no. It looks like a R100 000 up type of ring. I can do a lot with that kind of money if I pawn the ring.

But above all I feel love.

Love - That emotion alone is overpowering all the others. I know that Elik loves me and I love him, so why not take this next step? Why not close my eyes and take a leap of faith? And how can I not be charmed off my feet by how he went all out to propose. He could have taken me anywhere in the world to propose but he chose this place because it meant so much to us. I need a man like that, and here is that man asking me to marry him.

And that whole scavenger hunt, that was so different and unique. I smile just thinking about it. Dude! I hiked a mountain for an envelope!

I should say yes because I love him and he makes me happy and I want to marry him anyway and I don't see myself with anyone else ever. But I should say no because I have no desire to be wife number 2. I'm from a polygamous family and I don't wish that life on myself. I should say no to safeguard my heart.

If I say yes then I'll be upgraded from side chick to second wife. That just means the side chick vacancy remains empty! Yoh! STRESS in capital letters!

This is too much. It's frustrating. I'm going to take a deep breath and shelf my thoughts for now. You know, open a shelf, put all of them in there, close it and lock it up. I'll open it when I'm ready to digest them. For now I need to live in the right now and I need to make a decision that makes me happy. Society can go to sleep for a while and all the judges should get off the bench. I need to do this for me. I need to be selfish.

Elik looks so nervous as I just stand there with my hands over my mouth, saying nothing. I'm thinking. The crowd keeps saying 'say yes, say yes'. I've never seen strangers so excited before! Elik has to ask again because he thinks maybe I didn't hear the question, because why else am I not saying anything? I've never seen him so unsure in my life. His hands are shaking shame. He's really scared of me saying no? He loves me that much? This is too hard! It looks easy in movies, but then again those people won't be having the kind of love Elik and I share.

"Baby? If you need to think about it, I understand. For you, I'm willing to wait. Nomatter how long it takes. You don't have to give an answer right now", he says. Tears are actually building in his eyes and he's blinking them back.

"Yes, I'll marry you Elik. I'll marry you", I give him my left hand and he slides that sparkle on it. I don't know how he got the size right though! This sneaky ex-convict of mine! He probably stole one of my fashion rings and took it to the jewellers! I give him a hand and help him up.

"You will marry me?", he says, as if he's not sure he heard right.

"You will marry me baby?", he says, more excited this time.

"Yes. I'll marry you", I say. I'm excited now and I know in my heart I made the right decision. It's always been Elik.

He picks me up and swings me around, then gives me the tightest hold I've ever had. I can't stop kissing him and now I can't stop the tears. I have to stop kissing

because it's all salty now with the tears. I said yes. I actually said yes. I'm engaged. I still feel like I'm in a dream.

I'm not expecting a happily ever after with Elik, because there are so many obstacles ahead. But I'm expecting an as-long-as-we-have-each-other-we-will-be-ok ever after. I refuse to think of all the things wrong with this. I'm all for positivity at this moment.

Tears are blocking my vision, I can't see clearly. Everything is so blurry. When I wipe off the tears, goodness gracious! Holy Mary wife of Joseph! I can see this rock on my finger close up now! To say it's perfect would be an understatement. It's whatever is better than perfect.

I don't mind the strangers screaming and congratulating us. They are showering us with hugs and some are even giving us marriage advice already! One says to Elik "The secret to a happy marriage is saying 'yes dear' to whatever she says". Some are taking pictures. People like things tjo! And I hope none of these strangers kissing me on the cheek have herpes!

When they finally leave us alone, I put my arms around Elik and I lay my head on his chest. I feel like I'm hugging him for the very first time. He couldn't have chosen a better place to propose. This is our place and it's beautiful. There's the mountains on our right, the vast forest on my left and the ocean down below in front of us. There's also Table Mountain over there, looking so majestic in this evening light and the city over that side. It's just perfect.

Everything seems so magnified. His heart beat sounds louder and his breath on my neck feels more intense. I feel like I want to love him hard, take care of him hard, treat him like a king hard, protect him hard. I feel like I want to go all out with him and not hold anything back. I want to do everything for him and keep him happy. I want to pick him up when he's down and put back the pieces each time he falls apart. I worry about him a lot and I just want to always make sure he's ok.

I cling onto him like I'm afraid he's going to run away. Because maybe I'm afraid this is just a dream and I'll wake up soon and I'll be alone in my bed at rez. But that scent of him that makes me ding-dong is right here so maybe I'm awake after all.

The sun is about to set. The city is now painted a beautiful orange hue from the sunrays. I look at the rock on my finger again and the rays of the setting sun dance through it as if celebrating with me. It's perfect, everything is perfect. My heart feels so alive and my soul is doing get down.

"I love you Elik", I say and look up to him.

"I love you more baby", he says.

I swear Elik was designed for me. He ticks all the boxes.

We join the masses watching the city lights and I'm looking down at Cape Town from a different perspective today. This city has made me who I am. I love who I became when I moved here. I got education and I got love. I lived. I'm 26 and

engaged. If I'm making a mistake that's fine, I'll own it and know that I tried everything with Elik.

He is a good guy, he just has a lot of childhood trauma and didn't get enough hugs as a child. He grew up without a father and his mother who later turned out not to be his mother, was in the city. All he had was his aunt, but she died too. So he feels like everyone always leaves him. So he replaces them before they even leave. He made that money but it wasn't enough to buy him loyalty and love from his family so he disowned them. He harbours a lot of hurt and scars but they are all stored safely away and you wouldn't see them just by looking at him. I had to scratch a little deeper to find them. He grew up way too fast and instead of chasing puppy love as a teenager like everyone else, he was busy disarming alarm systems and running from the police.

So I guess that's why he had to seek the attention of women. I'm probably making excuses for his past behaviour but that's how I always viewed it. Each time I took him back, I looked at it as he needed me and his past was making him do what he was doing. I loved him too much to watch him suffer and do nothing. We all have to justify the actions of our men if we are to stay sane.

Anyway it's getting dark here and Elik is still standing behind me with his arms around my stomach and his chin on the top of my head.

We decide to leave.

"Where did you park?", I ask.

He takes me to a polo vivo. A polo vivo! He loves big cars and this is small. He says he had to get a car that I wouldn't even suspect to be his. He's right, I'd have never imagined him in a polo.

"It's so hard driving this small thing, there's no space for my legs!", he complains as we get to the car.

"It's ok dear fiance, you can take my Jeep. I'll drive this small thing", I say.

I wish we were driving together though.

His phone rings and it's Lumka!

I don't hear his side of the line but Elik says,

"She said yes bro!".

I think I made someone very happy today! The way he's smiling, I deserve an award!

He hands me the phone and says Lumka wants to talk to me. We exchange hellos and how are yous and how is life and the congratulations.

"Thank you Fierce", he says.

"For what Bhud' Lumka?", I say.

"For saying yes to Elik. He's been afraid to propose all month, he has been carrying that ring around, I thought he would lose it! He thought you would say no", he says.

"Well, I'm glad he finally asked!", I say.

I walk away from Elik and sit on the wall, it doesn't seem like this will be a short phone call.

"Are you sure you are ready for this though?", he says.

"Ready for what now?", I say.

"You know, marriage, with Komla in the picture and all?", he says.

"I'm trying not to think about it. At least not today. I just got engaged and I want to enjoy that for now", I say.

"Alright, that's alright. Congratulations again sisi. I'm really happy for you and Elik. You two have been to hell and back and I know you will make this work", he says.

"Thank you. That's the plan", I say.

"But you know I've come to care about you Fierce as much as I care about Elik. So I don't want to see the two of you hurting each other again. You need to think this through, together", he says.

This phone call is spoiling my mood.

"I have to go bhudi, I'll call you some other time and we can talk", I say.

He says that's fine. I hang up and go back to Elik. He takes the Jeep and I take the polo and we agree to meet outside my rez on campus. He gets there before me because he drives like a taxi driver!

"Come, lets go. We sleeping at rez today", I say.

I know he will never agree to that! He says my bed is too hard, but I never hear him complaining when we make out on that bed! He swore to never sleep at rez. He said he would rather sleep in his car.

"Get your bag. We sleeping here", I say.

"Eeish, do we have to? I kind of booked us a hotel suite in Waterfront", he says.

"No, we sleeping here today", I say.

"Eeish. Ok fine. That's fine. Let me get my bag", he says and sighs.

I'm shocked! He agreed to sleeping at rez? He didn't even put up a fight! This engagement ring has superpowers mos! That's incredible.

"I'm kidding silly. Let me go pack a bag and we can go", I say,

He looks so relieved.

That question Lumka asked me is haunting me now as I pack. Am I ready for this? Or like I've done many times in the past, I'm letting love blind me? We leave the polo at rez and drive to Waterfront. It's the first time he's driving my car and he loves it. He says it's so smooth. It's new and it's a Jeep, what does he expect! He asks if I want an upgrade because apparently there's a new Jeep. I say no, I'm good thanks, I'm still in love with this one and won't be changing it any year soon.

We talk on the way and he's so stingy with answers! He doesn't want to tell me how he pulled the scavenger hunt off. He says he arrived yesterday morning. He says he decided to marry me when we were in Ghana. He says the day he took me to the ruins of his home, he meant to propose but he was an emotional wreck and felt the timing was wrong. He says at Sun City he meant to propose again but Komla showed up, we ended up fighting and even after we made up, the timing was now wrong. The he says he thought he would propose when we went home last month but after the uncomfortable incident with my mother, he just couldn't.

We get to the hotel and I still want to talk. I'm talking too much tonight.

"So, now we are engaged baby", he says.

"Yes we are", I flash my ring.

"Look at my ring. Don't look at it directly, it will blind you!", I say.

"You like it?", he says.

"I don't like it, I love it", I kiss my ring.

"You make it look good!", he says.

"I do, don't I?", I giggle.

"So, can we talk about what this means for us going forward?", he says.

"Not today baby. Today we celebrate", I say and he nods.

"What do you want to do?", he says.

"I don't know, we could go to Longstreet and get wasted, or we could go down to Shimmy Beach here and get wasted, or we can go to any bar in Waterfront and get wasted or we could stay right here and allow our bodies to also get engaged. Your pick", I say.

"My little drunkard!", he says and laughs at me.

I barely drink though but sometimes I just go all out and get stupid drunk and forget myself.

"I like the last option better. We can stay right here and get drunk on each other and wake up wasted", he says.

"Well, I need to shower first. I climbed a mountain today you know! Come shower with me", I say.

We used to make most of our plans in the shower back then.

“So? Can I call you wifey now?”, he says.

“No, please no! Allow me to enjoy being a fiance please!”, I say.

We decide to not discuss the future and I tell him how I finished my lab work and how everything seems to be falling into place. We probably wasting water considering the water shortage in Cape Town, but who cares. We keep talking about anything and everything. We reminisce about the good old days and all the things we’ve been through, like the time we lost each other in London and because I didn’t have a phone it was impossible to meet up so so I had just sat there, waiting.

What had happened was, we were having an argument while waiting for the subway. So the subway came and he got in and was like, “Baby, jump in let’s go!”. I had said no he must get out and listen to me! The doors had just closed and the subway had left me standing there on the platform. I didn’t have a ticket cause it was with him and I didn’t have a phone or money. I had been so scared and just sat there not knowing what to do. He had jumped off at the next station and took a subway back and found me sitting there 30 minutes later, almost crying. Long story short, he laughed at me and I laughed and we didn’t continue the argument.

“Where do you want us to go for our honeymoon?”, he says,

“Easy tiger! We not even married yet! We just got engaged today”, I say.

“Well, you can’t blame a brother for being excited. Have you seen yourself in the mirror? I’m one lucky man”, he says.

“You just trying to get into my pants!”, I say.

"Always", he says. We laugh about how we've never spent time together without getting it on, well except when it's the wrong time of the month. Even then I always put my mouth to work instead. He says it just means we are compatible.

"Ok I have to think about where we would go for honeymoon. Where haven't we been? We could go to the Maldives, they have this underwater hotel that I'm dying to experience", I say.

"Yes and we can make a baby there and call the baby Maldives", he says.

"Ha a I'm naming all our children! I don't trust you", I say.

"No ways! Looking at the names in your family I'll end up with children called Popcorn or Coke Zero or Chip Roll! Or worse Akon! So no, I will name our children", he says.

"Woo so you making fun of my name now?", I say.

"Which one? Lastborn? Who is called Lastborn when they are not even the lastborn? That's not even a name! What were your parents thinking!", he starts laughing at me.

This man!

"Fierce is funny too but it's grown on me. I love it actually. It's so unique and it describes you perfectly. You are fierce! And isn't you are going to show me just how fierce you are as soon as we step out of this shower", he winks.

I can't deal with him. He laughs at that Lastborn name all the time and he never uses it really. He says some Zimbabwean parents don't deserve to name their children. The children must be given random names at the hospital at birth.

"But you named your kids Peter and Paul! Why? Those are such lazy names. You didn't even think!", I say.

"Those are beautiful names! What you talking about it?", he says.

"You probably named them after P-Square hoping they will also be famous when they grow up!". It's my time to laugh at him now.

"I actually didn't name them hey", he says.

That's my cue to shut up. I'm not talking about Komla tonight! We done showering anyway, we wasting water now.

"Baby?", he says.

"Yes?", I say.

"Are you ready to try and have kids again?", he says.

I wasn't expecting that. I didn't even try the first time, it just happened.

"I think so. Why?", I say.

"Because I can't wait for you to have my children", he says.

"I don't know baby. I don't think I'll make a good mother", I say.

"Are you kidding me? I've watched you with Peter and Paul. You will make a great mother. Besides I'll be right there every step of the way, to help you and we will raise our little engineers together", he says.

That's true. I can almost picture them in my head. I'm hoping for twins in future. I would love that. I remember he asked me sometime ago to have his babies and I had laughed about it. After the lobola and stuff is done, we will try for a baby or babies. And Peter and Paul will make the cutest big brothers ever!

But wait. I think I just agreed to marry someone's husband!

Oh well, my mind is on other things right now, I'll deal with that tomorrow.

"What you doing?", I ask.

"I'm trying to connect my phone to the TV so I can play music", he says.

He gets it done and Akon comes up. Akon is our person and it's just fitting that we play his music today. His songs have been with us through thick and thin.

"So what was that fourth option you gave me earlier of engaging our bodies?", he says.

I giggle. He has that effect on me. I get all giggly and blushy around him sometimes.

"If you behave, I'll do that thing you like", I say.

He has studied me for too long and now knows me like the back of his hand! He knows how him looking into my eyes gets me all the time and how breathing down my neck makes my knees so weak. And he know exactly where and how to touch me to get my engine revving. I guess it's time to consummate our engagement now. The one thing we never disagree on!

When we first started I had zero experience. I couldnt even kiss properly. He always brings up how he loves that he was the first with me. He taught me everything and he explored my body and bow he knows every inch. He has a PhD in pleasing me.

I still get goosebumps when he touches me like this. It's like the very first time. He kisses me then stops.. He's teasing me I know. I would love to play hard to get but he's given me a taste and now I can't wait, I want some more and I want it now. I get on my tippy toes and pull down his neck. He doesn't resist. Before long, his hands are everywhere and he's kissing me harder and deeper like he's been waiting for this all his life. The way he's kissing me is making me regret all the kisses I wasted on past people. They were all wrong. This is how kissing should feel like.

I feel like I'm melting and I'm no sure how much longer I can stay standing. By the time we upgrade to lying on the bed, Let's Just Fall In Love - Akon, is playing in the background. I'm glad for the song because I don't how sound proof these walls are.

I guess Elik is just that good because I'm here realising that saying yes is the best decision I've ever made. If he brought a marriage certificate right now and said sign, I would do it without a second thought. He's pulling off the kind of passion that makes me suddenly think being his second wife won't be so bad after all.

I love how his skin contracts perfectly with mine and how he feels a bit heavy on top of me but I wouldn't have it any other way. It's a paradise and a battlefield, all wrapped in one. I never want it to end. Our bodies are just dissolving into each other. I grab his back, pulling him closer and closer. I inhale the scent of his perfume and that extra scent that's just him. It's the most delicious scent in the

whole world. It makes me want to drink him, lick him, bite him, eat him up and have him for dessert afterwards.

I've never wanted anyone like I want Elik. It's always been him. I keep holding on, pushing my body closer to his and pulling him down on me so our bodies can become one. I just want him closer and closer and a little bit closer. When he lifts his head from my shoulder, holds the back of my head with his hand and looks me in the eye and tells me he loves me, I'm completely finished. That's it for me. I could do this for eternity! I feel so connected to him. He's so deep he's touching my soul.

I close my eyes and let the song now playing take me away as I ride this wave. I imagine it's Elik singing to me.

This, like a thousand songs before it, is now my favourite song.

'LOVE HEART ATTACK - AKON'

I used to be, yeah, extremely lonely

Till you came around and became my girl

And you made me see, yeah

The real woman

I'm lucky to have found you in this cruel world

Cause some live for a lifetime and never see how wonderful love could just be

Cause you'll always be my life line that's why

I believe you the fluid that makes my heart beat, oh oh
I rather die than watch you leave, oh oh
Cause you are the reason why I breath, oh oh
I just felt my heart skip a beat, oh oh
I'm having a love heart attack

I get so excited yeah
It happens when you come around
Get my blood pressure rising
I get so delighted, yeah
Especially when I lay you down
We'd rather make love than fight

Never wanna see myself without
Wouldn't do it even if I was allowed to
Life wouldn't be the same baby without you
My little heart don't wanna beat without you

CHAPTER 63

Elik didn't wake me up this morning so I only got up after 10 am! I feel betrayed. How can he wake up, shower and live for over 2 hours without me! He says he didn't want to disturb me because I looked like I could use the rest. He's so full of it! The first thing I feel is the ring on my finger. It still feels weird. He brought me

breakfast in bed. Well, the restaurant prepared it and room service delivered it, but he's serving it to me so I'll take it as if it's from him. I'm not hungry really. I just woke up! Who eats as soon as they wake up? I eat a bit though because fiance dearest insists and then jump into the shower alone, since someone didn't wait for me!

Honeymoon phase is over and reality is kicking in hard. The truth of what I agreed to yesterday is now dawning on me. What I did yesterday was impulsive and it's going to complicate my life even further. You would swear I'm possessed by the spirit of stress because every time I'm in a happy place stress finds me or I find it.

We have to talk today. I hate serious talks. They somehow never go well for me. Elik is too honest sometimes and he has no filter. He might just tell me he loves Komla but feels sorry for me so he's doing me a favour by marrying me. He could say that and see nothing wrong with it! We might just end up broken before the day ends. That's scary.

Yesterday I was excited about this whole engagement thing but now that I think about all the logistics and the hurdles we will have to jump over, I'm terrified. I'm not ready for marriage. I have no clue how to be a wife. No one even knows I'm engaged because well, I don't have friends. I'll tell my lab mates in person and they are going to be shocked dead. They all think I'm in a long drought, well except Bunke. He will judge the hell out of me and call me stupid using the most polite of words.

I think I'm tired because I'm doing everything at snail speed. It takes me a whole 30 minutes to finish showering. Elik had to come and check if I was still alive. I go through 3 different outfits before I decide what to wear. Elik is useless. He says 'that looks great baby' to every outfit! By the time we leave the room it's past 12 and the canon from Signal Hill has already fired.

For someone who's going to be a wife I'm showing way too much skin. I have on short shorts, a small T-shirt, a cap and trainers. I look like a first year! Elik says I look cute when I try to change into outfit number 4. He says I must embrace this body I have and wear whatever I want so that should I lose it when I start popping his children I won't regret. I guess that's one way to look at it.

He says we are going deep into the ocean to talk. It doesn't make sense until we make it to the side of Waterfront with boats. He always loved the ocean, having grown up in Cape Coast and all. He says it smells good and it's so far from the stresses of main land.

He got us a private yacht so we can 'escape the noise of the land' and go and talk. It's just us two plus the helmsman (driver) and two attendants to keep bringing us drinks and whatever else we want.

She offers us oysters to snack on. I hate those things. They are so slimy and yucky. The first time I tried one was at a departmental function. It went all the way down my throat then came right back up and I had to take it out with my fingers. That

was gross. I don't want them anywhere near my mouth ever again. Luckily she has mussels in butter cream sauce. Now that's what I love.

We sit at the front of the yacht, facing each other. Today is just about talking. We make small talk like arguing about the colour of the sky. I say the sky is blue, that's a no brainer. He says it's violet. I remind him that the atmosphere scatters blue light more than it does red light therefore - blue. He insists it's violet but we see it as blue because of how our eyes work. He goes on to explain how the retina of our eyes work and the different wavelengths of light and the relationship between them and our eyesight. When he's done I know he's right. The sky is actually violet we just see it as blue. But I'm not going to admit it out loud!

We not here to have a science forum though and we both know we have to start talking about the serious things at some point. Thankfully he goes first.

"So, nana? Do you regret agreeing to marry me?", he says.

"No I don't", I say and play with my ring. He hardly calls me nana, but it's always cute when he does.

I go back to my mussels. I don't know where we are supposed to start talking. I'll wait.

"Do you want more mussels?", he says.

"No thanks", I say.

"Do you want anything else?", he says.

"No hunn. I'm good. I'm not that hungry anyways", I say.

Another long pause.

"Alright baby let's talk" he takes the bowl with the mussel shells and signals for an attendant to take then moves closer until our knees are touching. Then he doesn't say anything. He just keeps playing with my hands.

Ok fine I'll go first, otherwise the sun will set and we will still be here making small unnecessary talk.

"So, what's the situation with you and Komla?", I ask.

"Nothing's changed. We are still married", he says.

"Ok, when are you getting a divorce?", I say.

"I'm not", he says it so easily, I don't understand.

"Why not?", I ask.

"Because she is the mother of my children. I don't want Peter and Paul growing up without a mother like I did. I'm looking out for them. Besides, I don't hate her baby", he says.

"So you are marrying me as well? How is that going to work? It's illegal!", I say.

I take a deep breath. I will remain calm and will not lose my cool.

"We'll make a plan", he says.

"What do you mean? You don't have a plan yet?", I say.

"Not yet", he says.

The way he's so calm is making want to punch him in the stomach! I could just throw him into the sea you know. Like, why is he so calm about this?

"You can't be serious Elik!", I actually feel like laughing.

This is a big joke. I'm going to be engaged for the rest of my life at this rate! This is witchcraft. He put a ring on it so I don't get taken by anyone else, but he won't marry me all the way. So I'll be stuck in limbo for a very long time.

"Be serious baby. What's the plan?", I ask.

"I don't have any", he says.

All the angels and saints in heaven please call an urgent meeting and start praying for me because I think I'm about to commit murder. He can't be serious.

But I'm keeping my cool. And clearly, I need to make the decisions here. Breathe in, breathe out.

"Ok, we can't get married because you are married in community of property and you can't divorce Komla because she will take half of all your estates. Is that right?", I say.

"No we married out of community of property. We entered into an antenuptial contract before the wedding. So if I divorce her, she just takes whatever she had before we got married and that's nothing really", he says.

I don't know why I'm relieved by that Komla won't be taking off with half of everything!

"Well, she can have her car at least", I say. I mean it as a joke really.

"That Fortuner is in my name", he says.

Wow! So he got me the Fortuner then the Jeep and gave me full ownership but he couldn't do that for his own wife. And she's still driving that old Fortuner while some of us have upgraded. Shame.

Out of community of property. That makes a whole lot of sense. That's why Komla will never leave! She would have nothing! That's why!

"So baby, your plan is for me to be your second wife? You want polygamy?", I ask. I know the answer is yes but I need to be sure sure.

"Something like that. I want to marry you, officially", he says.

I sigh. Ya ne! What have I gotten myself into.

"I met with Clive (his lawyer) and he said Komla and I need to convert our marriage into a customary marriage, then that way I will be allowed to marry you", he says.

I keep playing with the ring, wondering if I made the right decision here.

"Have you spoken to her?", I say.

"No not yet", he says.

"So Komla had no clue that you are marrying me?", I'm shocked.

"She doesn't", he says.

Still so calm it's driving me crazy.

I need a scalpel to slice open Elik's head. I'm curious about how his mind works.

He is not normal.

"I'll tell her when I get back to Joburg", he says.

"And if she asks for a divorce?", I ask.

"She won't", he says.

I'm getting a headache. This here is the reason I drink! I call the attendant and ask for a glass of wine, the sweetest they have.

"We will be fine baby", he says.

"How? You didn't think about this. You just wanted to propose and didn't think of what to do after I say yes! That's selfish baby. I don't need this. I can't deal with Komla for you. She is your wife! I shouldn't be thinking for you. You shouldn't have proposed to me without a plan!", I say.

"Please don't be upset with me. Let's work through this together, please?", he says.

This calls for me to stand. I'm getting seriously worked up. It's hard to express myself using my hands when I'm seated. I take a long sip on the wine then walk to the edge.

He follows and stands behind me. It's like we are in the African version of Titanic.

"Ok look, I'm going to meet up with Clive as soon as I get to Joburg and I'll talk to Komla. We will change the terms of our marriage to customary, then we can get married", he says.

"That process will take up to 6 months! And there are so many steps involved!", I didn't mean to shout, but I just did.

"Not if I pay the Registrar of Deeds! I know a guy", he says.

The way he easily pays his way through life is quite scary sometimes.

"You should have thought of all that before!", I say.

"But I'm thinking about it now", he says.

I turn and give him the eye and he immediately starts apologising.

"I'm sorry baby. You are right, I should have thought this through first. You are right", he says.

This right here, is what my future looks like! Ain't I just a lucky girl! Sigh.

I turn around so I can face him.

"Why do you want to marry me?", I ask. Just out of curiosity.

"Because I love you", he says.

"You've always loved me, so why now?", I say.

"I should have married you a long time ago. It's just long overdue. I love you and I want children with you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you", he says.

He really wants those children shame!

"I don't know how I feel though about being a second wife, you know", I say.

"Come on baby. You don't have to think of it that way. You will be my wife. I want that. Don't you want that?", he says.

Mxm! He knows I want that!

I turn away again and into the sea. This is too complicated. He turns me back around so I face him.

"Hey, ok I will handle this change of marriage status. I want to pay lobola for you as soon as possible though. I want you to be my wife already", he says.

"How Elik? You don't have family! Who's going to do the negotiations? And how are we going to get married without their blessing? We'll just be setting ourselves up for failure", I say.

Since he disowned everyone, I have no idea who is going to go home for negotiations. Maybe he can hire some uncles in Joburg. I'm sure they are posers who would appreciate the money and a free trip to Zimbabwe.

"I'll make a plan", he says. He looks a bit hurt. Am I being unreasonable? And bringing up his family was just me stating facts! Was it wrong to point that out? And if he says he'll make a plan one more time, I swear for real this time, I'm pushing him over the edge and maybe he can be swallowed by a whale like Jonah and return 3 days later with some sense!

"I'm sorry about bringing up your family baby but we need to talk about that as well", I say.

"Speak to your aunt first and find out how many people are supposed to come for the negotiations then I will find the people", he says.

I don't believe this! I was joking when I thought he would hire people! We really need to talk about this after I call my aunt.

This is too hard. Why didn't he just think about all of this. I think I'm going to cry. I feel like he didn't go the extra mile to make sure everything goes smoothly.

"Fierce, look at me", he says and turns and holds my chin up.

"Baby, if you can't do this, let me know. I will understand. I know you don't want to be a second wife. I know how you feel about your mother and step mother and the whole relationship. I know. I know I'm asking for too much from you here. So if you can't, it's ok. I'll still love you and you'll still be my baby. Just tell me", he says.

I don't know anymore. Maybe I need to walk away right here right now. He's offering me a safe pass. I can't see how this is going to work. I'm going to be fighting Komla, I have to lie to my family and I don't see Komla agreeing to them changing the status of their marriage contract. And under customary law, Elik will be free to marry a 3rd wife and a 4th and a 100th! And he can afford to! And if we get married now, how is it going to work? Will we have a long distance marriage? Me here and him in Joburg? I'm getting a serious headache. But I agreed to this!

"Can you do this Fierce, for me? With me? Please. Don't give up now baby", he says.

He looks so sincere and innocent, you wouldn't believe.

But I'm wired wrongly anyways, so I nod.

"I'll do this with you. We'll make it through. I'm not leaving you", I say.

"I don't know what to do with you Fierce. How do you do this? You are everything. I can't afford to lose you", he says.

If I was everything, wouldn't he have married me in the first place? Or at least be divorcing Komla? We shouldn't be having this discussion we are having right now.

I give him a hug. I just want to be held for a minute. I'm afraid I might just fall apart. The situation we are in is too much to deal with. I should let him know.

"I want to be with you baby, you know that. It's just, I don't see how we will get through this. I don't have the energy, I need to finish my PhD. I can't afford to be distracted now", I say.

"Look at me", he says and cups my cheeks so I look up at him.

"I'm going to marry you. You are going to be my wife. I'm going to pay lobola for you next month. Whatever number of cows your people want or how much money they want, even if it's a million rands, I will give them. I will do things right. I'm going to handle Komla and the whole situation. Me and you will be legally married. You will finish that PhD and graduate in April! Do you understand?", he says.

He has that commanding voice on that makes me just want to say 'Yes daddy!'. I nod.

"So don't worry about anything. I will take care of everything, I promise. If you want a big ass wedding and you want to invite the whole of Zimbabwe, I will give you that! I will give you whatever you want. You are worth everything I have", he says.

I don't know what to say so I'll just throw my arms around his neck and stay there.

"And when all is said and done, what if Komla doesn't accept me?", I ask.

"You are not marrying her, you are marrying me", he says.

This man!

"She's going to kill me Elik!", I say.

I'm not faking it. I'm truly scared.

"Let her try if she wants to deal with me. I'll speak to her. She will never touch you again!", he says.

That sounds wrong so I don't know why I'm smiling.

I'm tired of standing now so we go back to sit. We keep talking and he wants to know about the way we do our lobola process. I actually don't know much about the process because its a 'men' thing back home. Women don't sit in the negotiations and no one has gone through that in my family so I'm not sure. I tell him what I know. I will have to call my aunt and tell her I'm engaged. I think she will be very excited! She will then tell my parents and we can take it from there. She will know what to do.

"Are you going to tell your family about, you know, me and Komla?", he says.

"No". That's not even a question. I'm not going to tell them!

"Is that a good idea? Shouldn't they know upfront?", he says.

"No, I said I'm not telling them!", I say.

"Come on baby. They are bound to find out at some point, so don't you just want to tell them yourself", he says.

"Drop it already! Please. I said no!", I almost scream at him.

"What do you want me to tell them exactly? That all this time I was bringing home a married man? That my mother saw me having sex with a married man in her home? That I've been sleeping with a married man all these years and now I'm marrying him? That their beloved daughter who can never do no wrong is marrying a married man? Is that what you want me to tell them? How do you think they will react? Huh? You think you will continue being their precious son after that? You think they will accept your cows after that? So no I will not tell anyone anything end of story!", I'm upset.

It's not him. It's this whole situation. My parents can never find out. They wouldn't support their educated daughter being a second wife. They have always wanted the best for me and although I know Elik is what's best for me, other people might not see it that way!

"I'm sorry baby. I was just saying", he says and pulls me closer. To really hug him, I have to sit on top of him, facing him, with my legs wrapped around his waist. Talking about serious things is hard! Love is harder!

I realise now that I might have been too harsh. He meant well and somehow I think he's right about telling the parents but I'm overwhelmed. So much is going on and so much needs to be taken care of. So I can't take anymore.

"Can't we just elope baby? Go and get married on a beach somewhere in Brazil. We don't need a certificate. Me and you will know we are married!", I say. I'm seriously considering it. It would be so much easier you know.

"No nana, I really need us to do this right. Please. I want to follow your traditions and marry you right", he says.

I feel sorry for him. My uncles already know he's loaded so I won't be surprised if they charge him half a million. I have to tell my aunt to tell my father to tell my uncles to behave. They are not selling me here. Besides they have been surviving on Elik's money this whole time so technically he has paid lobola already in installments.

"You know baby, I went through the first wedding without being truly there. I didn't want to go through that wedding but I ended up doing it out of obligation to

family and society. I was chatting to you that day as I sat on that high table. I didn't enjoy myself. My mind wasn't even there! I was feeling so guilty because the woman I was marrying wasn't the one I wanted. I wanted you. Soon after the ceremony, I kept trying to call you. I needed to apologise for betraying you. Your phone wouldn't go through. I kept trying all night. Komla asked me who I was calling and I said, 'The love of my life'. I know it was mean but it was true. We fought that night and I slept with Lumka and she slept alone", he says.

I have no comment.

"So as much as our wedding would be for you as the beautiful bride, it will also be for me too. I want to enjoy it. I want to be a part of it and really experience it, you know. So it will be your first wedding and it will be mine too. I'll finally get to marry the woman I love and say vows from my heart and not repeat after a priest like a robot!", he says.

This is going to be so exciting.

"Komla has always known about you so I don't know why she's being so difficult. I actually told her that I would marry you one day and that if she didn't want that, she was free to leave", he says. It's nice being Elik ne. He gets two women that can't leave him and he gets to keep them both. He's actually going to have us both and I'm ok with it. I guess I've shared him for so long it feels natural to. I still think Komla is going to kill me. I need to call Avbob tomorrow and sign up for funeral cover. I'm so dead.

"How long are we supposed to be here? What time does the trip end?", I ask.

"Whenever we want. We are paying by the hour", he says.

We. I like the sound of that.

"Look at me Fierce", he says. Why? I'm enjoying resting my chin on his shoulder. I look anyway.

"You know I love you right?", he says.

I nod.

"You can tell me anything baby. I want you to be happy. So if you don't want this, please tell me. I'm begging you. I will understand. I need to know if you are truly in this or not", he says.

I look away. I need to find the right words to say.

"I want you Elik. I love you, more than anything. So much I don't even understand half of it myself. But I trust you. I trust you have thought about this, with me in mind. I trust you doing this because it's the best thing for us. If me being your second wife is what you truly want, then I trust and respect your judgement. Let's do it", I say.

He just keeps staring at me. I don't know. Maybe I said something wrong, I don't know.

"Are you serious baby?", he asks, with eyes wide open.

I'm not quite sure what he is really asking.

"You are my man and soon you'll be my husband. I have to listen you. I trust you to make decisions for the both of us. I'm with you, I'm not against you. I will go

through this with you because as long as we have each other we'll be just fine. So yes I'm ok with this. It's not something I ever dreamed of, but it is what it is. I'm not even quite sure how exactly it's going to work but let's find out together", I say. I wanted to say more but he's kissing me.

"I'm so lucky to have you. I don't know how I have you because I don't think I deserve you", he says.

"You deserve me baby. No one can ever love me the way you do. So I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be. I wouldn't trade you for anything", I say.

I can tell he needs reassurance and I'm willing to give that. I'm speaking from my heart. He just keeps staring at me like I'm an alien. I just have to change the topic.

"So after marriage, are you going to expect me to wear a doek and long skirts and start cleaning the house?", I say.

"Of course. You have to wear baggy things and call me 'baba' and kneel down whenever you see me", he laughs.

I remember how he laughed at me kneeling down to wash his hands when we were back home. I had a doek on and a long baggy dress.

"Ok, I will do that, you will see. You will feel like you are living with your grandmother!", I say.

"I'm kidding baby. You have to keep dressing like this (shorts), us men are visual creatures. Me looking at you looking so fine and sexy all day is foreplay. It's a major turn on. So when I get home I just want to hit that", he says.

"They call women who dress like this prostitutes you know!", I say.

“No, that’s just other women who say that. Us men we don’t complain, we love seeing that actually”, he says.

“Well, in that case, I’ll be keeping my shorts then”, I say.

“Of course. It wouldn’t be you without them. I love you exactly as you are. And no, you won’t be cleaning the house! You want to wake up at 4 am and clean, then go to work, then come back in the evening and start cooking! By the time you come to bed you’ll start telling me you are tired and I’ll never get any. So no”, he says.

“Have I ever said I’m tired *wink*”, I say.

“Nope. And I intend to keep it that way. I would go mad if I didn't get some of that”, he says.

He’s grabbing me and I feel a bit shy because the attendants might be watching. I have to quickly pull his hands away from me.

“Slow down on that baby. Let’s make a pact for now”, I propose.

“Alright”, he says.

“Let’s promise that we will support each other, we will talk to each other about everything and we will help each other through this. We will not shut each other out!”, I say.

He gives me his pinky finger and I give him mine.

Pinky swear.

When it comes to supporting me, I have no doubt he will hold his end of the bargain. He is very good in that department.

I think we good now. We have been talking for the longest time. We've left the difficult stuff and are now just fooling around. We can return to the Waterfront now, we have a reservation for dinner at the 12 Apostles.

Elik is leaving for Joburg tomorrow. He meant to stay here longer but he needs to deal with the 'change the status of marriage contract' as soon as yesterday. It's about to be a bumpy road, I need to brace myself.

"Hold me and don't say anything", I say.

He holds me tighter and stays silent. With our voices now silent, I can hear the sound of the ocean hitting against the yacht. The sound is so soothing and peaceful. I need to prepare myself for this coming journey. I will need every gram of strength if I'm to survive.

As we are nearing the Waterfront and network has returned. Elik's phone rings. It's Komla!

CHAPTER 64

So much happened in the past 2 weeks, I'm exhausted, annoyed, shook and angry. You would swear me getting engaged to Elik is worse than what global warming is doing to the world! Like come on now, we have bigger problems in the world like the war in the middle east, starving children in India, Bitcoin losing value, fuel prices going up, you know! Things like that! Those are real problems. Me being engaged to Elik shouldn't even be an issue!

But ya, there's so much negativity going around, I can not deal! I can't. Our people have been practising polygamy for centuries, so why is it suddenly an abomination because it's me? People are coming at me from all directions with guns blazing!

My first mistake was telling the guys in the lab! I thought it was the right thing to do you know seeing that I'm rocking this rock on my finger. I knew they might not approve but I was never ready for the bashing I got. I ended up a tearful mess. I had kind of left out the part of Elik being married and me being awarded the position of second wife.

But Bunke! Bunkechukwu! That Nigerian dark chocolate that used to make my temperature rise, just had to tell them I was marrying a married man! And of course they immediately assumed it was an old blesser and they did not withhold the punches hey! They shredded me and grated me to pieces. I'm still shook!

BRAIN

Brain went off at me like I had cheated on him or something. He said he didn't know why I was given a brain in the first place since I continuously refuse to use it! He says he can see now that the only reason I didn't date him was because I'm a gold digger and just wanted an old man with money. I didn't even get why he was taking it so personal when it had absolutely nothing to do with him! You would swear I had promised to date him in the future!

NDIVHU

He says it all makes sense now. The facebook posts on that page, the sudden riches, the always smiling on my phone, the driving of expensive cars, the man in the suit he once saw me with entering rez, my WhatsApp status pictures in exotic place and my unexplained disappearances! He says he should have known!

I don't know what that means or where he gets off telling me that, considering he has a universal penis that has seen more girls than a gynaecologist! I think he sounded jealous now that I think of it! Why else would Ndivhu go off at me? It's unlike him.

As if that wasn't enough, big mouth Ndivhu just had to go and tell Prof the 'you won't believe this' and he called me in for a talk. When did men start liking things mara?

PROF (Supervisor)

The old man pulled out a Bible on me! He gave me a whole lecture on how there are no blessings in stealing another woman's husband. I didn't steal him! It's not like Komla was walking in town with Elik in her handbag then I snatched the handbag and ran away! What do people mean 'steal'? If she thinks I stole something that belongs to her she should go report to the police!

And we quoting the bible now seriously? Religious blackmail? Are we going to ignore that polygamy is in the bible? King Solomon, King David, Father Abraham, Esau, Gideon, Ezra, Caleb, I could go on. So why can't Elik be allowed a second wife? But I'm not one for religious debates so I listen to the old man go on and

even invite me for a prayer group at his church! Over my dead body. Do I look like I want an exorcism performed on me! I know these people think I'm possessed!

MY AUNT

Oh glorious aunt, what would I be without you! My aunt is over the moon you would swear it's her getting married. Of course she doesn't know the whole story and in her head I'm marrying into love and money. A rare combination, she says. She says even if he breaks my heart at least I'll be crying in a mansion in Sandton and driving a Ferrari. She says she can't wait to see me so I can tell her word for word on how her beloved mkhwenyana proposed.

LUMKA

I spent over an hour on Skype with Lumka the other day. He's as supportive of Elik as always but I kinda got the feeling that he thought I was settling for less than I deserve. He didn't say it like that but he kept asking if I'm sure about this and that I'm still young I don't have to do this and stuff like that.

I insisted that I'm sure and that I love Elik, which he already knows. He says he wishes he had a woman as loyal to him as I am! And he promised to support whatever Elik and I decide and he will be the best man again at the wedding. He even offered to be the godfather of our upcoming football team.

ELIK

My precious baby. I wouldn't trade him for anything. My love for him is so bad that when he's not around, I miss even his annoying habits, his lack of planning and his zero sense of urgency!

We talk every night on the phone now since we got engaged. I need it considering how annoying everyone else around me is. He's so excited about me being his wife, it makes me not regret my decision. And well, he's busy so he's giving me his attention the best way he knows how to. By blessing me with them Mandelas, even though I have one of his bank cards! When it comes to being supportive, Elik takes the trophy shame. It never takes long for him to cheer me up.

KOMLA

And on the seventh day, while God was resting, the devil created Komla! Dear Komla! My soon to be sister wife! That woman has energy and drama that I fail to understand. I don't get her at all.

Elik said she completely lost her mind when he told her about our engagement. I think he contributed because I know that man can be so cold sometimes. He probably just said, "Hey wifey, guess what. I asked your arch enemy Fierce to marry me and she said yes, so clean the guest room, she's moving in". I wouldn't put it past him!

Apparently she got into her car and drove straight into the durawall! Wouldn't it have made more sense if she crushed Elik's car rather? Then, apparently she

threatened to kill herself if Elik married me to which he said 'go ahead'. Then when all her tantrums didn't work on Elik she turned her anger towards me.

She started dragging me on Facebook and posting some pics I didn't even remember. I'm just thankful it's not nudes! I can't imagine! She went as low as writing about how my sister died having an abortion and how I have had so many abortions I can't have kids anymore! And to add vinegar to the wound, I had to be shown all those posts by Ndivhu!

I don't know, maybe she noticed that I'm not on Facebook so she turned to WhatsApp. After reading her first 4 messages I concluded that she needs to see a specialist. Such confusion can't be normal. At least her messages were short so I didn't have to go through paragraph after paragraph. Komla doesn't deserve internet!

1: Why are you disturbing my husband? I'm coming after you, fool.

2. I have warn you before now to leave my husband alone! Ugly and foolish ashawo (Prostitute). My husband don't marry an ugly girl!

3. You think my husband loves you? He hates you, he tell me that. You are a disgrace to woman hood!

4. Remove the witchcraft you put inside my husband. Remove it I tell you. Stupid girl. You don't love my husband you want chop-money. Go get a job abeg and leave us alone. If you call his line again, aswe I go sound (slap) you.

Eh! This woman. If you are insulting someone, wouldn't you want to be as clear as possible and use a language they understand so that your insults have an impact? But I guess she was so upset, even English ran away from her!

I don't know if she expected responses or what because I didn't see any reasonable way to respond so I took screenshots for future use then blocked her. All I know is she needs me to be her sister wife so I can teach her about life. We can start with how to insult someone over text messages.

When she realised she was blocked, she started calling! Did she honestly expect me to answer her calls? Pshh. Then her sister intervened and sent me a message I couldn't quite understand. I could tell she was angry but she's so funny!

'You think baba Paul leaves proper woman like Komla for useless two-two (prostitute) like you? He marry you and you believe that? Idiot like you can't have good husband. Stop it now! Stop it I swear to you little girl'.

I found that message funny and I don't know what's up with their English today! Maybe it's on strike! I blocked that one too. Then another number found me telling me they will beat me with a wire. A wire? Not a stick or a shoe at least? A wire? I hope it's not barbed wire! I had to uninstall WhatsApp.

I did not respond to even one of the messages. I didn't even listen to the voice notes. So when she realised I wasn't giving her notice, she gave up on me and pulled out the bigger guns. She booked a flight to Ghana to go and report Elik!

This woman is so clueless about her husband, it's not even funny. She must ask me. If you want Elik to listen to you, the last thing you would want is to take his business to a family he disowned!

So with Komla gone, Elik was left alone with the twins. He's an amazing father but he also gets very busy. I need to coach him on his talking skills though.

He was like, "What you up to?"

"Same old", I said.

"How does your tomorrow look like?", he said.

"Same old", I said.

"You think you can come and babysit for me?", he said.

"Where's Komla?", I ask.

I'm worried Elik is trying to force us to be in one place together.

"A, that one. She left. She went to Ghana to that family she loves so much!", he says.

"Oh wow. So are you not going to follow her?", I ask.

"Fierce! I have money to chase because I need to buy a lot of cows. I'm marrying an expensive girl you know! So no, I don't have time to be playing hide and seek with crazy people", he says.

Ok. No need to be dramatic now!

I asked if he can't leave them with Komla's sister and he said she poisons his children so he doesn't want her anywhere near them.

He had to meet up with some high up people in Zambia. Their company is opening up a branch there. They actually got a construction tender already! How you get a tender before the company even exists in that country surpasses my understanding.

"Fine. I'll be there tomorrow morning", I said.

I needed to get out of Cape Town for a bit.

CHAPTER 65

With that said, I'm in Elik's house, lying on a mattress in the living room, with each twin fast asleep on either side of me. We are 'camping'!. I've had a very long 3 days. Dealing with kids is exhausting shame! I don't rest when they are up. They are too hyperactive! Partly my fault because I allow them to eat whatever they want. Today, we went to the Zoo, then had a picnic at Zoo Lake, then had our supper at McDonalds. Then we had to go past Game to buy a tent because apparently we were going camping. I didn't get it but they took their time to explain.

"Aunty Fierce I'm tired of sleeping on a bed. Can I sleep in a tent?", Peter said.

I looked at him like, what is this child smoking!

"Yes aunty Fierce. We can go camping in the forest", Paul said.

When they say Fierce is sounds like they are saying Fears.

They were getting excited and I was getting worried. What is McDonald's putting in their burgers to make children want to go and sleep in the forest?

"No guys, we can't go to the forest. There are lions there. They will eat us", I say.

"No we can go to the forest but at home. There are no lions there", Peter said.

From his argument I knew it was Peter. Paul is more soft spoken.

At this point I was thinking, Elik where are you? Come and take your kids.

They explained to me that a forest doesn't have to be a forest you can make your own forest. It was confusing as hell and they were talking over each other. But eventually Peter made reference to the movie we watched the other day where the kid was sleeping inside a tent in his room.

So that's why we ended up at Game buying an indoor tent. We pitched that tent right here in the living room and we are sleeping in it right now. I had to pull out their christmas tree from the storeroom at the other side of the pool and place it outside the tent, to give that forest look.

I can't say no to them. They gang up on me and are so cute when doing it. And their stubbornness and some silly arguments they make remind me of Elik! So now I'm sleeping inside a tent, in the living room playing Farm heroes!

Bringing the mattress from the other room to here was a mission and a half! I think they put stones inside mattresses these days! It was so heavy! And it didn't help that these two kept trying to help me but were actually disturbing me.

Which reminds me. I need to make them wear name tags because I can't tell them apart still!

I've been referring to them as my kids lately to whoever asks. We get along and I don't know how their mother has not turned them against me yet. It's a miracle. I'm actually happy here with them. I feel much better.

Elik should have been here already. I'm tired but I'm still up, waiting for him. It's almost 11 pm now and he's still not here. I don't even think there are flights at this time! His phone is off and I'm dozing so I guess I'll see him in the morning then. Dealing with Peter and Paul takes all my energy, I don't even know how I'm still awake right now. But I'm not complaining. I hate sleeping these days. I have nightmares of Komla coming for me!

I must have dozed off though because I'm woken up by someone tapping my foot. I kick the hand so hard I hear 'ouch'. Serves him right. Who taps other people's feet when they are sleeping! It takes a while but I eventually get out of the tent. It's Elik. He takes me by the hand and leads me to the bedroom.

"When did you get here?", I ask.

I'm still trying to wake up.

"Not so long ago. What's going on with the tent and the Christmas tree?", he asks.

"Long story. Apparently we are camping in a forest somewhere!", I say.

"Seriously? In the living room?", he says.

I roll my eyes.

"Ask the boys. I was their idea", I say.

He laughs at me.

"You let those two bully you into playing their games!", he says.

"I don't mind. It's fun actually. They are great kids", I say.

"Do you love them?", he says.

What type of question is that!

"I do. A lot", I say.

I want to sleep but he wants to talk.

"Baby. I need to sleep. Let's talk in the morning", I say.

"Wait. I have a surprise for you", he says.

I wonder what he could possibly have brought me from Zambia that can't wait till morning.

"Please give it to me in the morning. I won't be able to be excited right now".

At least I'm being honest. I'm still half asleep.

"Alright", he says.

"Alright. You not sleeping with me?", he says.

"No. They can't wake up in the morning and I'm not there!", I say.

He laughs.

"You are amazing! You know that?", he says.

I want to smile but I want to sleep more.

"You can come and join us. It's a 4 man tent. There's plenty room", I say.

I don't wait for his response. I'm so sleepy.

Like 10 minutes later, he gets into the tent. I'm making him childish shame! He straightens the blanket and covers me and the twins. Then he lies down at the one end with his arm around Peter (I think) and I'm sleeping on the other side with my arm around Paul (I think). I'm sure Komla would have a heart attack if she walked in right now.

"Goodnight baby", he whispers.

"Night love", I say.

I'm 3 quarters asleep.

I woke up at 7 am feeling much better. I had a mini panic attack when I woke up in the tent. It took a while to figure out I wasn't in a cage or something like that. Well I didn't wake up, I was woken up. My little rascals wanted to wish me a good morning.

"Bye aunty Fierce. I asked daddy for you to come with us but he says you must sleep", Paul says.

"Can we go to the Zoo again?", Peter says.

"We will go", I say, rubbing my eyes.

"We are sleeping in the tent again today! Right aunty Fierce?", Peter says.

This child is already adapting that 'commanding' to e of his father at this age!

"You know daddy came back and he slept in the tent too", Peter again.

"Is it? I didn't see him", I say.

"You were sleeping but he slept here and he woke us up", Paul says.

“Ok guys, get your bags, let's go”, Elik says looking inside the tent.

“Bye aunty Fierce”, they both say and both hug me. It's not a hug hug, more of throwing of arms around neck. How they are so awake and alive so early beats me!

Their hugs and smiles are the best thing ever. I feel so much love everytime they throw their hands around me. Elik said he was taking them to daycare because he wants me all to himself today. I don't know how this daycare thing works. So you can bring in your kids any day you want, not continuously? I always thought it was like a school where the children have to go everyday for a term.

I went back to sleep as soon as they left. When I woke up again it was after 8. Elik had already taken out the tree and taken down the tent, leaving me sleeping there in the open. How rude! I woke because of the noise he was making while making breakfast even.

I had time to at least brush my teeth and wash my face first. No breakfast in bed please.

“Here's your warm water with lemon. I'm almost done here”, he says when I return and hands me a cup.

“You need a hand?”, I ask.

“No. Just sit back and enjoy your water. I'll be done just now.

I can't stop smiling. He really is special. I'm sitting there, sipping in my warm water and watching him cook. It's a beautiful view.

The Zambian deal is coming along just fine. He says we will be rolling in money soon. I love how he uses the 'we' for everything these days. I thought we were already swimming in money!

He's getting better at this making breakfast thing. The bacon and the eggs are just right and the toast is not burnt and the coffee is perfect!

There's so much bacon on his plate I wonder how he doesn't gain weight! He keeps thanking me for taking care of Peter and Paul. He says they can't stop talking about how much fun they had. I think I just scored major points!

As soon as we are done eating, he's more than excited to go get me my surprise! As he disappears into the bedroom and I'm left alone at the table, I'm praying that it's not a new car. I don't want a new car. Me and my Jeep recently met and are still getting to know each other! I'm not ready for a new relationship with another car. Please help me.

He hands me a big brown envelope. It feels light though.

"What's this?", I ask.

"Take a look. It's the reason I came home late last night. I had to pick them up", he says.

I open it and it's only 2 pages. I have to read through a bit.

'Application of dissolution of marriage'. It's divorce papers!

Wait! Divorce! He can't divorce me, we are not married! Can he? Can you divorce a fiancée? I've never heard such. But I can't put anything past Elik!

"You want to divorce me?", I ask.

I only realise after talking that I sounded so stupid.

"Don't be silly", he says and pulls me to sit on his lap.

"So? I'm not following baby", I say.

"I'm divorcing Komla", he says.

He just says it like it's, 'I'm going to buy bread at the tuckshop'! Isn't divorce a big thing? Why isn't he hurt or crying or upset or whatever emotion accompanies divorce?

"Why are you divorcing her? I said I will be your second wife. So what's the problem now?", I don't understand.

"She betrayed me", he says.

I wish he could just tell me everything without me having to keep asking!

"What did she do?", I ask.

"She knows exactly how I feel about that family in Ghana yet she went to them anyways and told them my business. I value loyalty Fierce and she betrayed that. So, I'm done with her", he says.

"Just like that?", I ask.

"Just like that", he says.

I think I'm growing evil these days because this news just made me smile.

"Wow", is all I can say.

"Yes. So from now on, you will be my one and only. I can finally concentrate all my energy on you! It's long overdue", he says.

I love the sound of that! So no more hustles of trying to convert their marriage into customary and I won't be known as the girl who married a married man! The relief!

"Have you told her yet?", I say.

"Ya. I sent her a WhatsApp message the other day", he says.

Oh wow. He dumped his wife through WhatsApp? Just like that? No sitting down and talking about it like adults. That's pure savage tjo!

I knew what Komla did was stupid from the moment Elik told me on the phone! I honestly don't know how she doesn't know Elik all these years! And now she wrecked her car, the only thing she could have walked away with. Elik might have let her take it. If she had seen how broken and hurt he was in Ghana, I'm sure she wouldn't have gone to his ex-family to report him!

"So. When is she coming back?", I say.

"She said she's not coming back. But she just wants attention and thinks I'll feel bad and beg her to come back! I don't have time for that", he says.

"You don't feel bad?", I don't understand how he is so ok with this. He spent years with this woman! Shouldn't he feel a little bad?

"Bad? No. I feel, let's see, free. I feel free. Like for once I'm being true to myself", he says.

“Divorces take long though baby”, I know from the series I watch. They can drag for up to 6 months or more.

“I married out of community of property so there's no division of assets and besides, I have the best lawyer, so it should take 4 weeks max”, he says.

“But will Komla sign these papers?”, I ask.

“Even if she doesn't sign, the divorce will proceed. I don't owe her anything. We just need proof that she has been informed of the divorce. Clive is handling that”, he says.

I don't know why I always thought both parties have to sign to finalise a divorce! Apparently that's not the case. If you want out you want out and the other spouse can't do much about it. And if you have a good lawyer, the law always bends to whichever direction you want it to. And all this time I thought they got married in Ghana! But apparently they had the ceremony there and went to Home affairs here.

This is a pleasant surprise. It just makes everything so much simpler. Komla did this to herself and she shouldn't blame me for it. I never meant to displace her! I mean, I've always been willing to share but she didn't want and now she's pushed her husband away and straight into my arms.

I think I feel relieved, you know. Elik is finally mine. All mine. I'm so excited I can't even hide it. He's just made me the happiest girl walking this country!

We stop talking about Komla and talk about us. He asks that we set a date for the lobola negotiations. We go through the calendar on his phone and we settle for the second Saturday next month. I'll tell my aunt to pass on the message to the parents.

"So, will we also marry out of community of property?", I ask.

I need to know so that I can aspire to get a job and build my own empire for the day I get dumped via a text message.

"What? No! You deserve half of what I have. Why else would I work so hard if it wasn't to keep my baby girl smiling?", he says.

Well, his money doesn't make me smile! Ok fine you got me, it kinda does. It makes life so much easier.

I ask if he's spoken to Komla's sister. I kept expecting her to come to the house in the past days Elik hasn't been around. He says he has disowned Komla's whole family and wants nothing to do with them!

He bana! This man just disowns people nje like it's drinking tea! And he doesn't look fazed about it!

"But wait. What if Komla is serious about not coming back? What will happen to Peter and Paul? Who will take care of them?", I say.

That thought just crossed my mind. As much as he loves his children, he's hardly home, especially now with the Zambian expansion. He can't take care of them.

"They will stay here with me", he says.

“How? You hardly here baby. They are too young”, I say.

“Well, they will have you. You will take care of them”, he says.

I freeze, my lips stay there parted as if I'll say something. But I can't find the words.

No. Elik no. I have enough on my plate. I can't keep the kids. I can babysit for a couple of days yes but not keep them indefinitely! What do I know about taking care of children? I fed them cereal and junk food for 3 days straight! What am I supposed to do with them? At rez nogal! And it's not one kid, it's two!

Yho!

Ya ne! My life!

I could write 10 books!

CHAPTER 67

It's Friday. I've been playing mother for 13 days now but it feels like 13 weeks.

Geez, I'm exhausted! I'm pulling 48 hour days! Juggling my own already busy life with kids is draining. I wake up at 5 am because I'm still quite slow with the preparing the kids for 'school'. They are calling it school and not Daycare so ok, school it is. The whole bathing them, dressing them and making sure they have breakfast then driving them there, takes away my whole morning.

I'm so thankful for this school though because whatever they are doing is great. The kids are happy, well fed and they are always exhausted when I pick them up at 4 pm, which means I cook early and they go to bed early. Then I have time to continue working on my thesis.

Elik is very busy. He's between Joburg and Zambia. I hardly get him on the phone and we've done a video call like twice since I got back. He calls late at night but the kids are sleeping then so it's just us.

He's so ok with his divorce thing. I just hope he's not just shutting me out and bottling his feelings. I've been too busy and too tired to really probe deeper. When he says he's fine, I leave it at that.

I've been feeling sick almost everyday but I've been so busy I haven't had time to go to the doctor. Mornings are the worst! I think I have a bug or I'm coming down with something.

I drove around the township yesterday looking for chicken feet! Imagine! And when I eventually got them, I didn't want them anymore! I'd lost my appetite. I found that really strange. It's probably just hormonal imbalance from my body taking strain. I'll live.

So it's Friday and I'm leaving campus at 1 pm. I have a doctor's appointment at 2:30. It's time to make use of that medical aid I pay for!

"So. Ms Nkomo. What can I do for you today?", the kind doctor asks.

"I think I'm coming down with something. I get these hot flashes and I wake up sick every morning", I say.

"Ok. When did you start noticing these symptoms?", he says.

"I don't know. Saturday, Sunday last week, somewhere there", I say.

"Anything else that's been off?", he asks.

I don't think I can tell him about the sudden craving of chicken feet and how the only drink (Coke Zero) that I have been loyal to for years suddenly tastes like domestos!

"I feel nauseous and get headaches every now and then, but I think it's only stress", I say.

"I think you are pregnant", he says.

"What? No! That can't be", I say.

I've thought of it but I guess I didn't want to think of it really. It can't be. I've been pregnant before and I did not have any of these problems.

He insists on doing the pregnancy test and I try to tell him he's wasting his time. I end up agreeing though. Because why come to the doctor if I won't listen, right? I do as told then wait.

"There. See? You are pregnant Ms. Nkomo. Congratulations! It's just morning sickness and hormones acting up. You are totally fine", he says.

I don't know how I feel. I feel numb so I just stare at him.

He says it will pass and refers me to 'the best' gynaecologist in town.

"Thank you doc", I say, grab my bag and walk out.

I sit in my car and hold onto the steering wheel for balance. I feel like my world is spinning. I can't believe I'm pregnant. I still can't describe how I feel. I'm

overwhelmed and scared. What if I lose this baby or babies? I can't survive that. It was so hard for me the last time.

My hands are shaking as I dial Elik. I know he has an important meeting but I really need to talk to him. Again, I remember now why I need girlfriends! I call, it rings till it goes to voicemail. I call again. And again. Then give up. I could call Osh, Brain's girlfriend, but she could tell Brain and he could tell Ndivhu and Bunke and and. I can't deal with that right now. Things are already awkward between me and Bunke as is. Anyways, I need to rush before traffic gets hectic. I need to pick up Peter and Paul.

The twins and I are watching Moana, eating chips and they are going on about their day and their new friends. I think they really love it at that 'school'. I know I'm a bit off today, I hope they can't tell. I have been to the mirror twice, to check if my tummy looks bigger. It looks normal to me!

I'm not cooking. We will have pizza delivered tonight. My phone rings and it's Elik. I excuse myself and step out onto the balcony. The view of the sea from here is amazing!

"Baby. Is everything ok? I saw your missed calls just now. I was in meetings all afternoon. Is everything ok?", he says.

"Baby. You are going to be a father", I blurt out.

Maybe I should have said 'again' seeing that he is already a father!

"What? What do you mean?", he sounds so confused.

"I'm pregnant baby", I smile for the first time since hearing the news. Saying it out loud made it so much more real.

"Are you sure?", he says.

"More than sure. I went to the doctor", I say.

"I'll be on the next flight to Cape Town", he says.

"But....", I start to say.

But he's hung up.

But he has that meeting with the board tomorrow morning, he can't be here. He needs to be there! Oh well. It would be good to have him here. I've missed him and I'm sure the twins will be more than overjoyed to see him.

Change of plans. No more pizza. My man is coming home so I'm cooking. I just have to go to town and buy vegetables at the train station. Elik loves his pap and veg with extra meat.

I know the boys are hungry but they have to wait a bit. We are having dinner as a family today!

That 'I'm outside' phone call I've been waiting for finally comes.

"Stay here guys, I'll be right back", I say.

"Ok", they both say.

They are so synchronised, I'm still not used to it.

Elik looks divine in a suit. Wow! I can never get used to it. Seeing him standing there, outside his rented car, with a bouquet of flowers in his hands, makes me fall in love with him all over again. I run to him. I've been waiting for the past 5 hours for him.

I open the garage so he can drive in. It's a tight fit for 2 cars but it's a fit. He has to squeeze out of the car. I'm so glad he's here. I need him to help me process this whole pregnancy thing and to deal with all the emotions going on inside me right now.

We start making out, we never waste time. It's all going in the right direction when I remember the kids!

"Baby. Not now. Peter and Paul are waiting. They are hungry and I can't keep them waiting any longer. It's almost their bedtime and I still need them to eat and brush their teeth", I say.

He just holds me there and starts smiling.

"I can see they've replaced me!", he says.

He's silly. We go up to the house anyways.

"Daddy", they both run to him as we get into the house. Watching Elik with them is the best thing in the world. There's so much happiness and love between them. It's beautiful. I dish up as they play catch up and bombard him with stories of their new 'school' and the movies aunt Fierce watches with them and the bedtime

stories she reads to them every night before they sleep. They are so precious. I just need to teach them to talk one at a time.

If anyone walked in here, they will see a perfect family. Two parents who keep kicking each other under the table and exchanging the 'I can't wait to have you' look and two mannered kids who know not to talk with food in their mouths.

"Go change into your pyjamas and brush your teeth. I'll be there just now to finish the story from yesterday", I say.

"Ok", they say.

"I love you guys", I say.

I just have to. I feel the need to let them know everytime. I may not be their mother but I genuinely love them with all my heart. It just happened.

"Love you too aunt Fierce", they say and each gives me a hug before running to the bedroom.

Elik is staring at me with his jaw dropped. I feel like I did something wrong!

"Wow. Baby", he says.

"What?"

"Nothing. It's just you", he says.

I clear up the dishes and go to the bedroom to tuck them in and read the last half of "Tsuru and Gudo (Hare and Baboon)". I read African folklore to them because well we are in Africa and Cinderellas and Snow whites are too far fetched if we are

being honest. I love keeping it closer to home. It doesn't take long for them to fall asleep. They were tired shame. I cover them up and switch off the bedside light.

I didn't see Elik standing by the door, watching me this whole time. That feels awkward considering I've been doing voice changes so Tsuru and Gudo don't sound the same.

"Fierce", he says.

"Shhhh!". He can't make noise. They will wake up then I have to start over!

We go to the other room. There's clothes all over the bed. I kind of dumped my clothes there and have been meaning to hang them.

"So, you are really pregnant?", he says as soon as he closes the door.

"Yes baby. I am", I get so emotional. I hate these hormones! Damn. I was smiling a second ago, I'm crying my eyes out now.

"It's ok baby. Don't cry", he says and sits and makes me sit on top of him. I have to sit facing him, with my legs around his waist. That way my head is on his shoulder and I feel so connected to him.

"I'm so scared Elik", I say.

"Why?", he says.

"What if I lose the baby?", I say.

"You won't. Don't think like that. You'll be fine. I'll be with you every step of the way", he says.

I know he will be.

“What if I make a terrible mother?”, I say.

That's my biggest fear.

My mother always said the way I leave things lying around, I would forget my child in the bus one day. What if she had a point? What if I fail my child or children or how ever many they are growing inside my stomach right now?

“I saw you with Peter and Paul today and my heart just beat hard. The way you are so loving and the way you have embraced them as your own and the way they love you back and trust you. It's amazing. You even tuck them in and teach them manners and you read them bedtime stories! That's incredible Fierce. I know I threw you in the deep end and as always, you came through for me. For us. Because me, Peter and Paul are your family now. So to address your fear, you will make an amazing mother!” he says.

“You think so?”, I say.

“I know so!”, he says.

“But I'm scared”, I say.

“That's ok. That's why you have me. You have no idea how happy I am right now. Today is the best day of my life. You are having my baby Fierce! Thank you”, he squeezes me so tight I can't breathe. So men thank women for being pregnant with their children? I'm learning a new thing everyday!

“So how far are we? Is it twins? How are you holding up? Is everything going well, with the pregnancy I mean?”, he says.

Easy there.

“I don't know how far I am and stuff. I'll go to the gynae sometime. I'm doing well though, the doctor said. It's too early anyways. But the morning sickness is killing me!”, I say.

I still don't know how I didn't get morning sickness the last time.

“And can you believe I can't stomach Coke Zero anymore!”, I add.

He laughs at me and says he's heard that some women start craving weird things like toasted avocado and fried watermelon. He says he will run away from me when I get to that stage. He's so silly! I can't deal with him.

He says Lumka will handle the meeting tomorrow so he will stay the weekend. I don't even know why they would have a meeting on a Saturday.

“Baby. Have you heard from Komla?”, I ask.

I need to know. I'm keeping her children and I need to know if she's coming for them or what the situation is.

“She called, yes. But I told you I'm done with her. Don't worry about her”, he says. It's easy for him to say ‘don't worry about her!’ because it's not him who gets asked ‘Where's mummy?!’

“What's her situation with the children?”, I ask.

I refuse to believe she would abandon them just like that.

“She doesn't want to come back Fierce. She says she will only come if I don't proceed with the divorce. What kind of a mother does that? The divorce is going on and should be through in about 2 weeks. So let her stay there if that's what she wants. You and I will raise our boys”, he says.

We will raise the boys? Discussing such big issues with me would be nice, you know!

I don't say anything though. I don't want him getting worked up. Not tonight. I have other things I'd rather have him work on, if you know what I mean.

“Thank you sweetheart. Thank you for taking care of my children. You are an amazing girl, you know that? I don't deserve you”, he says.

He deserves me. What's he talking about?

“You know, as I listened to you that day as you spoke at the symposium, I felt so proud that you were mine. I knew then that I wouldn't have anyone else be my wife and the mother of my children. You are everything!”, he says.

I blush. I'd forgotten. So he did watch the live stream after all!

It's getting late though and I need to get off him and clear the bed. I tell him all about the daycare the twins are going to and how they wind down with yoga! He is very impressed with me. I feel like I was on probation or something! He says it's easy to tell them apart. He says Peter has a birthmark behind his ear and Paul doesn't. Very helpful Elik! So I'll be checking behind their ears everytime I want to tell them apart?

We both agree that I need to get a nanny or 2. I tell him I've thought about it but I've seen horrible videos of nannies abusing children. He says Peter and Paul are grown so they will talk if something is not right. He's right. I could use a live in nanny to help me with the cooking and to pick them up should I ever be unable to make it on time. That way I'll have time to focus on my pregnancy and my thesis and still be there for the twins.

"How do you sleep with so many things on the bed?", he says and helps me fold my clothes.

"I sleep in the other room", I say.

"And where do they sleep?", he says.

"They sleep with me", I say.

He looks at me and raises an eyebrow.

"They insisted baby. I know they should sleep alone but they wanted to sleep in my bed. So ya", I say.

"No, I didn't say it was wrong. You just never cease to amaze me that's all", he says.

His shirt is all forms of creased now. And looking at him I know I made the right decision. He's my personal person. Tailor made for me.

"Anyway. Tell me. Is it true that getting it on with a pregnant woman is the best thing ever?", he says and pulls me towards him.

"I don't know. Why don't you find out and tell me?", I say.

I've missed him so much. I've been celibate for almost 2 weeks now. That kind of drought is not healthy. And with all these hormones pumping through me, I could use some steamy hot loving.

The rest of my clothes find themselves on the floor. I have to bite my lower lip extra hard to stop from screaming. The last thing I need is those two waking up and coming to see if I'm ok. Or worse, if they hear us and start asking me awkward questions in the morning.

CHAPTER 68

I woke up late and I panicked thinking Peter and Paul would be late for school. I dashed out of the bedroom and into the other, only to find them not in bed. I panicked some more thinking something bad had happened or that maybe they went off alone. That can't happen to me. I screamed so loud, Elik came running. It took him explaining it's a Saturday and they are fine and he didn't want to wake me up because he wanted me and the baby to rest.

I remember now how he knocked me flat out last night with his awesomeness! That's why I couldn't get up this morning! I feel stupid but he thinks it's cute. He doesn't understand that I can't let anything happen to his kids. They are not mine and how would I explain it if anything happened to them?

I take a quick shower and join them in the living area. The three of them made a mess of my kitchen, trying to make breakfast! I have no idea how they broke so many eggs and left them there or why there's flour everywhere.

Apparently the kids kept breaking eggs when Elik wasn't looking, thinking they were helping. And the flour was meant for baking so I don't know why there's nothing baked but it's everywhere! These 3 boys of mine are trying to drive me crazy I can see!

After breakfast I tell Elik he and the boys need to clean up. I'm pregnant, I'm not supposed to work. I can't wait to start throwing around the 'I'm pregnant' card! I know he'll just get a maid online anyway, but it was nice hearing him say 'yes baby, we'll clean I promise'.

I need to quickly go to campus to give Prof some results of a study I did for him. For some reason he texted me and said he's at the department and needs them. Why he didn't ask for them yesterday, beats me. Anyway, I'll go and give them to him. He will have to capture them himself then.

Elik insists on coming with but I assure him that he needs time with the boys and besides they should be cleaning up. I need my place sparkling clean when I get back!

Prof bullied me to capturing the data for him so I only leave campus an hour later than expected. The downside of being too nice!

I'm on my way back and just joined the N2. There isn't that many cars on the road and I'm having a chilled drive on the slow lane doing 100 km/h, listening to Akon's Shake down and feeling good. My life is going good and I'm in a happy place.

In the blink of the eye, I hear BOOM. The warning alert comes on my screen, flashing red and beeping very fast. The alert says my front left tyre just burst! It didn't deflate slowly, the safety system would have warned me. It just burst like a balloon!

With that BOOM, my heart seemed to have stopped. It's like I'm just watching from outside and this is not happening to me. The car is getting off the road and I'm quickly losing control of it. Instinctively, I slam the brakes hard and jerk the steering wheel to the right. Oh shit. I shouldn't have done that. That's a huge mistake! How can I be so stupid! But had things not been happening so fast I wouldn't have braked. I know that's the worst thing anyone can do when a tyre bursts. I know that. But I can't control involuntary actions!

My car spirals out of control, gets off the road, breaks through the barriers on the side of the road and overturns. I'm sure all that happened in like 5 seconds tops. I see my life flash right before my eyes. It rolls 3 times before it comes to a stop at the bottom of a ditch on the road side, lying on its roof.

It all happened so fast I'm unable to process it. The system is warning me that a hard impact crash has been detected (As if I'm not aware!) and an alert has been

sent out. The automated voice from the safety system keeps saying, 'Hello Fierce. Please remain calm. Help is on its way'.

I'm thankful for this car. At least I don't have to depend on other drivers and hope they see me down here and stop and call an ambulance on time.

I don't know what happened to Akon because he's no longer singing now. Only that voice telling me to remain calm is left. I'm hanging upside down and I can feel myself slowly drifting away.

I have airbags all around me. I'm trapped. I remember asking Elik why this car had so many airbags. I mean it has airbags on the steering wheel, side airbags and a driver-seat knee bolster airbag. Now I know why and these might just be the only reason why I'm still alive right now. And thankfully the roof is hardbody so it didn't cave in enough to slice my head open.

I don't know how badly I'm hurt because I don't feel anything. Maybe I'm dead. Like how do you know when you are dead? I try to shout for help but my voice is not there. It probably fell along the way as I rolled down here. I'm way too calm for this! Not that I have an option since my body is refusing to move.

Thankfully this is Cape Town. If this was Johannesburg, I'm sure I'll be lying naked outside now and I'll have been robbed of my clothes, everything in the car and what's left of the Jeep! Criminals that side don't play.

I need my phone. I need to call Elik and at least tell him how much I love him, before I die. I can ask him to take care of my parents as well. I also need to tell him that the kids love the Bar-One cereal crunchy so he should warm up the milk first then add the cereal after.

But I have no idea where my bag is and these airbags are obstructing my view. I'm still hanging upside down at the mercy of a seat belt. I had no idea these things are so strong! I weight a full 56 kg! So how gravity hasn't dragged me down yet, I don't know. I don't know whether to try and crawl out or what. If my back is broken then I know moving might paralyse me for life so I have to stay put.

Is the child growing inside me alright? I'm losing touch with myself at an alarming rate. I can feel my mind wanting to leave my body. At the same time it's like my body just wants to fall asleep. Other people's bodies panic and overreact in these situations but my lazy body just wants to shut down and take a nap? Just great!

I'm not in pain though. I'm at peace and everything around me sounds so serene and distant. The noise of the car tumbling down and the airbags deploying left me temporarily deaf.

My eyes are so heavy they too, like my body, want to sleep. But what if I never wake up again? What if this is it for me? What if this is lights out for me? Can't I be given a chance to at least say goodbye. I keep thinking of Elik. Will he be alright if I don't make it? What will happen to Peter and Paul? They need me.

I think I'll crawl out. I know I won't survive hanging upside down for long. It's so uncomfortable. Soon the oxygen supply to my brain will be cut off, my lungs will collapse and saliva will be running from my mouth into my nose and I'll be drowning. Besides, this reverse blood flow won't last for long and I'll run out of air very soon.

I need to get out but I can't find my hands. I wonder if I still have them. I can't feel any part of my body. Maybe I'm dead after all! But do dead people have a sense of smell? I think I smell petrol. The car might just explode and burst into flames, then that will leave my parents no body to bury. That's unfair. That automated voice is still on and is still telling me to stay calm because help is on its way. It sounds faint because of my almost-deafness.

My brain is working so painfully slowly, if I get out of here I need a new brain. I'm so done with this one! I look outside and I can tell that the window is shattered. I can't see much, just dying grass and litter. At least I was going at 100. What if I was at 160? I'll be an ex-person by now mos!

I'm still deciding what to do, at the same time trying to reconnect my mind to my body and also trying to understand what exactly is going on with me. My mind wants to detach itself from my body so bad, it's taking all the strength in my soul to stop it.

The paramedics are here and people. So many people, judging by the screaming. My hearing has returned to my right ear. My system is still telling me to stay calm.

I see the flashing lights and hear the sirens. And besides, my vision is distorted in this upside down position. I'm sure this image of me being dragged out of my wrecked Jeep is going to go viral on Facebook, posted by a stranger pretending to care but only wanting likes! Seeing that people post anything these days!

Ok, now I can fall asleep. I have been awake for far too long. It's time for me to sleep. My last thought is the baby growing inside of me. I just hope it's still in there.

I wake up in a white room. I feel like I just woke up from a nightmare. White room. Am I in heaven? That quick? I made it to heaven? But I don't remember walking through the pearly gates and being ticked off the register! And this man next to my bed. Is he an angel? But he doesn't have wings and why is he face down? I'm struggling to understand.

I shut my eyes and try to recollect my thoughts. I can feel my whole body and I can move everything. That's a huge relief! So maybe I am in heaven after all. I allow my mind to kick start and piece the pieces together slowly but surely. There was a boom, then my car system went crazy with alarms and warnings, then I was falling so fast, then I was hanging, surrounded by airbags. Then that's how I died right?

But there were paramedics and sirens and flashing red and blue lights not angels and heavenly music and white lights. It's all so confusing! Oh yes! My car overturned. I remember now!

The tyre of a new Jeep, with the right alignment and the right amount of pressure, driving on a proper tarred road, on a cool day, burst. It burst! That doesn't even make sense. How? There is no way that tyre would have just burst like that! No way! The last thing I remember is dangling upside down in my car.

Ok this is hospital not a waiting room somewhere in heaven! Then the face down man. He's sitting on the side of my bed with his face down on his hands on the bed. I might not be in heaven but he is my guardian angel. My saving grace. I'm glad he's my emergency contact and I'm glad he just happened to be in Cape Town today. The Jeep system would have sent a signal to him as well the moment I crashed. It's intelligent like that.

"Elik?", I push him with my foot.

I know that's wrong but I need him to wake up. He almost jumps up shame.

"Hey. You awake!", he says.

There is so much relief written all over his face. He wasn't sleeping. Just drowning in his sorrows. He kisses me on the lips, on the cheek, on the forehead, on the other cheek and hugs me. He's so relieved.

"Our baby Elik. Is our baby alright?", I ask.

I must look crazy right now. I push him off, jump off the bed, take off the gown and start searching my stomach for any sign of life. I need a sign, a kick, a bump, movement, anything. I need something. But there's nothing. I keep feeling and searching and poking my stomach. I need something. Please give me anything.

Deep down I know the baby is not even a baby yet, it's just a bunch of cells that can't move or do anything. But I need those cells to stay in there and grow. I hope they are still there.

The more I ask about the baby, the more I panic. I can't lose the baby. Not this time. Elik says I'm fine and didn't lose the baby but I don't believe him. He might just be wanting to trick me into not working myself into a fit!

He holds me from the back but I'm losing my mind. Before long, I'm having a panic attack and it doesn't help that I just woke up so my body is not ready for what's happening right now. My breathing is hard, my heart is racing, my palms are sweating and I want to scream and pull out my hair. I want my baby.

Elik shouts for a doctor and presses the 'help' button on the bedside and tries his best to restrain me. As a doctor and nurse walk in, I'm sure now they have seen it all. A naked woman going crazy and a poor man trying to hold her in place. The three of them manage to stabilise me and the nurse gives me a shot that gradually calms me down. It takes a while but I breath and I get there.

Ever sat there naked with 3 people in the room? It's actually not that awkward when you have bigger issues to deal with. You don't even attempt to cover anything. You just sit there. Elik covers me with a sheet. I can tell he doesn't like the idea of the doctor seeing me this naked. But it's a doctor come on. I'm sure he's seen thousands and thousands of pairs of boobs. It's no biggie really.

"Doctor. I'm pregnant. Is my baby alright?", I ask when I can now breath.

I'm not yet that calm but I need to know.

"The baby is ok and so are you", the doctor says.

"My child is fine? As in, I'm still pregnant? And you are sure?" I ask.

"Yes ma'am. I'm certain with no doubt. You are also alright. There is no broken bones or internal bleeding or any injuries. You just have a few shallow cuts from the flying glass but otherwise you are great and can go home. You were just in shock", he says.

Breath in Fierce, breath out. Repeat.

"I respect your car, I must say. I don't know how you fell off the N2 and got out in one piece!", he says.

He says I was temporarily paralysed by the shock and passed out from the trauma and from hanging upside down. And he says the first thing Elik asked when he got here was if the baby was ok, so yes, he is 110% sure that my pregnancy is still intact.

"The nurse will bring you the necessary paperwork", he says. He wishes me well and leaves.

"Thank you", I say.

Thank you good doctor, thank you nurse for that shot, thank you Elik for being here always, thank you dear Jeep for saving my life, thank you God I'm still alive. I'm grateful.

I lie back and let out a mini cry of victory. "The baby is ok! Our baby is ok".

I feel like shouting it from a rooftop so the whole world can know. Our baby is unharmed. But for now I just want Elik to remind me that I'm ok. I guess now that it's just us two left, he doesn't mind my nakedness! He keeps rubbing my stomach. It's still ironing board flat but I know there's a little heart beating in there.

"What happened baby?", he says.

His eyes are red. I can tell he had been crying. He probably thought I would die or worse our baby would be lost.

"My tyre burst and I lost control", I say.

"Your tyre burst? How? Were you warned of low pressure in the tyre or the presence of a foreign object in the tyre or something?", he says.

"Nope. Nothing. It just burst from nowhere. Just like that", I say.

I can tell it doesn't make sense to him as well. I mean, that Jeep has top class safety features. This is a car that warns me about everything. It even tells me when I'm driving too close to the road markings and tells me to centre align! So how a huge problem that would have led to a tyre bursting went undetected doesn't make sense. It doesn't add up.

He hugs me and I can't help crying. I have been in an accident before but it wasn't this bad and I wasn't the one driving. It was back home and the kombi (taxi) had skidded off the road and hit a tree. I had broken my arm. I remember the one woman was so terrified and in shock, she kept looking for her head. She had bumped her head hard she said it had fallen off and she needed to find it. It was sad to watch then under the circumstances. I was in Zimbabwe and we had called the nearest hospital and were told the ambulance had no fuel. So I had left the scene and hitch hiked and carried my hand to hospital. My lazy body had passed out from the pain then as well!

The car rolled 3 times! How I'm alive right now, I don't understand. I get up and I'm clinging onto Elik and crying onto his shoulder. Is it possible that this child protected me? I've heard stories of children, born and unborn, having unexplained supernatural powers.

For once in a very long time I pray. I ask that the universe doesn't punish me so harshly for all the wrongs I've done. I ask for emotional healing. I ask that my child doesn't get to suffer for my crimes. I beg for divine protection. If not for me, then for my child. Please.

The nurse brings the papers I need to fill in. What? I wrecked up an R8500 bill in less than 5 hours! That's absurd! But ok, I pay medical aid for a reason.

"Where are the kids?", I ask Elik.

I feel so much better now.

"I left them. They are fine. I rushed here as soon as I got the SOS from your car. I was coming to the scene but the rescue team called and said you'd been lifted. So I came here instead", he says.

"You have to go then. The kids can't be alone. I'll fill in the papers and come home", I say.

I don't like the idea of them being alone. I'd rather take an Uber home.

"No baby. I'm not leaving you. You have no idea how scared I was Fierce. I thought I would lose you. Do you understand? I thought you were dying! Seeing you lying in this bed took me right back to the last time. I thought you'd lose the baby. I thought you'd leave me and I was afraid. You can't leave me Fierce. You can't!", he says.

"Well, I'm still here. I'm not made of glass. I don't just break", I say.

He likes saying that, I'm just quoting him back at himself.

I need to remember to get a phone for Peter and Paul tomorrow. I need them to be able to call either me or Elik whenever they want or need to. I'm probably taking this motherhood thing too seriously, and the hormones are not helping. And with this near death experience I know to take life more seriously and take every precaution possible.

I can't believe I'm fine. The cuts on my arms were cleaned and closed with elastoplasts. I have to dress up though. Now that I'm self aware, I hate the thought that some strangers undressed me and saw me butt naked! I hope they didn't do

it at the scene with bystanders! I guess that's why my mother used to say 'you can't wear a dirty panty or one with holes. What if you faint and people have to undress you?'. I'm glad I took her advice.

I'm still in shock as we drive home and I'm uneasy of being in a car. I keep thinking 'what if we have an accident and this time I die?'. Elik just holds my hand and doesn't say anything. And for once he drives slowly. He's actually driving at 60 km/h!

I ask for a moment to get it together before I get into the house. I need to look like nothing's wrong to the boys. I don't want them worried. They are too young.

"You don't have to baby. You don't have to be strong. Allow yourself to feel. I'm right here. I'll take care of them and I'll take care of you", he says.

He's right. I'm not superwoman. I just need a long nap and I'll be just fine.

The day is almost over. The eggs and flour are gone, so Elik actually cleaned! The boys are watching TV and there's chips everywhere on the floor and juice all over the floor near the fridge and the fridge door is not closed. Apparently they wanted the chips they left over yesterday but I had put them on a shelf too high for them. So when they were trying to reach for them, the bowl fell. Then the juice, Peter says it's Paul, Paul says it's Peter. I watch them argue and they are so beautiful, I feel tears building in my eyes.

"Sorry aunt Fierce", Paul eventually decides to own up.

From his tone I know it's Paul.

"It's ok baby. I'll clean up", I say.

I get a clean bowl, fill it up with cheese curls, get two plastic cups and pour in juice and give it to them as they continue watching Naruto.

I get a dustpan and brush to clean the chips on the floor.

"It's ok baby. I'll clean. Come, let's put you to bed", Elik says.

I try to say no but he insists.

"I want to take a shower first", I say.

I feel so dirty and I want to wash the experience from me.

Elik goes to run the bath then comes for me, helps me out of my clothes, wraps me in a towel and carries me to the bathroom. He ties my hair in a clumsy ponytail at the top of my head, puts me in the water and takes his time washing me. I feel like a small child.

"How is my car?", I ask.

I realise I forgot all about my precious car.

"It's in a scrap yard. It's probably a write off. We can go see it tomorrow. Insurance will pay out but you know they take time", he says.

I nod.

"Lumka is looking into getting an independent accident investigator to find the root cause of your accident. Don't worry about the car though. I'll get you another one. Whichever one you want", he says.

I'll think about that tomorrow. I'm in no position to think about cars right now. One of their kind almost killed me!

Elik. I most certainly couldn't have done better. He is my life.

When he's done, he dries me and carries me to bed. He says he'll sit right here with me till I fall asleep.

"I'm paying lobola for you in a few weeks. I can't wait", he says.

I smile and try to find sleep.

CHAPTER 69

I woke up around 9 am and morning sickness had me bad. I felt like death. When I finally finished with my shower and dragging myself around. I joined Elik and the boys in the living room. And guess who else was sitting there on my couch! Lumka! He says he loves Cape Town, so any excuse to come here he takes it. He says he's here to meet up with the accident investigator and help Elik with stuff. Everytime Elik and Lumka team up to do these things for me, I'm left feeling so tongue tied. I don't understand how people can be so good to me and do all this just for me.

I listen to Lumka as I stand by the fridge and eat half of a carrot cake with my hands. I was just so hungry, I couldn't even wait to get a plate. I just keep digging

in. They are all looking at me like I'm crazy! What? They have never seen anyone eat half a cake all on their own? I ignore them, they have no idea how I'm starving.

I'm still hungry so I get cornflakes and fill up a bowl then add orange juice, some olive oil, a bit of almond milk and a lot of honey and mix it all up. I don't know why but that's what I want to eat and the recipe just came to me. I swear the way these guys are looking at me, they think I have lost my mind. I finish that then run to the bathroom and throw it all up. Afterwards I'm back to starving. I look in the fridge and in the pantry but nothing there says 'eat me'.

"Elik, please go and get me chicken wings and pizza. Make sure the wings are extra spicy", I say before dumping myself on the couch. I feel so tired and so hungry!

"You still want to eat baby after all that?", Elik says.

I fold my hands and give him the eye.

"I'm sorry baby. Yes, I'll go and get them right now", he says and gets up.

"You said the wings must be spicy? You don't like spicy stuff!", he says.

I look at him. Now he's really trying me! I'm thinking of words to tell him off without being disrespectful.

"Come Elik, let's go", Lumka grabs him by the arms and pulls him towards the door.

At least one of them has some sense!

I don't feel like doing anything today, I just want to sit right here with my twins and eat cheese curls and watch cartoons. So that's exactly what I do. I don't know why

Elik and Lumka take forever! It's like they had to go to the farms first to harvest the wheat, then grind it to make the flour, then make the dough for the pizza! They only come back like an hour later!

"Do you want the pizza or the wings first baby? Or both?", Elik says.

He sounds so unsure.

"I'm not hungry baby, thanks", I say and continue watching TV with Peter and Paul.

"Argh...", he starts to say but doesn't say whatever it is he wanted to say. I can hear Lumka giggling but I ignore them. How is it my fault they took this long?

"Anyways baby, can I talk to you in the bedroom? Please", Elik says.

I sigh and follow him. I don't know why he's disturbing me so much.

"I need to get you a car. Which car do you want?", he says.

"I don't know", I say.

"Come on Fierce. Just pick any, you can always change it later. But you need a car as soon as possible", he says.

"I don't know Elik. Why are you shouting at me?", I start crying.

"I wasn't shouting baby. Ok, I'm sorry. What did I say?", he hugs me as I cry.

I don't even know why I'm crying to be honest. The tears just came from nowhere.

"Can I get you another Cherokee then? Please baby, I need to make sure you have a car before I go back to Joburg", he says.

He's practically begging.

I nod. I loved my Jeep so I don't see why not.

"Ok. Don't cry. I promise I won't shout at you", he says.

I wipe my tears and we go back to join the others. Elik and Lumka say they have to leave. It's a Sunday so I don't know how much they can get done really or are they just running away from me?

"Baby", I call.

"Yes", Elik says.

"Please take that pizza with you. It's stinking. Thanks", I go back to watching the cartoons.

Lumka laughs out loud this time as Elik grabs the box and they go.

It's not my fault that Eve ate the apple and now our entire species has to pay the price!

I don't know what to do with my day. I'm tired of watching these cartoons already!

"I'll be in the bedroom. Shout if you need anything. I won't close the door", I say.

"Ok", they say.

I take a notebook from my backpack and start making a list of all the people I think would want me dead. I haven't seen the accident report yet but I'm wondering if someone wanted me dead. I usually don't believe in witchcraft but what happened yesterday seemed a lot like it. I plan to approach everyone who will make the list and make peace. I don't want to die. I've always thought of myself as a good girl but I hadn't realised how many enemies I've made along the way!

BRAIN

I honestly don't think he wants me dead seriously. Yes, he has had a crush on me from day one, but he has Osh and he really has no reason to want me dead. He just made the list because he's the smartest person I know. So if anyone can temper with my tyre and override my car system, it's him.

I'll just call and say I'm sorry. It's peace offering day after all.

He sounds shocked to hear from me. I apologise for not being a good friend and for my loose morals. I actually say, 'I'm sorry that I'm marrying a married man' as if that's a crime he can forgive! He says no he's the one who's sorry, because he was too harsh on me and he had no right. He says he's glad I called because it's been eating at him and he didn't know how to apologise. He adds that he's happy for me and wishes me the best and hopes we can go back to what we were before. I agree. So we good.

NDIVHU

What does he know about killing anyone! He has no reason whatsoever. I won't waste my airtime! He owes me an apology for talking to me the way he did last time! Otherwise I'll disown him quick, Elik style. He has till end of day tomorrow to bring me an apology!

BUNKE

It can't be Bunke. Bunke has always been good to me and I don't know when he started loving me really. He was attracted to me but just for sex. So as for love, I don't know how we got there. He confessed that he still loves me and still wanted me. Is that enough to make him want to kill me? If he thinks there may be a future

for me and him, wouldn't it be in his best interest to have me alive? Except if he has a ghost fetish or something! I'll call him anyway.

We spend over 30 minutes on the phone. I feel bad. He really loves me shame. He's going all out professing his undying love for me. But he has a wife! Why do I attract married men so much though. I tell him how what we had should never had gone that far. We were just having fun and things just happened and they got out of control. I assure him though that I had great times with him and apologise for any wrong I could have done to him. He says he wishes me well and is no longer upset with me. He says he actually misses spending time with me in the lab. I promise to make myself more available for chatting. He says he can't wait for us to graduate and says after listening to my speech the other day, he's sorry he judged me. He says if Elik makes me happy, then I'm doing the right thing.

"Do you hate me Bunke?", I ask.

"What? No madam. I love you, if anything", he says.

"Would you want me dead?", I know it's a strange question but I need to hear the answer.

"What? Hell no. What?", he sounds so shocked.

Ok, it's not Bunke then.

Next.

MBALI AND ELIK'S SLAY QUEENS

I have Mballi's number on my phone, you know, just in case I need it one day. I could get the rest of the numbers if I wanted to but I'm not going to waste my

breath! Elik has probably moved on to others anyway since he doesn't have a problem having one night stands! That upsets me so I'm not going to think about it. Mbali and her fellow sides don't strike me like they even know what a car system looks like so to temper with it? With what? A lipstick? They know nothing, all they know is the price of Savanna dry so I won't even go there. Now that I've been upgraded to fiance, I wonder who has occupied my post as head side chick. I won't even think about it. I have enough stress, I don't need anymore.

ATHI

Technically Athi and I are even. I cheated on him and he hurt me. So we are fair and square. He has no reason to hate me to the point of wanting me dead! Well Elik kind of had him thrown in jail. He's actually never said it but I know. But Athi doesn't know that so that can't be his reason of wanting me dead. And I refuse to believe he could have contacts outside of prison. He was weak!

Since I can't call him directly, I put my number on private and call his friend Monde. I'm pleasantly surprised when he answers. He doesn't sound very enthused to hear from me but at least he doesn't drop the phone. He says Athi is in Pollsmoor and got 5 years. He says I did his friend bad and they all thought I was different so they were all shocked when I turned out to be just another common neighbourhood whore. That's my cue to thank him and hang up. Yho! Pollsmoor. That's a maximum security prison and that's where all the notorious gang members are. Athi won't survive Pollsmoor shame. He's probably someone's wife there already!

I feel bad and I wonder if I should go visit him and make peace. But Elik made me promise to stay away from him! So if I go and he finds out, I don't think he will be too happy with me. Elik punishes betrayal by disowning. And I can't have that because of Athi.

PROF

No shame. He's just on the list because I had the accident after he called me to campus. I call him up anyway.

"Hi Prof", I say.

"Hello Lastborn. You did not come to church. I invited you and you said you would come!", he says.

"Ya about that. I meant to come but I'm not feeling too well today. I will come next Sunday", I say.

I will come never.

"Alright. We will be waiting. You need to give your life to the Lord Lastborn. He is the way, the truth and the life", he says.

"I know Prof. I'm working on it. So, about yesterday, why did you need that data that urgently?", I ask.

"You know I'm presenting at the nanotechnology conference tomorrow. I had forgotten all about it. So I needed to prepare my presentation", he says.

Oh ya that conference. He's got a point. So it can't be him.

KOMLA'S SISTER

That one. I've met that woman in my nightmares and she was the devil incarnate, complete with horns and a burning fork! She's a female Goliath and I feel like

running away just thinking of her. She scares the living daylights out of me. She whooped me so bad when she found me on Elik's bed. Wow! She did not hold back that time! She beat me up like a donkey! I have no doubt she would do anything for her sister. Even kill me! I can't contact that one even if I wanted to. Maybe I should send her a photo-shopped picture of myself in a coffin and say I'm dead and hashtag #SoonToBeGhostThings. Maybe she will buy it and actually think I'm dead then stop trying to kill me!

KOMLA

My soon to be future husband's ex wife. I know for a fact that that one hates me with a passion that runs all the way through her bones. To her, I'm the reason for the end of her marriage. But am I? I wish me and her could sit down over a pot of tea and talk like women so I can explain myself to her. I never meant to replace her. Displace her maybe but not completely replace her! I was willing to share, she should give me credit for that! And I'm keeping her children for crying out loud. If she's the one trying to kill me she could kill her children! Does she know that? And I'm struggling but I'm doing the best I can to make sure they are happy and comfortable. I put them first.

Nomatter who says what, I won't take the blame for what happened between Elik and Komla. I did that for years and it almost broke me. I would sit in my room feeling like Proverbs 5 was written about me. I'm over that now. I won't apologise for love. I won't apologise for being with Elik. If Komla needs to blame someone, let her blame the man who made the oath to her.

I take my laptop and draft an email. I'm too scared to send it because I'm not sure how Elik will feel about it. Maybe I'll send it one day.

"Dear Komla

I know I'm the last person you expect to hear from but please, hear me out. Let me start off by saying I'm sorry. I know sorry will never be enough. But just know that I'm sorry. It was never about you or intended to hurt you. You know my history with Elik, you know our beginning, you know our story, you know everything. Please understand, none of it was meant to hurt you, I swear. We just happened, before you married even. I just love him with every fibre of my being. I can't help it.

I was willing to be a second wife because I never meant to replace you. I thought we could be sisters and be united by our love for Elik. I thought we could make it work, you know. I was willing to try.

Anyways, I'm living with Peter and Paul now, I'm sure you know. They are doing great and have made so much progress at the school I enrolled them in. They are happy and growing. But they miss their mother Komla. I'm not trying to steal them from you. I'm just taking care of them in the meantime. Someone has to. If only you could call them on the phone at least, just so they know you still exist. They are forgetting you and soon I'll be all they know and that's not good. They are well taken care of though, I promise.

I hope one day you will find it in your heart not to hate me so much. I won't ask that you forgive me, because I will be asking for too much. Please call me so you can talk to the kids. I'm begging you. They need to know you still love them.

Sincerely, Fierce".

She probably won't make it past line one anyway.

"Aunt Fierce. Can we have our afternoon nap now?" Peter says running to me. He jumps on me, I almost drop the laptop. I need to stop feeding these kids sweets because the energy they have is too much.

"Sure. Where's Paul?", I ask.

"He's sleeping", he says.

"Alright, take off that T-shirt first then get into bed", I say.

The T-shirt is wet with juice, I don't want it anywhere near my bedding.

I could use a nap too. I'm tired of thinking of people who want to kill me. I go and carry Paul from the living room and put him into bed. Being a mother is so hard! I was never ready. I wonder how women out there do it. And with the new baby coming, I will need 5 nannies.

I join them in bed and we all try and get some sleep.

I'm woken up by Elik! After this morning I thought he wasn't coming back. He looked like he was ready to run away and never come back.

"Do you want weird things again, like maybe heated ice cream?", he laughs.

That's not funny!

"Mxm. Leave me alone", I say.

"So. I have a surprise for you. Two actually. No, three. Which one do you want first", he says.

Is he serious?

"I want number one first?", I say.

I'm not sure what exactly he's asking me.

"Ok. Close your eyes", he says.

I do and hold out my hands. He places something there and I open my eyes. It's a small box. I turn it around and there's a paper stuck on it written in his handwriting. It reads 'Antipsychotic medication'.

He's so silly I can't deal.

"Seriously?", I say.

"Well. You kind of showed signs of bipolar this morning so ya", he laughs.

He's really enjoying this! It's actually a box of chocolates. My favourite 70% dark chocolate. I can't help but smile. He is so sweet and thoughtful.

"I don't know if you are going to eat it now or you'll keep it for the coming 6 months when you are normal again", he says.

I hit him with a pillow. I hope the remaining two surprises are not mocking the pregnant!

"Ok. The second one is not a surprise surprise. Come and see", he says.

I follow him outside and it's a black Jeep Grand Cherokee. Just like the one I had. I start crying. This crying business needs to stop seriously. There's water shortages

in Cape Town and I keep wasting it! I jump into his arms and keep thanking him. He's the best thing that ever happened to me. If I had never met him I would still be driving my VW and broke at rez. Well I would have finished my PhD a long time ago though! Good thing about me is that I cry easily and I stop easily.

"Can we bless it tonight?", I say.

"Obvious", he says.

By bless I mean can we get our freak on in it tonight. I don't know what it is about cars but we've always loved loving each other in the back seat. Back then he used to say he loved it because there wasn't enough space for me to run away from him. He always was silly!

"Where's Lumka?", I ask.

I assumed they had gone together.

"Somewhere, I don't know. He will bring the accident report later though", he says.

"You think he can take the kids for a couple of hours this evening?", I ask.

"Why?", he says.

"I was thinking, since I'm going to get fat soon and my stomach is going to bulge. I was thinking I can dress up for you while I still can and we could have some fun.

Whatever you want. French maid? Nurse? Cop? Kitana? Naughty school girl?

Stripper?", I turn on my seductive voice.

He can pick any, I have a whole bag full of costumes we've been collecting over the years. It's never been a secret that we are serious addicts and we redefine spicing it up.

I can tell from the way he's biting his lower lip that he's getting ideas in his head.

"Can I call him to come and fetch them right now?", he says.

"I don't see why not", I wink and walk back into the house, deliberately swinging it so he can get a view.

He dials Lumka and follows me back into the house.

"Here is the last surprise", he says.

He picks an envelope from the table and hands it to me. I hope it's not divorce papers. You can never trust Elik.

It's a Title Deed of this house! How? When?

"Well. You not renting anymore. You own this place now. You like it?", he says.

Wow! The way he's so chilled you'd swear he just bought me a packet of biscuits not a house! But how. The registration of transfer process takes up to 3 months sometimes. I'm having a hard time processing this one. All in my name? All mine? He bought me a house?

"Is this mine? When? How? Tell me everything", I'm so excited.

I don't even care if the twins wake up from my screaming.

"Well, I don't like you staying at rez so before I proposed I purchased this house for you. The transfer only went through last week and I only picked up the Title Deed today", he says.

"Why? Why are you doing all this for me?", I ask.

I'm overwhelmed.

"What do you mean why? You are my baby and I've always told you, you deserve the finer things in life. You deserve a Jeep and a beach house and so much more. Why do you think I work so hard? For you, I'll do anything", he says.

"I don't know what to say", I honestly don't.

"Don't say anything. Just let me take care of you", he says.

"Thank you. Thank you so much".

I don't know what to say or do. I got a house just because and I lost one car yesterday and woke up with another one today. It's too much. I'm overwhelmed. Where exactly will my money go to when I start working when I'll have everything?

Lumka eventually gets here and I'm still holding on to Elik and thanking him. He's too much. We left the door open just for him so he can take the kids and go. I'm straddling Elik in my signature pose, legs around his waist.

"Geez! Get a room you two!", he says.

"Sorry bhud' Lumka", I get off Elik. We just sitting! For whatever reason Elik quickly puts a cushion on his lap. Lumka already knows we are messed up. He's bailed us out for being caught sexing in the car so us throwing him and the kids out so we can get it on shouldn't be a surprise.

"Please don't go meet a girl with my children bhud' Lumka!", I say.

Lumka looks at me then at Elik.

"Ya. She's serious man. Don't", Elik says.

"You know they will tell me if you do right?", I say.

"I wasn't going to do that! How many times should I tell you I'm a changed man? Tell her Elik", Lumka says.

"Leave me out of it you two. I don't know anything", Elik says.

I go and get the kids. I feel bad for waking them up but they will forgive me. Aunt Fierce and daddy need some quality time. I need healing from the shock I suffered yesterday.

CHAPTER 70

I feel like my stomach just grew overnight! It was flat the other day but now there's a bump. I just woke up and it was there! I was hoping it will wait a bit at least till after the lobola. My mother will go crazy I know. I'm now terrified of going home. That woman scares the living daylights out of me. I love her though and you know what they say, you don't choose family, you just have to learn to deal.

I'm quite happy about my growing stomach though because it didn't feel like I was really pregnant without the bump to back it up. But now I feel very pregnant. In the week Elik was here, he went all out to make sure the twins and I were sorted. He spent hours handling my accident reports, registering my new car, filing for insurance, he even did the dropping off of the kids at school in the mornings. And since he was here, he lined up a couple of meetings. On top of all that, he still would have energy to come home and play with the kids before they went to bed and on top of that, still have energy left to lay me good.

I feel bad for my tantrums but he was understanding and would laugh at me afterwards. This pregnancy thing is hard yho! It's so bad I'm even buying books called 'Pregnancy 101: All you need to know'. He's really excited and this baby is all

we talk about these days. I wish he could have stayed but he had to go and push deals and cash in. We need that money.

The accident report came back with the root cause analysis. Apparently they could not really detect what exactly happened. They said it's like the tyre just burst from nowhere, which is exactly what I kept saying! And apparently what happened is so rare considering my car was new and its top class safety features were in perfect working condition. That means I'm part of the 0.01%, yay! I changed the statistics! Now Jeep can never guarantee 100% safety. I feel like a revolutionist! I'm changing the statistics, one car at a time.

I've thought long and hard about my accident and researched and everything. I've reached a conclusion that what happened was witchcraft since science and technology can't explain it. Someone isn't sleeping at night trying to kill me. Poor thing. Don't they know sleep is precious? They should stop this nonsense and get a good night sleep like everyone else! Who do they think they are going to kill? Me? They must think again! That's just the outside talking. Inside I'm shivering and terrified and praying ten times a day now. I don't want to die. I'm not Romeo's Juliet. I will not die for love!

Elik and Komla are officially divorced! The divorce finally went through and Elik says Komla is enraged but that's not his problem. See, my love has set him free. I told you I'm a revolutionist! He looked so relieved and we popped a bottle of champagne to that. Of course I just stopped at the popping, I can't drink. I'm not trying to give birth to an underdeveloped drunkard baby with half a liver!

I sent Komla that email asking for a truce, but she didn't respond! Not even an acknowledgement of receipt! I don't know if she even read it. Whatever! I tried. The kids don't ask about her that much anymore. They are very occupied juggling school, afternoon naps, video games, watching cartoons, playing with their new phones, eating whatever they want, listening to bedtime stories, bothering aunt Fierce with everything and spilling food all over the house. They are very busy! I got them a phone to share but Peter was bullying Paul so I had to get another one. The only contacts on their phones is Elik and I. And Elik is complaining that they call him non-stop! He says he's going to block them! He can't do that. I know they just dial for no reason but I find it cute.

They seem very fine without Komla. That's worrying. I'm not here to replace their mother! And as they grow they will start asking about her again and I won't have an answer. Peter was sick earlier in the week and for two days he couldn't go to school so I had to stay home with him and make him soup and baby him and watch cartoons with him when I would rather be watching something more adulty.

Oh and no one has killed me yet, did I mention that? I feel like a survivor! I'm still alive and kicking and my new car hasn't run away from the road and gone tumbling down as yet. I'm paranoid but fine. I'm even back to driving now because what option do I have. I need to get from Point A to Point B somehow. Yes, I have considered wearing a helmet and shin pads and safety shoes when driving, but I haven't yet.

Elik got me a live-in nanny before he left since I was dragging my feet about it. He said Lumka's cousin had a nanny whose cousin's sister-in-law's young sister was available. So that's how I ended up with Pelagia. I had never heard that name before. She said I could call her Peggy, so that's what we call her. Peggy. Where do I start!

Peggy is an oldish woman from Zimbabwe. Ok, she's not old, she's just older than me. She's probably like 35 - 38 years old somewhere there. I'll check her passport copy. I hate the way we were raised you know! We were taught to respect elders, so even when Peggy does something wrong I can't exactly shout at her! I end up calling Elik and venting and he just says 'Talk to her baby, she'll understand'. My precious man.

Peggy! She came here with that thing of 'I'm older than you and I know children!' Like woman, I'm your boss and me and the twins have a routine, you can't just waltz in here with that attitude and think you'll change that! I'll fire you quick! I may not be a mother yet but I'm doing great with the twins, if I do say so myself. I've read so many books and Googled so many things about the do's and don'ts of raising them. Even Elik is idol pressed. He said he wasn't sure I'll manage. This man!

Ok, so I had to sit Peggy down and as respectfully as possible tell her the twins are my children and what I say goes. I wasn't smiling when I said that. I've come too far with these boys so I won't let anyone disrupt our routine! She listened.

The first four days with Peggy, I was scared for my life. I was convinced I'd come home one day and the house would be burnt down or she would have put the twins in the washing machine or something. I'd assumed that she knew everything because she said she has over 10 years experience in this field. But Peggy, dear Peggy, she cleaned my Persian carpet with water and sunlight liquid and a mop. I wanted to cry. It was wet and soggy and she just looked at me when I asked her why she did that. I didn't yell though, I just showed I was upset and asked that if she's not sure about anything she should ask.

But did she? No. I asked her to make some mixed vegetables so I could add it to the couscous for the kids. She said 'Yes madam'. So I said fine and went to do my own things. When I came back to eat, I actually laughed. I don't know how Peggy confused mixed vegetables with mixed fruits. Like who fries fruits though. She says the packaging confused her. I keep packets of frozen mixed fruits for my smoothies but they specifically say 'fruits' and even have a picture of fruits on the outside. Ey, Peggy just fried those fruits and added spices and it was just a mess. I had to order pizza because couscous and fried fruits! No.

The one thing I hate is that she said she knew how appliances worked and stuff. She could have just told me and I would have shown her everything from the get go! I was scared for the future of my washing machine. Peggy! She has potential though and I think I'm teaching her just fine. We have had one fight this far. First she used my favourite face wash to wash her body! So more than half was gone! Then she went into my closet and sprayed and sprayed and sprayed my perfume!

When I got home, my room was saturated with perfume. I lost it that day! That's a R5000 perfume from Israel! I told her to stay away from closet. Maybe I was a bit harsh but it's not me, it's the pregnancy.

She has the best job in the world though. All she does is come to my room in the morning and get the kids ready for school. Then I get ready when they have breakfast. Then I take them to school on my way to campus, leaving her behind to do whatever she wants. So all she does really is cook supper (simple meals) and watch TV all day. She'll get there. I used to be rural too once upon a time.

Anyways, on to good news. Good luck has been falling on me like rain. I finally finished my thesis and Prof will send it off for examination early next week! And because the guys in the lab and I are cool now, they celebrated with me. Bunke especially was super proud of me and wouldn't stop hugging me! It was a bit uncomfortable. You know when a guy you know wants you keeps holding you it gets quite uncomfortable! I smiled though. I'm not a party pooper.

Oh happy day! I finally finished my PhD! I know you can't celebrate before results come out but still, it's a milestone. And I know there's no way I'm failing that thesis. Elik proofread it back to back and boy was he harsh with his comments! I didn't speak to him for 2 days! He actually wrote in one section 'WTF! Were you drunk when writing this section? Delete everything and rewrite it. Use your brain this time!' Was that necessary?

But he did an amazing job editing it, I admit. I know I'm passing. See, it helps dating a professor after all. Too bad there's no mark for PhD, it's just pass or fail. I'm sure I would have bagged a distinction. I was so excited I took Peggy and the boys to an exclusive seafood restaurant in Waterfront. I regretted it though because I lost my appetite on the way and it was hard trying to teach Peggy how to eat prawns and mussels. It was mission impossible.

My only problem now is that I'll be 7 months pregnant in April next year. I'll look like an elephant in my graduation gown. That just makes me sad. I looked so good for my Masters graduation I was hoping to look even better for my PhD. But no, Elik just had to knock me up and spoil my graduation day!

Speaking of Elik, I'll see him tomorrow, I'll spend a day then proceed to Zimbabwe. Elik's 'people' will be coming down for lobola negotiations and I need to be home so they can 'identify me'. I still don't know who exactly his people are but I've decided to leave that to him. He snapped the last time I pushed the matter so I'm not bringing it up again. I'm dreading going home but I'll wear baggy things and hope no one notices the small bump on my stomach. It's not really showing. I look bloated more than anything.

I explain to the kids that I will be gone for like a week and they must be good and try not to miss me too much.

"I'll miss you guys so much", I tell them.

"Can we go with you?", Paul asks.

"No Paul. We have to go to school!", Peter says.

My clever boy!

"So, who will take us to school?", Paul asks.

"I have arranged for that. There'll be a driver to take you to and from school. Aunt Peggy will be here the whole time", I say.

They are sad for like a second then they forget and are back to arguing with each other. I wish I was a child sometimes. Zero stress. After I put the twins to bed I find Peggy packing away the dishes. She finally got how the dishwasher works, thankfully. I'm still uneasy about leaving her alone with the kids but Elik said they'll be fine.

"Peggy, can we talk please", I say.

She dries her hands on her apron and joins me on the couch.

"I told you I'm leaving tomorrow right?", I say.

"Yes madam you did", she says.

"Please don't call me madam. Fierce is fine", I say.

I'm always telling her. Madam makes me sound old! Besides it reminds me of Bunke and I would rather not go there.

"Yes madam", she says.

Hay I give up!

"If anything happens Peggy or one of the boys gets sick or anything at all, call me immediately. Also, please monitor Peter. He's still recovering from the flu", I say. I'm worried about leaving them. I have been with them every single day since I became their guardian. This is the first time I'm going to be without them.

"Don't worry, everything will be alright", she assures me.

I'm not sure about that. I can only hope.

"I have made a list of things you should make sure you do. Make sure you read them a story every night before they sleep. Here's the book you should read from", I say.

"Yes madam", she says.

She thinks Elik is my husband and Peter and Paul are my children. She assumed that all on her own and I didn't correct her. I just went with the flow. I don't know how she's missing the 'AUNT Fierce'. Or maybe she thinks my name is Anti-Fierce? Technically she's not wrong though. Elik is my husband (to be) and the twins are my children (by association). She made a comment about how I must have started having sex at a young age and had these twins so young. I gave her that 'we are not friends like that' eye. She can't cross that line.

I got to Joburg this morning. Elik's away for meetings all day so I'm alone at home, bored. I tried watching TV, tried reading a book, tried going for a swim. All didn't work. I'm trying to read up on things to wear to hide a pregnancy when my phone rings. I don't recognise the number but it turns out to be Lumka's wife. That's unexpected but not unwelcome. She says Lumka told her I'm Elik's new wife and she was wondering if we can meet for coffee so we can get to know each other, since our husbands are besties and we will be hanging out. I'm bored anyways so I don't see why not. I send Elik a message that I'll be somewhere in Sandton City.

Dressing up is already becoming hard. My body is expanding and clothes are getting tight. I don't blame them though. I mean I'm eating every hour!

I wonder what she'll say when she realises I'm that same girl who slept at her house that time! I don't know who Lumka said I was then. Oh well, we'll cross that bridge when we get to Sandton. I don't know why she's referring to him as hubby because Lumka told me they are not legally married. He says he paid damages after he got her pregnant but never married her so they have just been cohabiting for the past ten years. I feel sorry for her. Lumka doesn't love her, he hasn't for a long time. He says horrible things about her and says he just keeps her for convenience and for the children of course. I'm trying to be friends with her here so of course I won't tell her all that. Besides, Elik would kill me if I did.

When it comes to those two, their loyalty to each other is admirable. I remember I was on the phone with Lumka one time when I asked, "Where's Elik?". I had meant to ask where his wife was but had made a mistake and said Elik instead.

"Elik's here with me", he had said so smoothly!

"What? Let me talk to him", I'd said trying not to laugh.

"Aaah! Eeish. He just went to the bathroom. I'll have him call you back", he had said.

I had laughed so hard because Elik was actually lying next to me at that time.

I've only met Mrs Lumka once before, in her house for like 10 minutes. She had been nice then so I hope she still is. I find her in a small coffee shop in the middle

of the mall. I know our men are friends but just by looking at Mrs Lumka, I know we won't be friends. We don't have that electricity between us. It's not there at all. She's a nice person and all, but she's like 10 years older than me and carries herself like a mother. I'm still on the childish end of the spectrum. I don't see her playing video games, watching Vampire Diaries, wearing charcoal face masks or going on spa dates with me.

I'm dressed in a way that no one can suspect I'm pregnant. I need to protect my child. People are evil out here. I don't want Komla knowing I'm pregnant and sending me lightning! We force the conversation at first but it flows as time goes. She talks at least and laughs and is very sweet. It doesn't take long for me to open up to her. She tells me that she quit her job because they were not treating her right and she didn't see the need to keep waking up at 5 am when her man makes so much.

"So sisi, when are you and Elik getting married?", she asks.

"We haven't set a date yet but we are doing the lobola negotiations on Saturday", I say.

I'm sure Lumka has told her everything anyway.

"This Saturday?", she asks.

"Yes", I say and sip on my hot chocolate.

"Where?" she asks.

She's so interested in where exactly I come from and I tell her. She keeps asking and I give her all the details she wants. I enjoy talking about my village.

She asks about Peter and Paul but I'm not sure whether to divulge information about them. So I say they are fine then quickly change the subject and ask her how long she has had her dreadlocks. I don't mention how the way she pulls them back has finished her hairline. We not there yet. She really is interested in getting to know me. I can tell she thinks getting a PhD is pointless from her remarks but I'll forgive that. It's my PhD after all, not hers. Who cares what she thinks?

By the time I make it back to Morningside, it's almost 4 pm and Elik is home.

"I thought you went shopping. Where are the bags?", he says.

"No. I was having coffee with Lumka's wife", I say.

"What?", he says.

"Ya. She's very nice hey. I had a great time", I say.

I really liked her. Genuinely.

"That's strange!" Elik says.

"Why?", I don't understand.

"She doesn't approve of our relationship! Besides, she's Komla's friend so I'm wondering why she would want to have coffee with you", he says.

Oh well! Such information might have been very nice to have before I went all out and told her about myself. But what if she's now accepted me and Elik? Seeing that I'm not going anywhere. I told her Elik and I are planning a trip to Cyprus and she said it would be nice if she and Lumka could come along. So there, see, she wants to spend time with me or maybe she thinks I'll give her dirt on Lumka? In which case, I'm sorry, my loyalty lies with Lumka not her.

I'm not big on sisterhood or women sticking together! Evident by my lack of girlfriends. Women would be the first to throw you under the bus, so I'm sorry, I got off that sisterhood train a long time ago. Women will judge you and gossip about you and crucify you yet they do the same things as you, if not worse! I don't need sisterhood. I'm good thanks.

I'm going home tomorrow and I'm worried. Elik doesn't have family and he still doesn't have anyone to negotiate for him and he says I shouldn't worry he will make a plan. That's exactly what's worrying me. Him 'making a plan'. I feel like kicking him every time he says that. But I won't push this one, I know how sensitive his family issue is. I just hope he gets people and doesn't show up alone!

CHAPTER 71

I wanted to drive home. Hire a car or take Elik's car and drive. I have enough groceries to feed the whole village and putting them in the boot of a car just makes more sense. But Elik won't have it and we've been back and forth. He thinks because I'm pregnant and because of my last accident I can't drive such a long distance alone!

"Come on Elik, I want to drive", I keep saying.

"Fierce look at me", he says.

I pout but look at him anyway.

"You are getting on that flight this afternoon, you will pick up a car rental in Bulawayo and then drive home. That's final. End of discussion. Now go and get ready. I'm taking you to the airport!", he says.

What? Where does he get off telling me what to do!

"No Elik! It's just", I start building my case.

"I thought I said end of discussion my love? We done talking about this. Come let's get you ready", he says.

He's moved on from that topic and I know I've lost.

I didn't really unpack so I just pack my toiletries and Elik just sits there watching me and telling me that pregnancy looks good on me. He's so excited about this baby, it's too much. I'm ready to go now.

His young brother is doing a Masters degree in Germany. He's coming down tomorrow to come and support his brother. I haven't seen him in years and I can't wait to see him again. He was the life of the party back then, I hope Germany hasn't changed him!

It's Thursday so I have the whole of tomorrow before Elik's people come home to 'pick a flower'. I pick up a rental car in Bulawayo and pick up my aunt in Nkulumane then head home. I'm exhausted by the drive home. Elik was right! I wouldn't have survived the drive from Joburg! But at least I get to sit in the car and get some alone time with my aunt. She's so excited for me it's making me so happy. It all comes down to Elik having money! It's all good though, he makes me

happier than I can ever be, so me marrying him is the best thing I can do for myself.

"So what's with the glow? Are you pregnant?", my aunt asks.

I nod then focus on the road. There's no point in lying. I need her on my side.

"And Ghana man is the father right?", she asks.

"Of course!", I say.

How could she even ask that.

"Just checking, you know. We don't want drama along the line when you give birth to a white baby when your man looks like coal", she says.

I can't help laughing. Did she just say Elik looks like coal? Yes fine he's black but coal? That's funny though.

"Come on, he's not that dark aunty", I say.

"You know he is. You'd swear he was dropped on wet tar when he was born! He doesn't even need a shadow that one", she says.

I won't win this one I know. He's not that black though come on. He's just the perfect shade, for me.

"Can people tell I'm pregnant?", I ask.

"Those who know these things, yes", she says.

Oh flip! I thought wearing this dress and a poncho on top would cover everything!

I had even considered wearing a corset underneath but then again I don't want my child to be born with a squashed head.

"And umama? You think she will see", I say.

"She will and she won't be happy with you at all. You know your mother lives for people! Don't worry though. I'll talk to her", she says.

"You the best aunty", I say.

"I know!", she says.

"Is that why you are getting married? Because you are pregnant?", she says.

"No. He proposed before I even knew I was pregnant", I say.

I didn't know I was pregnant for over 2 months. Unlike other women, I really don't know my body at all. And it doesn't help that my periods are irregular. I ignore subtle changes in my body and blame it on junk food.

My aunt is more than happy with me. With money flooding my account, I have been sending her a young R5000 every month when I send money home. I'm like her favourite niece right now. We talk about the negotiation process, how it will go and what's expected of me. She assures me that my uncles will charge money with so many zeros they can't even say it. She says after they saw how loaded my man was at Replace's funeral, they have been waiting for this day so they can get a piece of the bank too. She says she will talk to them though and tell them to be reasonable.

"Aunty. There's something I need to tell you", I say.

"What?", she says.

"Elik was married before", I say.

She keeps quiet for a long while.

"No aunty. He wasn't married when I first met him. He married Komla during us and I kind of stuck around and they divorced eventually. It wasn't my fault though", I say.

I won't mention that they divorced last week.

"Oh! That's not good Fierce", she says.

"Fierce. Having an affair with a married man is wrong. You just don't do it. The ancestors frown upon it and bad luck just follows you everywhere! But all that matters is that unlike most married men out there who just want to eat your cake, Ghana man wants to eat that cake and pay for it too", she says.

"Is marrying him a good idea?", I say.

"Yes. Why not? You said he's divorced now, isn't?", she says.

"Yes he is", I say.

She is the best.

But my aunt loves stories yho! She makes me tell her everything and makes me repeat the part Komla and her sister beat me up. She can't stop laughing and says the same once happened to her. The only difference between me and her is that her man went back to his wife and mine is bringing the cows home.

My family is over the moon to see me and I'm glad it's getting dark so no one can see that I'm pregnant. My father especially is ecstatic. He is so happy that his golden daughter is continuing to shine and do things right. My father loves Elik like his own son. He says he's respectful, humble and above all, loves his daughter.

Supper has already been made and we eat. My two useless brothers are not home. I couldn't get hold of the one in Hillbrow and the doctor one bluntly told me he wasn't the one marrying me so why was it important that he be there. How rude! The ever loyal Zibulo is home. I will buy him a car for this undying loyalty! He deserves it. Inflation is so tall now! I swear this child eats fertiliser for breakfast, seriously! I have big plans for him next year. He will come and live with me and Elik. Peter and Paul can use a big brother.

I can't tell my mother's mood. She seems happy but it seems fake. I don't know what's wrong with her so I'm going to sleep. I'm tired. I just want to lie down and chat to Elik. Lately, I just can't stop telling him how much I love him and how he is everything to me. I think the hormones are making me needy. He says he loves hearing it because whenever he's having a bad day he thinks of me and the twins and the coming baby and it gets better. He doesn't have a family now, after he went and disowned everyone. We are all the family he's got now.

I can't believe how exhausted I am. I just send an 'I got home safe, I miss you already' message before I doze off.

CHAPTER 72

My mother woke me up at 5 am! Seriously! This woman has no mercy! She says what kind of wife sleeps until the sun comes up and gets into her mouth! She kept

talking saying I won't survive a week in marriage with my laziness. Who talks so much so early in the morning though? Where is the energy coming from.

I tried to keep sleeping and she left and I was like 'yeeesss, come here blanket!'. Then she returned and poured water in my ear, I woke up jumping and bumped my head on the wall. It wasn't funny at all but again she wasn't laughing. This is child abuse! The struggle is too real for me.

She's lucky I'm still scared of her to this day because sometimes she does things that make me want to scream at her. I'm sure that would be the day I die! She will bury me alive. You know there's a thin line between fear and respect and usually I'm not sure which side of the line I'm on with her.

The first thing I did when I woke up was run behind the house and throw up. I tried blaming it on a stomach ache but my mother wasn't buying it. She had me lift up my dress and show her my stomach. I didn't know you can't suck in a pregnant stomach! But boy did I try! I tried so hard I nearly fainted. Gosh!

"You are pregnant!", she says in an accusatory tone.

"No I'm not", I say.

"Don't act smart with me young lady! I was pregnant eight times! So you can't tell me anything about pregnancy!", she says.

Eight times? I know of seven. Does that mean she lost another child at some point? I can't ask her that now though so I just keep looking down and feeling like

throwing up again as she goes on about pregnancy and how she can spot it even if you are one day pregnant!

I won't win this one I know. I might as well admit before she cuts my stomach open and checks for herself!

"Are you pregnant?", she asks again.

I nod and keep looking down.

"Yho Lastborn!" she says, carrying her hands on her head. She's acting like I committed the worst crime in the world. I'll never hear the end of this shame.

"What happened?", she says.

What does she mean what happened? Does she want me to outline the process that took place for me to end up pregnant or what? I'm confused, so I keep quiet.

"Yhoo! What will people say? How will people look at me?", she says.

How is this about her now? I'm the one who's pregnant! She's too dramatic for my liking.

"I'm sorry", that's all I can come up with this right now. I'm just saying though. In reality I'm sorry I'm not sorry. Elik and I are having a child. That's the best thing that's ever happened to me! So no I'm not sorry and I wish she could support me.

"When did you become this immoral person? Why did you even spread your legs for a man who hadn't married you!", she says.

Ok. Alright. She's being disrespectful now! Breathe in. Breathe out.

"I'm sorry mama", I say.

"Save that sorry for your father!", she says.

She's so upset I don't get it. I'm here at home ain't I? To do right and have lobola paid. What's the big deal?

"Please don't tell him, please mama I'm begging you", I say.

I'm ready to kneel down if she wants me to.

"Why not? He needs to know so he can charge them damages on top of the lobola", she says.

"Is that necessary?", I say.

"It is! I can ask you the same thing you know! Was it necessary to lie on your back and count the stars and get pregnant?", she says.

This woman! Count the stars where now? It's not like Elik and I were outside! Even if we were, the last thing I would think about while undergoing my getting pregnant process would be to count stars, trust me!

I think I need to stand up for myself for once. My mother has bullied me for far too long. I'm a woman grown now! I'm about to be someone's wife and someone's mother, she can't keep treating me like this.

"Mama. Why are you being like this? I've never done anything wrong to you. I've always listened to you and respected (feared) you. Fine, I'm pregnant before marriage, I admit that's wrong of me. But I'm getting married. I will be married long before the baby is born. So why are you being like this?", I say.

She stops and looks at me but I hold the stare. I need to stand up for myself seriously. I'm scared she will start hitting me though in which case I'll have to run away because obviously I can't hit her back.

"I didn't raise a prostitute Lastborn! I didn't raise girls that sleep around and just get pregnant randomly! You should have kept your thighs closed until you were married. That's what you should have done not this nonsense you are telling me. And since when do I talk and you also talk?", she says.

I don't get it. When she saw me having sex last time did she think I remained a virgin after that? Or she thought I always did it standing so couldn't get pregnant while standing? And isn't my own mother calling me a prostitute a bit extreme? I honestly don't know why she's so angry though. She could be disappointed yes, not angry!

"I'm sorry mama", I just want us to stop talking about this.

"You've embarrassed me shame. Now the whole village will look at me as a failure! The mother of prostitutes", she says and claps her hands.

Ok. I can take her calling me a prostitute. I have a thick skin. But I won't stand here and listen to her trash Replace! She's gone too far now. The poor child only had sex once and got pregnant. How does that qualify her as a prostitute?

"You know mama, it's talk like this that pushed Replace to her death! You hurt Replace deeply with your words to a point she hated herself and wanted the baby out of her. Such talk is what killed her!", I say.

"Eeee Lastborn! What did you just say to me? Are you saying I killed my own daughter?", her voice just went from zero to hundred!

"You know you did mama. Indirectly yes, but yes you did. You should have supported her like you should be supporting me right now!", I say.

I think being pregnant has made me bold. I can't believe I'm standing here talking right now! I've had it really. I won't let her treat me like this anymore. I've done everything for her and I've been a good child. I don't deserve this.

"What's all this noise so early in the morning?", my aunt emerges and comes towards us.

I'll let my mother fill her in. I'm still feeling nauseous and I need to sweep this yard, make the fire and make breakfast. I don't have energy to keep arguing!

There's so much to do today. I'm glad I bought enough groceries and we are killing a goat for the visitors tomorrow. My mother is still upset with me but I don't have the energy to deal with her. I'm just glad she hasn't told my father about the whole pregnancy thing. My aunt says I must ignore her, she's going through menopause and it's messing up with her head. She's really killing my vibe shame. Menopause or not!

I didn't know people get invited to lobola negotiations. It's just negotiations it's not the real lobola! But my aunt tells me my parents have invited everyone. They are such show offs shame!

I get to talk to my father briefly before I'm called back to come and serve tea to my uncles. He says:

"Lastborn. You have made me a person. A man amongst men. I can now hold my head up in public because of you. I'm so proud of you my child. This is good", he says.

"Thank you baba", I don't know what else to say.

The conversation quickly goes towards what he needs for his farming and how expensive fuel is. I tell him I will give him money to take care of that.

I spend most of my day working with my aunt and stealing minutes in between to go and text Elik. He's nervous so I need to keep assuring him that everything is going great. I don't tell him about my mother's moods because that will worry him. And if there's one thing I'm good at when it comes to Elik, it's protecting his feelings. He and his people are in Bulawayo and will be coming down tomorrow. I hope he's not having a bachelor party there and blessing girls. This is not a wedding!

People just keep coming! I don't know where all these people will sleep or what they are coming to do here in the first place. My eldest uncle has already taken over the whole home and is ordering people around and telling everyone what to

do. He orders two of my aunts to take me to a hut and teach me how to be a wife so that my marriage doesn't fail like theirs did.

They do as they are told. How exactly are women who couldn't keep their own marriages together supposed to teach me what to do with mine? Besides isn't this talk given before the wedding? This is just negotiations for crying out loud! Why is everyone overreacting so much!

I follow them anyway. My aunt, the real one, isn't here or else she would have dismissed this pointless meeting a long time ago. I think these women are trying to teach me how to be a slave not a wife. They are saying I should wake up at 5 am everyday and clean the house and make sure by the time my husband wakes up there's breakfast on the table and hot water for him to bath.

But I'll have a helper to take care of breakfast and a geyser to take care of the hot water issue. I keep quiet though. I'm very respectful. They say I must have at least six children, make sure I do laundry, ironing, do the dishes, cook everyday and they stress out that I should never ever refuse my husband sex otherwise he will go and get it elsewhere! They are missing one important point in all of this. I will have a full time job. An 8 to 5 and I'll have three children plus Elik to take care of, so where will I get the time to slave away? I nod though and listen.

The one aunt says even if my husband beats me I shouldn't leave him because some men express their love by beating you. She says him beating me will mean he cares about me and is jealous, which is a good thing. What? Say what now? We

can't have women raising young girls to believe this nonsense! What kind of love is that? A man will kill you and you'll be busy saying 'he loves me that's why he beats me up like a dog!'. Nonsense.

When they get to teaching me how to have sex, I start giggling. They probably think I'm shy but I'm just laughing at them. No wonder their husbands left shame. What's this they are doing? I think I should be the one teaching them because this that they are saying I must do will have a man running away. This is too time consuming. I pretend to have just remembered that I forgot to give my mother some pots and ask to be excused. We are done here and I learnt absolutely nothing.

I have two distant cousins of mine who came to 'accompany' me. It wouldn't really be 'pick the one that's yours' if I showed up alone now, would it? I haven't seen them in years though but I force the conversation anyways.

Apparently three of my uncles plus my father plus Zibulo will sit at the negotiations. I foresee chaos. Those uncles are characters and they love money. They will be auctioning me tomorrow instead of treating it like a proper lobola. Besides how will five people agree on anything?

My aunt will act as the go between. She is my dombo (my representative). I know she will cause trouble if my uncles misbehave so I hope they don't. Tomorrow will be very interesting. I'm scared and excited at the same time. I want it to get here already so we can get this over with.

CHAPTER 73

Today is the day I take the first step towards being Elik's wife. The day we make the ancestors see how serious we are about our love and our desire to marry each other. I'm having mini panic attacks and I'm thankful for my aunt. She's keeping me calm and is reassuring me that everything will be fine. She's such a sucker for love shame and when she speaks to the people around here about me and Elik, she paints us like the ambassadors of love sent to represent by Cupid himself! She says her greatest moment was watching Elik love me at Replace's funeral.

I really hope everything will go well. I can't deal with drama. Not today. My mother is still in a foul mood today but at least she's smiling and telling me how hard being a wife is. I think I'm forgiven. With my mother teaching me the ways of keeping a home together, the importance of respect, how to do my chores and all that stuff and my aunt teaching me matters of the bedroom, I'll make a great wife I'm sure.

Because my father felt the need to show off and invite everyone who is remotely a relative or whose surname sounds like it could be related to ours, the whole yard is buzzing and I'm up and down with teapots and scones. It's a mess. So many people? I still don't think you invite people for negotiations. What if the two families don't agree on the terms and the groom's people storm out, what then? What do you tell the people?

But when I raised it, my father insisted that I'm a princess and royalty needs to be honoured. I thought he meant princess, you know, as in how fathers refer to their daughters. But no, he was actually serious. He gave me a long history lesson and says my ancestors were kings before they trekked down south from central Africa! I don't believe him at all. He always comes up with random 'facts' about our ancestry and the story changes each time!

Anyways we are killing a cow now, a goat is not enough. It's 9 am and I'm exhausted already. I've been up since past 5 and haven't even eaten anything. It's so hot already but I can't take off this jersey. I'm kinda hiding my pregnancy you know. I have to eat something then go and change because I'm so dirty, my goodness. It's like I crawled out of a dog's mouth! Elik will laugh at me if he sees me like this and probably take a picture so he can keep laughing at me.

Elik. I wonder where they are! They slept in Bulawayo yesterday and they should have been here already. His phone is not going through. I pray that he doesn't stand me up. He can't do this to me in front of all these people! If he doesn't show up, he will know me today! Well, I probably won't do anything if we are being honest. Just cry my eyes out.

I'm busy trying to change when my aunt walks in.

"Heeeeeee Fierce! Your men are here!", she says laughing.

"Yay. Finally!", I say.

Now I can relax. One problem down! But wait, why is she laughing? What's funny about them being here? That's a good thing right? We've been waiting for them all morning. I'm not done dressing so I just peek through the window.

Wow Elik. Elikplim Mawufeasi Nkrumah! Why? Why? Why? Why? There's four identical black SUVs parked outside my home! Four! They are parked in such an organised way, it's like they are at a car show or something. Like seriously though! Why would these guys come flashing money like this? Why are they doing this to me? One car would have been enough for all of them! Why go and hire all these cars now? I swear Elik was brought on this earth to drive me crazy! I need to take a deep breath before I go insane.

My aunt thinks they look cool though. She says people already think I'm marrying a minister's son so why not prove them right. She says they look like they are going to a president's funeral. How she sees that as a cool thing, I don't know. Those cars look so out of place out there. This is a deep, rural village and now we have these cars there making everyone run to look!

I'm still looking. I hope Elik is not here. He knows he's not supposed to be here! No one comes out of the cars so I give up and finish dressing up. I need to look decent in matching clothes with my cousins. Those two dressed up a long time ago as if this is their ceremony! A doek always did look good on me, especially when my aunt ties it for me. And these white tommies are so comfortable! I look very wifable right now.

My aunt is still standing by the door spying on the 'People from Africa' as she's calling them.

The way she talks about countries in Africa, you would swear Zimbabwe is somewhere in Europe! To her Africa is central and west Africa. She just bursts out laughing!

"Come see Fierce", she says.

What now?

You honestly, sincerely, truly have to be kidding me right now! This is a joke of the highest order. I told Elik they must look presentable and wear jackets for respect, I didn't say they should come looking all expensive in full suits and ties! And what's with the matching black suits vele? Goodness gracious, mercy follow me! Do they think this is a runway? Or what? A business meeting? A casting for Suits?

I can't. I'm unable.

My aunt says it's funny but she still thinks they look so cool and classy. She says they look like they are here to shoot a John Bond movie. I think she means James Bond.

Elik is here as well! Why? Why? Why is he here? I told him to stay away! He's not going to be part of the negotiations. He's not needed, just his wallet should be there to represent him. So why is he here? He'll send me to early labour I promise you. My aunt has to leave and go sit with the men who will be deciding how many cows I'm worth today. I dress up quickly and call for Inflation.

“Please go outside to those men and tell Uncle Elik he can't be here. Tell him to drive away or stay in the car or something. He just can't be seen”, I say.

“That will be \$5”, he says.

Eh! This child! I should have never gotten him used to being bribed. I'm encouraging criminal behaviour.

“I'll give you later. For now, run Inflation”, I say.

“Make sure obaba don't see you”, I call out after him.

It's going to be a very long day. I now need to find a way of jumping from this hut to that one Elik used to sleep in, so I can join my cousins. If Elik sees me he could call me and that's the last thing I need right now. Culturally he doesn't know me!

I'm glad Inflation got to him and he listened and is no longer out there with the five guys in black suits. I recognise Lumka, Clive and Elik's young brother. I haven't seen him in years! This is a pleasant surprise. Me and him used to get along and him being here means he supports this thing of me and his brother. I could use all the support I can get. I have no idea who the other two are or where Elik picked them from. At least one looks older so they might actually be taken serious.

And Clive? That's Elik's lawyer. What does he think this is? A business contract? Signing of a tender? Purchasing of merchandise? I'm completely finished. A lawyer at lobola negotiations! That's a first. I've always known Elik to over do things but come on. Don't they have lobola in Ghana? A lawyer! I'm not even going to mention this to my aunt, she won't stop laughing at me. She thinks all this is fun to watch. I don't!

I emailed a list of my clan names to Elik before I left so they could memorise them and call them out while asking for permission to enter my home. I can hear someone announcing their presence and asking to be granted entrance and reciting my clan names. At least they are getting the clicks right! That must be Lumka.

I quickly run to the other hut and join my cousins. I don't look at the men outside the gate, I'm trying not to be seen here.

"Cuz, you look good", cousin number one says.

"Thanks cuz. You guys look good too", I say.

I don't know if they look good or nor because they are sitting down. I just had to return the compliment.

We talk a bit about nothing really.

"You know Thulani was so hurt when I told him you are getting married", cousin number one says.

I have to think of an answer. First, why would she tell him that? Secondly, I dated Thulani in high school! What business does he have getting hurt over me getting married? Thirdly, what would he lobola me with if it was him? Chickens? No offence but it's not like he can afford me now. I'm not that giggling, innocent, old uniform wearing girl he used to know.

"He'll be strong", that's all I can come up with right now.

My aunt keeps coming to check on me and to gossip about some women around the village who are eating meat as if it's for the first time, and stealing sugar to take to their homes and some stealing scones and putting them in their bras.

"They have been outside for over 2 hours now. When will they let them in?", I ask my aunt when she drops in again.

Elik's entourage has been outside asking to be let into the home but they are still being ignored. Culture though! Why?

"They might be hungry now aunty. Please tell obaba to let them in. Please", I beg her.

"Hungry? I doubt that very much. They are sorted those ones. They are here on vacation", she says and keeps laughing.

I'm scared to ask what she means.

"Your men Fierce! Hay shame no. Hay I give it to them. Are they always like this?", she says.

"What did they do now?", I ask.

Sigh.

I hope they didn't just get into the yard without permission or worse, drive away. She's not able to tell me because she can't stop laughing.

I'll go and see for myself then. I stand by the door with my mouth open. I don't know whether to laugh or cry. Now I see why they say inter-cultural marriages are complicated! A Zimbabwean man would never have done any of this that I'm looking at right now. I expected Lumka to know better but I guess I was wrong.

One of the men I don't know is reading out my clan names outside the gate from a tablet using a wireless microphone! A tablet! Not even a piece of paper at least? And what's with the microphone? Where did they even get a microphone? Or they thought the reason they are not being let in is because they are not being heard so they pulled out a microphone? I know my home is crowded but it's not a rally, there's no need for a microphone! And the way the man keeps saying, "Ekuhle bakoNkomo, sizocunta iflawuzi egarden yenu (Hello Nkomo people, we are here to pluck a flower from your garden). What type of Ndebele is that? Who translated that for them? I feel like dying. This is so embarrassing.

And now I swear I've seen it all! I can now die and rest in peace because I've seen it all in life. These men are camped outside and having a full braai going. They have camp chairs, a braai stand with meat already roasting and a cooler box with beers! They look so chilled, laughing with beers in their hands, I just want to scream and pull out my hair. And Lumka is among them! He's the one actually turning the meat on the braai stand! I can't wait to have a talk with him when all this is done! Well, at least they are not playing music!

But who does that? I told Elik they should be prepared to wait outside for a couple of hours before they are given permission to enter. I guess all he heard was 'prepare yourself and pack camp chairs and meat packs for a braai!' I feel like walking out there and shouting at each and everyone of them! What are they doing? They are humiliating me! Now I'm sure everyone is gossiping about how uncultured 'my men' are!

And what the hell is Inflation doing there with them? I feel like all the men in my life are conspiring to destroy me. I'm even scared to think of the fine they will get for displaying such disrespect. My aunt says I should leave them. She thinks this is funny and says that's what I get for marrying a Model C (cheese boy).

I guess it's my fault. I didn't fully lecture them on what's expected. How could I have though when I didn't even know who was coming! Besides, I thought since they are all Africans here, they would know what to do.

Elik's phone is still not going through. I want to scream at him and at all of them one by one. They don't have a brain, all of them! He's probably going to laugh when I confront him later and say 'It wasn't me baby. Did you see me? Me I was sleeping in the car. It was Lumka'.

I feel like I have three children already! Elik and the twins are all children!

They are just doing everything so wrong I can't watch anymore. I can't. I'm stressing and pacing up and down.

"Ok fine dear bride, please don't give birth on us! Let me go and let them in", my aunt says.

"It's you who's supposed to let them in? Why did you leave them outside for so long then?", I say.

She could have saved me the humiliation!

"Why? And miss out on free entertainment? I don't think so. Maybe I should leave them out for another hour, I'm curious to see what they will do next", she says.

"No aunt, please", I say.

"Fine. Ok. Relax!", she says and leaves.

I need a new aunt. I'm done with this one.

I honestly don't know how to react when I watch through the half open door as my aunt calls them. They pack up their camp chairs but leave the braai stand there. Then they still have time to wash their hands and straighten their suits! Sense of urgency equals zero!

They are killing it though in those suits I must admit. Damn! All these people in here today have never seen such fineness! It's like watching a celebrity and his groom's men step out of a magazine. They look clean.

I have my fingers crossed that Elik stays in whichever car he's in! And that briefcase Clive is carrying? Is that where they are carrying the money? Geez! Why? Why? Why? Why? They are not here to purchase a wife! I need to stop looking before I get a heart attack.

They pay the money to be granted access home and money to 'open my aunt's mouth'. Culture is funny. I wish I could be there later to see their reaction when they are told they must pay money for the 'beard' (for playing with father's beard when I was young)! They are led to a hut and now I don't know what's going on. I can only hope for the best. My cousins say I must chill, everything will be fine.

"So Cuz, your person is rich hanti!", cousin number two says.

I'm not sure if that's a statement or question. It's phrased in a very confusing way.

"Not really Cuz, he used to be a teacher", I say.

Lecturer, teacher, same thing. Besides, rich is relative.

"Let's see him", she says.

I scroll through my phone and find a clear picture of Elik. He looked very delicious here. He was back from a meeting and I couldn't resist forcing him to pose for a picture. He was serving too much sauce that day. He kind of looked tired and his eyes were just too much for me. I had to capture that look. If there's anything I'm proud of, it's how my man looks. I'll show him off to anyone who cares to look. He does it for me shame.

"Wow. Does he have a young brother?", cousin number two asks.

"Matter of fact he does. He's in there with the uncles right now", I say.

"Serious? Please hook me up", she says excitedly.

I'm not sure if she's serious or not. I never know if people are serious or not when they say I must hook them up.

"I'll hook you up Cuz, you know I got you. He'll be yours before sunset", I say.

I think she actually thinks I'm serious!

The day is going too slow for me. I'm uneasy about the whole process. I'm tempted to go to the cars outside and find Elik just for a hug and maybe steal a kiss, but with all these eyes everywhere I know that's a bad idea. I stay put. It's been 3 hours already! What are they still negotiating in there?

Another distant aunt of mine comes and says it's time for us to go so they can make their pick. I guess they finally reached an agreement now that we are at this stage. I'm so nervous as we walk into the hut the men are in, carrying woven plates. I walk in the middle and keep my head down and kneel opposite the 'visitors'.

"Hey Fierce. Dude! Long time! You look funny though fam!", Elik's brother says.

Everyone turns and looks at him and he has that face saying 'what?'

Just when I thought things couldn't get any worse. He truly is Elik's brother. This is something Elik would do.

"Oh! You know her? Where do you know her from?", my father says.

Lumka kicks Elik's brother so hard I feel the pain.

"Sorry elders. He doesn't know her. Who is Fierce? We are not here for Fierce, we are here for Lastborn", Lumka says with a serious face.

I look up a bit and catch his eye. I want to laugh but I'll try not to.

We are told to lift up our heads so the strangers can pick the one that's theirs.

I don't know if Elik's entourage is confused seeing that they know me or they are just playing along. They actually bring their heads together and deliberate! Then they agree that I'm the middle one. Seriously?

You should see their faces when they are told to fill our woven plates with money.

"For what now?", Elik's brother asks Lumka.

He asks too loud though.

I'm sure now they are wishing they had left him outside.

"To thank them for being born, I guess", Lumka says.

Elik's brother laughs.

"Are you being for real bro?", he says.

I think he's high, honestly!

"You will pay \$50 for the disrespect", my eldest uncle, the spokesperson says.

That shuts them up as they pay up.

They fill our baskets with \$100 notes. I explicitly told Elik that he should get loose change for parts like this. But did he listen? Clearly not! This isn't our culture even.

My uncles remixed our lobola process so they can get the most of it. Greedy much?

My cousins are then asked to leave and I'm told to sit down.

My uncle breaks the silence.

"As you can see our daughter here is a good girl. She is educated, she has a Masters degree! Plus she has no children and makes her own money as you can see she bought her father a car! She also built this home from the ground and so by taking her from us you are costing us a lot", he says.

I'm listening and thinking what is this man talking about now!

"She doesn't go out at night like immoral women do, she doesn't wear mini skirts, look at her. She goes to church every Sunday, she doesn't have children and she works very hard. So this is a great woman we are giving you. She's a full package. For that, we have decided to add three cows to the list", he says.

He had me at mini skirt! I wear the shortest butt riders sometimes. I'm sure Lumka and Elik's brother burst out laughing inside as my uncle went through his list. And what was that about me not going out at night and going to church every Sunday?

"I have a question", Elik's brother says.

Not again! I want to take him by hand and pull him outside. This is not one of his classes in Germany. You just do as told, no questions asked.

"Yes?", my uncle says sounding annoyed.

"My brother, Prof. Elikplim, is more educated than her. He has a PhD in Robotics so he is a Doctor. He's a professor actually. He also goes to church three times a week (lie), makes his own money, doesn't drink (lie), doesn't go out at night (lie) and doesn't do any of that stuff (lie). So that's a great man taking your daughter. So my question is, do we still have to pay those last three cows or you should pay us? I mean, my brother is a Professor!", he says.

The way he sounds so serious right now. I want to laugh. But I also want to cry.

Everyone, me included, stop and look at him long and hard. He looks down shame. He thought he was defending his brother but now they have to pay another \$50 for disrespect.

My uncle resumes talking.

"As I was saying. Our daughter here is pure. She's a virgin and we all know how rare that is these days", he says.

Elik's brother chuckles and quickly disguises it as a cough. I don't know why they didn't leave him in the car with Elik!

"She can testify to that", my uncle says in confidence.

Wait? What now? Where do adults get this virginity idea from?

"Ask her", my uncle insists.

Lumka clears his throat. I think he wants to laugh but is controlling himself.

"Lastborn, are you a virgin?", he says looking at me.

I look back at him and I can tell he's laughing inside. He knows I haven't been a virgin for years!

"Yes I am", I say.

This is a guy who bailed me out for being caught having sex in a car! And he knows I'm pregnant!

This is too much. But clearly I'm the new mother Mary mos. Pregnant and a virgin!

"See. I told you. Add another cow to the list", he says.

I thought they were done! I'm sure now they have 50 cows on that list! Zibulo is the scribe. Adding cow after cow to the list! I'm excused and told they will call me when they need me. They need to make a handwritten copy of the lobola letter then both parties can sign. I'm officially sold.

Me? A virgin? That's the funniest joke I've heard all day. But well, considering that Elik took my virginity, maybe it's not so bad. I know a woman is not supposed to

know how many cows she was exchanged for at her lobola. But Elik will tell me I know.

CHAPTER 74

I go back to the hut and join my cousins. Phew! It's a circus in there! I don't know how my uncles are still dealing with them. But I'm sure the smell of money is teaching them tolerance. Elik's brother is too extra. He's always been like that though. We used to spend nights playing video games and that annoyed the hell out of Elik when he would be trying to work. He's a photocopy of his brother! He says the most random things at the most inappropriate times! But I just love him and I'm so glad he's here. It means we going to be clubbing Sandton down and chopping Elik's money when we get back to Joburg! He made my day though, I can't wait to tell Elik about it.

"So cuz, which of those men is mine?", cousin number two asks.

"The younger one who was fined for talking too much", I say.

"That one? He's very handsome", she says and blushes.

"He is, isn't he?", I say.

How can he not be when he looks like his brother?

"He's quite dark though", she says.

"He is, isn't he?", I say.

This complexion thing is getting old now! They may be darker than us but they are not that dark! The next person who'll raise it will get a response they don't expect.

"Ya. Is that bad?", she says.

Is she being for real right now? What does she mean 'is that bad?' when my own man looks like coal according to my aunt!

"I don't know. To each their own cuz. Dark skin does it for me", I say.

"Oh then, dark skin does it for me too!", she says.

I roll my eyes. I don't even know why she's so excited! It's not like we are being serious here!

"What's his name?", she asks.

"Kofi", I say.

"Coffee? As in tea-coffee?", she asks.

"Pronounced something like that yes, but K-O-F-I", I say.

"Oh ok. You won't forget to hook us up right?", she says.

"I won't", I say.

I will.

I never got to hang out with my cousins. I was always too busy with chores or in the fields. Besides my mother believed that everyone was out to bewitch us so I never really visited our relatives. I like these cousins of mine though. I wish I had females in my life. There's too much testosterone around me. In the lab it's Bunke, Ndivhu and Brain, then at my house it's Elik and the twins and in my family, it's my four brothers, I'm the only girl left. When we go on trips it's usually Elik and Lumka. See, too much testosterone around me!

My cousins update me on what's going on in the village, who married who and who got pregnant by who. We laugh at a girl who was all hoity toity in high school

and acted like she was all that in a bag of chips. Apparently, life got little pretty miss bad and her lobola was only two cows. She used to walk around like she was worth a hundred cows only to come down to two! That's funny. I never really liked that girl, she was a bully.

Turns out one of my cousins here is a virgin. She says she is waiting for marriage. Good for her, I hope her future husband is also waiting and not out there spreading his love then when he's tired he'll come and rest on her. Or worse, imagine she ends up married to someone terrible in bed and only discover on her wedding night. How will she live with that for the rest of her life? Bad sex is enough to mess up a relationship! But on the positive, she has no way of knowing what's good or what's bad since the one she will get will be the only one she knows and won't compare it to any other.

My aunt comes with more gossip. She says they are almost done there and both parties are satisfied. That's music to my ears. My heart can now settle.

"So that one who looks like your man is the young brother?", she asks.

"Yes he is", I say.

"That boy can talk! He was questioning everything and busy saying 'hold up, hold up' after every point made! He's a piece of work", she says.

I can't help laughing. Kofi really is a piece of work.

"But today, I couldn't stop laughing. Hay Fierce no. Where did you get such people?", she says.

"They have never done this before aunty so that's why they are getting it all wrong", I feel the need to defend them.

"Wrong is an understatement! But they made my day. I'm enjoying watching them! And that one, Lumka. He's a proper man, that one", she says.

At least she's enjoying this. I'm not.

"And where's Ghana man? I thought I saw him when they first got here?", she says.

"I'm not sure. I think he's in one of the cars waiting", I say.

"Is everything going well though?", I ask.

"Despite your people's ignorance, yes it's going great. I think they paid more fines than the actual money for introductions!", she says and starts laughing.

They really made her day shame!

"What did they do in there?", I ask.

"Where do I start! First, they were supposed to sit on the floor, isn't you know, but they showed up in their million dollar suits! When they were told to sit on the floor they all came up with all sorts of excuses why they can't! That small one said he has a chronic back pain and is not allowed to sit down on the floor! So we had to give them chairs", she says.

I trust Kofi to be that dramatic! I don't know why culture feels the need to make grown men sit on the floor though!

"What else", I ask. I'm curious.

“Then that boy, you said his name is Kofi? Yes, he asked if we accept bank cards or accept payment via EFT! Your uncles don't even know what EFT is! When we said no, he said we must consider it next time because it's safer and easier for all parties involved. Then they asked for water and we gave them a jug and none of them would touch our water! They wanted bottled water Fierce!”, she keeps laughing.

“And that Kofi of yours asked for a receipt afterwards. That boy! What does he think this is? Oh and that man, the one who was carrying the briefcase earlier (Clive) is busy now converting that lobola letter to a legal contract! You should have seen your uncles' faces! Who is he anyway?”, she says.
She's having the time of her life but I'm so embarrassed.

“He's Elik's lawyer”, I say in a low voice.

“Lawyer?”, she says.

She can't stop laughing and saying how exaggerated my men are.

She says when they brought them meat, one of the guys asked if they had tofu because he's vegan (That's Clive again!). Lumka then had to explain to my uncles in broken Ndebele how an African man doesn't eat meat.

She says she has to go back and make sure no one kills anyone.

“Can I talk to Kofi aunty. Please?”, I say.

I need to talk to someone on the inside and since Lumka is the spokesperson I can't ask him to come out.

"I want to say no because that's not allowed in our culture. But your men brought a whole new culture today where anything is possible, so I'll find a way and send him here", she says and leaves.

Now I'm excited. I haven't seen Kofi in a longtime!

"Cuz, your boyfriend is coming here soon", I say.

She blushes and I can tell she's excited and nervous. Maybe she believes in arranged marriages so maybe I should stop giving her this false hope!

When he walks through the door, I jump and give him the biggest hug ever. It's so good to see him and he still looks good with that flawless skin of his. I stand by the door and tell him we need to keep our voices down. He's not supposed to be here.

"Dude! It's been forever", he says.

"Kofi! Wow, look at you! Who knew you could clean up so well!", I say.

"You know me! Looking good is my thing! And you? How've you been?", he says.

"Great hey, as you can see how awesome I look", I say.

"Nah fam. You look old in that dress!", he says.

He's so silly.

"So how's Germany? How's the Masters going? How's everything? New girlfriend? Come, fill me in", I say.

"I have a lot to tell you hey. It needs us sitting down over coffee for me to tell you", he says.

"So you stuck it out with Elik! You go girl! I hear you were almost a second wife!", he says and laughs at me.

That's not funny! And I wish he wouldn't say things like that in front of these two.

"Where you going to do it though? Be his second wife, I mean?", he says.

"Yep. I'd already said yes", I say.

"Wow! That's true love right there! Elik inspires me though. How did he manage to convince you to say yes to that? He needs to teach me so I can marry all the girls I want", he says.

"Can you afford them?", I say.

"There's that by the way. I'm working on it. I'll afford them one day, you'll see", he says.

I know he will. He's brilliant and looks up to his brother and wants to be equally successful so I know he'll get there.

"I didn't know you were so expensive bro. All those cows!", he says.

"Don't. Don't say the number!", I say.

My cousins can't know! He can tell me later if Elik refuses to tell me.

"Your uncles are unbelievable! They are bullies bro. You can't say anything without them fining you! Are they cops or something?", he says.

"I'm sure they thinking the same about you guys! You are unbelievable! Whose idea was all this? Suits, cars, braai and carrying money in a briefcase?", I say.

"Who else? Your hubby of course", he says.

I knew it.

"Where's Elik?", I say.

That's one thing I really need to know.

"He's in the car. When we left he was going over the documents of their Zambian project. You know him and work!", he says.

I know. He works hard and plays hard.

My aunt comes and says we need to wrap it up, we'll talk later.

"Oh before I forget. I got you a girlfriend. Here", I point at my cousin.

She blushes so much I can't help giggling.

He looks at me, I think trying to see if I'm serious or not. He's a nice guy though so he greets both my cousins and kisses their hands and tells them how beautiful they look. Such a charmer!

"She's a virgin!", I whisper as I walk him out.

"A virgin virgin or a virgin like you?", he says.

I slap his arm. He's too silly!

"A virgin virgin!", I say.

"I don't do virgins, they get clingy. I don't need that", he says.

Shame he's picked up bad habits from Lumka and Elik. I wouldn't be shocked if he has five girlfriends now!

"That's not true. I was never clingy with Elik!", I say.

He laughs at me.

"You were. You are. Dude, you were even willing to be a second wife!", he says.

I wonder why they told him that.

"So, your virgin girlfriend here. When are you marrying her?", I say.

"You people are expensive! I'd rather buy myself a house than marry here! I want a wife from a culture without lobola", he says.

He says he has to go before they fine him because my uncles are too uptight and harsh. Some people never change shame. He's still the same. He used to drive Elik crazy with his lack of seriousness and I'd laugh because Elik is just the same sometimes.

My cousin is sold. She says he smells so good, looks so good, sounds so good. She's so infatuated it's sad to watch. I'm sure Kofi has forgotten about her already. Anyways, she won't see him after today so let her enjoy this dream while it lasts.

I'm starting to feel drained so I think I should take a quick nap.

"Please wake me up when I'm needed. I woke up very early today, I wanna rest a bit", I say to my cousins, then lie down. That's the bad part about being pregnant! You just want to sleep at random times of the day!

They think I'm sleeping and they are talking about how beautiful I look and how my skin is glowing and how I look so rich now. My cousin says she wonders if she'll look as good after she marries Kofi. She's actually serious! They keep talking and I'm touched. They actually look up to me and think I'm like the standard of success! If only they knew half the things I went through to get here!

"Cuz, wake up. People are fighting outside", my cousin says shaking me.

I wasn't fast asleep, fast asleep. I was somewhere in between being awake and being asleep. At that stage when you don't know if you actually dreaming or it's really happening. I force myself to wake up.

I swear if people are fighting over alcohol and spoiling my day I will kill someone today with my bare hands! Elik and I have come too far to have some low-life drunkard come and mess that up. And worse they have disturbed my nap so I'm going to show them flames today! I can hear the noise from here. Why were so many people invited in the first place? I don't need this stress.

I storm out of the hut and I'm met by chaos. Everyone is shouting and there's a crowd in front of the hut where the negotiations were being done. I can feel my heart sinking. I don't know what's going on but I have a feeling that something is terribly wrong. I can feel it.

Elik? Could he have done something? I hope not. Or maybe my aunt has picked a fight with someone or my mother is accusing someone of witchcraft again? Or did Kofi offend someone with his corny jokes? Whatever it is, it better not be serious. Today is all about me and I need things to end in good spirits.

There's a white Range Rover with GP number plates parked outside near the black cars. Lumka's car here? How did it get here? Or is it just another white Range Rover? Eey, I'm so confused. What exactly is going on here? Is it Lumka's wife maybe? Who invited her? Did Lumka invite her?

I'm not allowed to finish my thoughts as I can hear women having a screaming match somewhere. I think it's my aunt and mother. Why? What now! I can't deal with my family you know. Why are they doing this? I'm trying to ask my cousins what's going on but they also don't know so it looks like I have to find out for myself.

I can't see Elik anywhere so I have to find Lumka and just make sure the trouble is not from their side. I need answers. I need help. I push and push but I can't make it through the crowd. Why are all these people here in the first place! I wish I could throw them all out! I'll go around and see if maybe I can get in on the other side. People there are nicer, they actually make way for me. I think they need me to see whatever it is they are watching.

It takes me ten good seconds of blinking fast for it to register that this is real. Kolma is here. When I told people that Komla was created by the devil they didn't believe me! She's actually here in the flesh! I have so many thoughts running through my mind right now I can't describe how I feel.

CHAPTER 75

This time I give it to her shame. She outdid herself. She hit me where it hurts the most. My family. But how the hell did she find me here? How did she even know how to get here? And she's such a class act! I have to clap hands for her. She's dressed like a proper wife you know and is looking all innocent there. If I didn't know any better, I would also feel sorry for her! She catches my eye and gives me a subtle evil corner smile. I have no words. I can't even open my mouth. I have no

words! Some woman from around the village takes the liberty to fill me in about this poor woman standing here on our doorstep. I'm half listening to her and half trying to process this as quickly as I can.

Apparently Miss Komla here has told everyone that she found out that her husband is marrying someone else so she's here to clear the air and stop that from happening. She says she had no idea about this other woman (me) and is sorry to be doing this but she had to do it, to save herself and the other woman! She has them all convinced and feeling sorry for her. Hay no, I give it to her. She deserves an award for this show she just put up. She's divorced for crying out loud! She's the past!

I don't know what other nonsense she's told everyone. If I keep looking at her, I'll kick her flat behind back to Accra! So it might be best if I step away for a few minutes and recollect myself. I need fresh air. I need to breathe. But first I need to confront her. What's the worst that could happen? I mean she's told them everything right?

"Komla? What's this? Why are you here?", I ask and stand in front of her.

I meant to shout but my voice came out so pitifully thin.

"My husband Fierce! Please leave my husband alone. We have kids, I'm begging you", she starts crying.

I clap my hands. What is this in front of me! She thinks we are in drama class here?

"Komla", I say.

"I just want my husband back", she says.

Ya ne.

I just wanted to talk. But no. Drama queen goes on and throws herself down on her knees and starts crying. Gosh! She's making me so angry right now! Clearly there's no talking to her and all these eyes looking at me like I'm the mother of satan are not helping.

I kneel next to her and touch her shoulder.

"For what it's worth. I'm sorry Komla. It was never meant to be like this. You didn't have to do this you know", I say.

She keeps fake crying. Ok now she's just pissing me off! I need to put her in her place soon. When I'm done with her, she'll be somewhere in a plantation in Ghana harvesting bananas barefooted!

"I have your kids, do you know? You'll never see them again!", I say.

Her head shoots up. I think she forgot that she's supposed to be crying! She really needed to look in my eye. To see my reaction I guess. I'm blank. I won't give her that satisfaction! She wants to play the 'hurt Fierce game'? Well, I think we should try the 'get lost Komla game' first.

I can't stand being here a second longer or I'm going to beat her up! I'm serious. She's lucky I'm pregnant and can't risk her punching me in the stomach! I have to remove myself from this space right now. I leave and walk around the hut. I need to find my aunt. Only she can save me. Thankfully no one stops me, they just keep saying "yhooo". They all look so shocked and I would be lying if I said I'm not humiliated right now. I am thoroughly embarrassed. I don't know where to hide.

Just around the hut, there's Lumka. Just who I need to talk to. This is the first time I've seen him this angry! I freeze. He's shouting and talking with his hands! People in this village love things! They've heard the noise and they have all run and are crowding me watching the new scene. I wish people could just leave and go home. Can't they see we are dealing with a crisis here and we need to handle this as a family! But by the looks of things, they are going nowhere. Lumka keeps yelling. I need to move aside to see who he's shouting at.

Oh! I see. This conniving bitch with ugly dreadlocks! I actually laugh at myself! Gosh I'm so stupid! So she's the one who brought Komla here! She slithered her way into my life like the snake she is and I was so gullible, I actually fell for it. That coffee date was just a geography lesson for her so she can learn directions and coordinates to my home!

I'm boiling with so much anger I can't speak, I just stand there wondering if I pull those locks hard enough will they come out and leave holes in her head? Her brain could use some fresh air maybe she will start thinking right.

"Like seriously, what the hell are you doing here?", Lumka shouts at her.

"I'm doing what's right!", she says with an attitude.

"And what is that exactly?", Lumka says.

"I had to bring Komla here! I don't believe you are also supporting this rubbish Lumka! It's wrong!", she says.

"And what you did is right? This is right? Look around you! Look what you've done! Is this what you wanted?", he says.

"Of course not. But that girl has no right to try and marry Komla's husband!", she says.

"Are you even listening to yourself? What husband? They are divorced!", he screams at her.

I'm so scared he will hit her. Although I won't stop him if he does, some people deserve to be kicked around a bit to reset their brains.

"What? Divorced? What do you mean?", she says.

"Oh! So your friend didn't tell you that part? And you took my car without my permission and drove across borders all the way here to do this? You so fucked up, you know that?", he says.

He actually laughs. Not laugh laugh but 'I don't believe this' type of laugh.

She keeps quiet. I step towards them and fold my arms. I just want to look at this snake's face. Lumka doesn't even see me.

"I can't believe you did this! Give me my car keys!", he snatches them from her hand.

"But how will I get back to Joburg?", she says.

The know-it-all, I'm-right attitude is gone now. We down to almost begging. I don't pity her at all, not even a little bit. I just want to step up to her and slap that thick layer of foundation off her face!

"You'll make a plan. You and your friend are good at doing that, clearly", he says.

"But baby...", she says.

"Don't. Don't baby me! Don't ever baby me again!", he turns and walks away then stops and turns back.

"In fact, you know what, get your ass back to Joburg as soon as possible and get the fuck out of my house!", he says and walks away.

Mic drop!

Who's the fool now soon-to-be ex Mrs Lumka? Huh? I can't hear you. Speak up!

She just stands there looking at me like 'do something' and I look back at her like 'nah B, I ain't doing nothing!'.

She really thinks I would help her? Is she out of her mind? She dug this grave so now she must rest in peace in it! I'm more than willing to buy her a tombstone!

Would it be wrong if I point out that her hairline is running away from her face? I think she forgot it in Joburg! Is it bad timing? It's really bothering me. Now that Lumka is gone, she turns to me and since we already have an audience, why stop the show now?

"Look Fierce, I'm sorry alright. I didn't know they were divorced. Komla didn't tell me! It's just, I hate it when men cheat and do this to us women. You are a woman so you understand right? I just thought I was helping a friend", she says to me.

What drugs does this woman take? They are messing up her brain cells! She should come to me in Cape Town, I'll hook her up with proper dealers. Can she hear herself or her mouth just runs without any connection to her brain? Is she

really going to stand there and try and act like she had good intentions? And what's she talking about saying she hates it when men cheat when Lumka is making a different girl scream every weekend? She's not serious about life.

"I'm sorry Fierce", she says.

"Do I look like I need your sorry? You knew exactly what you were doing so drop the act already! It's pathetic really. Lumka is so done with you! I'll personally make sure of it. This is the end of you. You are done!", I say.

"You can't tell my husband what to do!", she says.

"Can't I now?", I say.

"You so full of it little girl! I know Lumka. He's my husband! You think he'll choose you over me?", she says.

Oh so we still have some attitude left, do we? Well let's take care of that right away, shall we!

"That's where you're wrong. See, I know Lumka! And maybe he won't choose me over you. But you know who he will choose? Elik! And Elik and me, do the Maths", I say.

Her jaw drops. It actually drops like it will fall on the ground. You know I've been so timid all these years, these women think I'm a doormat that they can just walk all over! They have taken a shot at my family so I'm coming for them with guns blazing. When I'm done with them they will regret ever crossing paths with me. I'm not that giggling girl she had coffee with in Sandton. I'm Fierce and I plan to live up to my name.

“And wait, what's that about Lumka being your husband? I think I didn't hear that part right. You are not married sisi! Wake up! You stayed with him for what? 10 years and never thought of marriage? Do you want to know why he never married you? Let me guess, he told you 'marriage is overrated and he loves you so that's enough!' and silly you fell for it? Now do you want to know the real reason?”, I say. I actually laugh at her. This part of the joke is on her. She ruined herself for Komla!

She looks at me like I'm transparent. It's as if she's looking right through me.

“Ok. I'll tell you anyway. He thinks you are not his type and you look old! The man you call 'husband' says you are not his type! He's just keeping you because well you've volunteered free maid duties and every home kinda needs that! So there, now you have it”, I say.

For every blow these women are going to throw at me, I'm prepared to throw two back.

“That can't be! He loves me”, she looks like she will faint shame.

I couldn't give a rat's ass about that. Let her faint if she wants. It's a free country. She can do whatever she wants. Are those tears? Who cares! She cries water not blood. So it's not like she's going to die. I need her alive so I can make her pay for every tear I will shed today!

“He what now? He loves you? You so funny, you know that! Newsflash, he doesn't love you at all! If anything, he resents you and says you are nagging and annoying as hell! And please don't tell me you fell for the whole 'the doctor says I have a prostate problem and must stay away from sex' story he told you last year. I told

him to tell you that. He needed an excuse to stop having sex with you and genius me told him to use that line. So you see, it's bye-bye for you cupcake. You are done", I say.

Now I think she will faint for real.

I walk away Lumka style and turn around.

"Oh. You still here? Don't you think you should start walking back to Joburg now?", I say.

I'm calm. Too calm. But gods I'm so pissed! I'm so angry that I'm smiling.

She keeps staring at me with her jaw dropped. What did she expect? That I clap hands for her for bringing Komla here? All these adults need to grow up!

"And Oh! One last thing. I can see your hairline has gone all the way back to 1990! And you think you can keep a man looking like that? Nc nc nc! You've got jokes!", I say. I just had to point out her hairline. It's really been bothering me.

I just need to find my aunt, she'll help me. I don't make it far. There is absolute chaos everywhere! People are screaming 'stop him, stop him'. Instinctively I assume it's Elik about to kill someone so I run towards the source of commotion. I want to laugh. This day is so bittersweet, I can't. There's my eldest uncle running away with the briefcase that had money in it! I suppose it had been left behind when people got out to listen to Komla. Then my uncle seeing that it was the end of the negotiations decided he could not let so much money go back. The problem now is he has a problem with his right leg so now he's running with a limp. In fact he's galloping and he doesn't even make it to the gate before they catch him. He

tries to hold on to the briefcase but my other uncles manage to take it from him. Today we will see things shame!

I spot Elik at the back of the crowd, he's fuming and wants to get to Komla but Lumka is holding him back. I just want to get to him but I can't. I don't want to stop him from killing Komla. I want to help him! But my cousins are stopping me, I don't even know why. I don't even know where they came from! I want to cry, I want to scream, I want to hit someone, I want to cut off Komla's head and feed it to the dogs. But I remain calm, with anger just boiling from my toes all the way to the top of my hair.

My aunt finally shows up to save the day. She's carrying a saucepan and the way she goes at Komla with it, I'm like 'Yes!'. Komla makes her way towards the gate at full speed. It's like we are in a comedy show serious except it's not that funny because the joke is on me.

Komla runs out and towards Lumka's car, but it's locked. My aunt doesn't stop. She chases her down the road. Ok I can't help but laugh a little. With Komla out of the way, my aunt returns for Lumka's wife. She has more sense than her friend and she starts running before the pan touches her. So my aunt throws the pan at her and it gets her on her back and she falls so hard, I laugh. She gets up though and finds her way out. I don't know why I'm laughing so hard. I think it's the anger making me laugh.

“Idiots! What do they think this is? A zoo? They can't just come in here and start talking nonsense”, she shouts.

“And the rest of you! What are you looking at? Don't you have homes? Show time is over! Get out! Go!”, she screams at everyone.

Some don't need to be told twice but some need a saucepan to encourage them to walk away. It's like she's guiding cattle out of home as she heads them towards the gate. A few people linger around, outside the home waiting to see more of the drama. At least there's not so many people left here and I can see Lumka still holding Elik.

I try to run towards Elik but my mother sees me and stops me.

“Where do you think you are going? Haven't you embarrassed us enough today?”, she says.

I don't have an answer to that. I stay put though. At least Elik is composed now but Lumka still has him by the arm. Everyone is talking at once, trying to unpack what just happened. Laughing is over, I'm back to being humiliated. I just want to hug Elik. Is that wrong? I need to feel the safety that only his arms can provide. Is that so wrong?

I can see Kofi at the far end, on his phone. Why is he recording this? Does he think this is funny? Does he think we want a memory of this? Anyway, I'll deal with him later! Inflation looks scared. Shame my poor baby brother, he's so protective of me but at the same time he's terrified of my mother. I can't blame him there! Aren't we all scared of her! I wish I could hug and let him know I'm alright.

I don't know where my mother has gone to now but I'm afraid to proceed towards Elik, just in case she's watching. I'm stuck here. I'm afraid to take a single step. My aunt has gotten rid of most people who are not family.

On our side there's my father, he's leaning against the wall and looks frozen with shock. Then there's two of my uncles trying to get the remaining people to leave. My briefcase-stealing uncle is sitting on the ground still catching his breath and looking like someone just died. Then there's my two cousins and aunts, the way they are looking at me, whatever they are saying can't be nice. And then there's my aunt asking everyone what they are looking at and screaming at everyone to get lost.

On the other side, there's Elik. My love, he looks so hurt and angry it's breaking my heart. Then there's Lumka maintaining a tight hold on Elik's arm and looking equally angry. Then there's Clive looking like he doesn't know what he's expected to do. He's probably wondering if maybe this is part of the ceremony. Then there's the two strangers that came with Elik looking all kinds of shocked. Then there's Zibulo and Inflation, I don't know what they are doing on that side! And of course the party wouldn't start without our beloved Elik's young brother, Kofi, recording everything.

Then there's me. I'm frozen in time in between the two sides. My tears have decided to fall now but I'm not crying. There's a huge lump stuck in my throat that keeps growing and growing and threatening to explode. My hands are shaking

and I'm not thinking. I can't afford to think right now and come to terms with how embarrassing all this is.

To think I was almost Elik's wife, the right way. To think that I was one step away from jumping over the finish line. That we just almost had it. Almost. We were so close. I just missed the promised land by an inch. Now I know how Moses felt when he didn't make it into Canaan.

Elik's image is ruined now. I don't know if my family will accept him after this. I hope this isn't the end of the road for us. That's the reason for the tears. The bright future I had thought we would finally have is looking quite blurry right now. Just like that.

I keep my face down. I can't look at anyone right now. And why is no one coming to at least hug me and see how I'm doing? Are they that disappointed in me? Do they hate me? Does my own family despise me now? I look up briefly and find Elik's eyes. Those eyes I love looking into so much. They look red now but they are still gorgeous. I keep looking at him. I know he's blaming himself but this isn't his fault. I need him to read my eyes and know that whatever happens from here, he shouldn't blame himself. He looks at me with I'm not sure if it's pity or pain or guilt or sadness. I can't seem to read him well today. It's probably because of the tears clouding my vision.

He starts to walk towards me. I shake my head no. He shouldn't come to me. Not now. Not like this. The situation is already too volatile and emotions are flying all

over the place. I need to move because I'm somehow in the middle. It's as if I was placed here on purpose. Like I need to pick a side or something. Ya, today started off funny but all that's changed. I'm so humiliated. I can't even really cry, the one thing I do best! I feel like if I continue standing here, I'll give birth.

CHAPTER 76

Ok so I'm standing here thinking, my mother is going to kill me and I'm thinking Elik was right when he said I must be upfront with my family regarding the whole Komla issue and I'm thinking at least my father will back me up because I told him Elik used to be married. It was a lie then but it's true now and that's all that matters. I'm also wondering if my uncles will fine Elik since he kinda found his way into the yard without invitation or they will let it go considering the circumstances. Also, where are those two witches? I don't know how they will make it out of the village considering there's only one bus to town per day and it left this morning already.

I'm wondering why none of the uncles have called a family gathering so we can talk about this and I can explain myself. Why are they just standing and sitting there looking at me like they have never seen me before? Fine, I'll call the meeting myself then!

My mother was missing and she emerges. Ok problem solved, she's coming to take me so we can all sit and discuss this. At first I'm relieved because I could use a mother right now. Not the usual hollering and shouting at me mother. No. I need

a caring and loving mother to hug me and tell me it's not the end of the world and that we will make it through this as a family. I just need a shoulder and someone to convince me that there's light at the end of the tunnel after all.

I'm holding on to that hope until I see what she has in her hand. She comes straight to me. Actually she charges at me! She has a sjambok in her hand! I know my father always kept a sjambok under his bed but it was never to hit us. He used it to threaten potential boyfriends and that was it. At first I think it's meant for Komla until I realise Komla is not here anymore. She's probably out there in the road doing who cares what! Or maybe it's to hit Elik's people? Now that would be bad. Or maybe it's for me? No ways. She wouldn't do that to her precious daughter. I turn away from her, just in case.

At first I hear my little brother scream just before I feel the worst pain I have ever felt in my entire life. It's so sudden and painful I don't get the chance to duck. I wasn't ready so I just stumble forward like a falling mannequin. She actually hit me! Do they make this thing out of razor blades? Because I swear it just cut all the way across my back. I was not ready. Why is she hitting me though? I know I embarrassed her in front of everyone and I know to her that's a big deal since she's such a show off. But isn't her hitting me with a sjambok a bit much. Yho! I honestly wasn't expecting that. And the pain, I feel like someone stabbed me in the back with a spear then dragged it around and around cutting off chunks of my meat. It stings so bad.

As soon as that whip lands on my back, I suddenly have bodyguards! I don't know when it happened since I was too busy screaming out loud and at the same time trying not to let the tears fall. A hard combination if you ask me. My men in suits are standing around me. Even the two strangers I don't know get into formation. Elik pulls me, puts my face on his chest and wraps his hands around me. He doesn't even say anything. He just holds me and I feel like crying now. It really hurts. But I won't cry. Is Elik protecting me? Are all of them protecting me?

The sjambok cracks again and since I didn't feel the sting this time, I think my mother just hit Elik! I felt the impact of his back caving in on my forehead. This woman! She's not playing mos. She's going to hit all of us now? But why hit Elik? That upsets me. No one hits Elik! No one! I don't care if you are my mother or not, you just don't!

I try to break free from Elik's hold. No one hits Elik! Not on my watch. He holds me in place though. He's avoiding my back so one of his hands is holding my neck and the other my lower waist. I can't break free and in hindsight I'm grateful. My mother would have beaten the hell out of me!

On the plus side, at least one day we can sit around the fireplace with our children and tell them how their grandmother once beat us up with a sjambok in front of everyone! We can spice it up and make it seem like we were Romeo and Juliet, fighting for our love.

But really now? Who hits umkhwenyana? Are we in Django unchained? Why is she hitting him? I hope she doesn't order that he takes off his jacket and shirt so she can hit him some more, this is not 12 years a slave! My mother has lost her mind.

I can't really see what's going on because well, I'm sheltered. There's men in suits all around me and I feel so loved and safe. A weird feeling considering the circumstances. I can hear my mother shouting at the top of her voice and promising to cause a mass murder and my aunt taking the sjambok from her and trying to calm her down. My aunt keeps telling her that this is about me and they should be on my side.

"I think we should go now", Kofi keeps whispering. A part of me wants to laugh at him. He doesn't know when to be serious but again he's got a point. Maybe they should go and leave me to deal with this with my family. We'll try a lobola re-run next time. I'll probably be beaten to a pulp by the time I go to bed but tomorrow might be a better day.

I need to face my people. I push Elik back and he resists but I beg him until he let's me. These guys actually formed a circle around me! Even Zibulo and Inflation are here! At least I know two people in my family still have some sort of love for me. That's consoling. This circle of black suits around me is beautiful. I feel like a queen. I find my way through them and make them move back with my hands. I have to do this on my own. Poor Elik. My sweet love. He looks defeated. I know he's ready to defend me if anyone tries to hit me again but he also knows him

being here is making the situation worse. So he doesn't know what to do and he just stands there looking all kinds of lost.

"Mama please. Can we sit down with the uncles and talk? I'm sorry. I can explain. That woman was lying", I say.

My back is in flames. That sjambok got me bad. I can feel blood trickling and my dress sticking on but that's not of concern right now. I'm not going to cry. I can't cry. She doesn't listen and keeps calling me every name in the book. You know words hurt more when said in your language than in English! She slices me and chops me with her words and shows no mercy at all. The more I say sorry, the more she vomits insults! Yho!

She's just running off like a truck without brakes! She keeps going! I had no idea she knew so many degrading words! Each word hurts worse than the last. And what hurts more is that this is my own mother! A woman who carried me for nine months and suffered hours of labour to birth me, as she always says! The words cut so deep because they are coming from her. I can take them from anyone else but not from my own mother.

I can't believe she went and made this all about her! It's all about 'you've embarrassed me', 'what will people say', 'people will be gossiping about me', nywe nywe nywe! How about me? How about how I feel right now? Doesn't she care? Not even a little bit maybe? I'm more embarrassed than she can ever be and I'm hurt. I need my mother. But it's fine, let her keep talking, I'm not going to cry. Elik tries to take my hand but I pull my hand away. I'm going to face her alone. I'm a

soldier. She might not know but I've fought so many battles and I bear scars so deep, Tshaka would have made me a commander in chief of his army. So what's a few more cuts on the back of a warrior?

She's dumping all the hurt and pain she felt when my father married a second wife in truckloads! She's looking at herself as Komla, me as my stepmother and Elik as my father! Why am I being punished for my father marrying a second wife all those years ago? I wasn't even born yet! If this is how she felt why did she stay married to him then?

You mean to tell me she's been this angry all these years? Wow! And I just happen to be so unlucky that she dumps it all on me? And why are all these elders here not stopping her? They are all just looking down like small children caught stealing sugar! I know they don't approve of what she's doing for their own selfish reasons. She's costing them money. It all comes down to money here. No one cares about me. I can feel Elik cracking his knuckles. I can't help him right now. I'm still facing a radical demon here, I can't multitask.

My aunt tries to talk sense into her and say it's enough now, but my mother cuts her down so quick.

"Of course you'll support her because she's just like you. Sleeping around with married men! I'm starting to think you are the one who taught her!", my mother says.

My aunt laughs and claps her hands. I can tell she has no words. I'm glad. I don't want them going at it. This is my battle, let me take the stabs.

I keep trying to apologise, even though I don't feel like I did anything wrong here. I look to my uncles pleading for help with my eyes but all of them are looking down with their heads in their hands! Wow! They have forsaken me so fast? Great. Next time someone says they want money to buy a new plough, I'll remember to hold my head in my hands and keep quiet!

"Wait. Hold up! I'm sorry mama, I don't understand what you saying but whatever it is, it can't be nice. Why are you shouting at her like that? That's not cool! Can't you guys like go inside and talk like adults or something?", Kofi says.

My precious brother in law.

"What is this one saying?", my mother says.

I have my fingers crossed that she doesn't hit him! She can't be trusted today.

"I'm serious! You see Elik and Fierce have loved each other for a very long time!

They give some of us hope that true love still exists. Why can't we just all support them? I thought that's what family is for!", he says.

Awwwww Kofi! It's refreshing to hear another voice that's not my mother's.

"Why is this one still talking? Who said he can speak?", my mother said.

Too bad Kofi can't understand her. She goes off at him and threatens to kill him in all sort of ways. He just stands there looking at her with wide open eyes, not understanding anything.

Well, at least he tried.

I can't listen anymore. I'll go and take my handbag and ask Elik to take me to Bulawayo. I'll return tomorrow when the storm has settled then maybe we can

talk about this like adults. Elik tries to stop me. I don't know where he thinks I want to go.

"It's ok baby. I just want to go and get my bag. I'll be right back", I say.

"Are you sure?", he says.

I nod.

"Should I come with you?", he says.

"No you can't. I'll be right back", I say.

My mother is not holding back the punches! I go into the hut and kick the door behind me. I hold onto the wall and hang my head down. Damn my back hurts! And my heart is so sore, I want to take it out and give it a massage. I want to scream out loud and cry my eyes out. But I can't. I need to stay strong, I'll cry on my pillow sometime tonight. I start speaking to myself to try and convince myself that I can do this. I can have the courage to walk away from my mother and come back tomorrow.

"Fierce. You can do this! You are fierce! Let her burn you down, it's ok, many have done that to you before, but like a phoenix you'll rise from the ashes like you always do. You need to hold your head up high and walk away. You need to. You have to. You must!", I say it out loud so I can hear it. Sometimes I need a reality check and a little encouragement from myself to myself. I stand up straight, wipe away the few tears that are trying to leave my eyes and grab my handbag.

After a few sighs and deep breaths, I open the door. These people are still here! I somehow hoped they would leave or just disappear.

My mother is not done but I am. Clearly there will be no reasonable talking today! "I'll come back tomorrow so we can talk and I can explain. I'm truly sorry about all this", I say.

"You think you can just go like that? Who said you can go? What's wrong with you?", she screams at me.

It's a miracle she still has a voice!

I explain as politely as I can that me leaving is for the best. I will come back tomorrow. I just can't be here today anymore. The situation is too toxic for me.

"I don't know what happened to you Lastborn. I don't know what South Africa did to you? You've been sleeping around and prostituting and now you are pregnant! Who even knows who the father is!", she says.

Just wow. Now everyone knows I'm pregnant. Just great!

"I always knew you were sleeping with people's husbands. I could just tell. I knew it! I don't know who you took after because in my family such has never been seen! must have been from your father's side. Do you have any idea how embarrassed I am right now? How will people look at me Lastborn? Huh? Everyone will be talking about me! How could you do this to me?", she continues.
Just wow!

I walk and stand next to Elik. I really need us to leave before I'm known as the child who beat up her own mother. She's pushing me to the limits now. Everyone is staring at me and my men from Africa are standing behind me. I think they are ready to step in should anyone decide to mince my back again.

I can't take my mother's words anymore. Why is my father not saying anything though? Does he feel the same? I'll apologise one last time.

You know what, I don't care anymore. I take Elik's hand and hold it tight. I'm sure my nails are digging into his hand and I'm sorry about that but it can't be helped right now. Who cares about respect and procedure and the do's and don'ts of culture right now?

"Mama. I'm sorry. This is a big misunderstanding! I can explain. You don't have to insult me so harshly", I say.

"I can say whatever I want to you. I carried you for nine good months", she says.

"Why are you doing this?", I say.

"Because you have become a worthless whore Lastborn, stealing people's husbands. That's why. You've embarrassed me", she spits.

A whore? Me? I don't recognise this woman in front of me. I've always known she was extreme but I never thought she would say half the things she's said to me in the past 20 minutes! I can imagine the things she said to Replace. No wonder the poor child tried to abort the baby. No one can take such words and remain the same.

"But mama you are embarrassing yourself even worse right now!", I say.

I can't believe I said that outloud.

"What did you just say?", she says.

I let Elik's hand go and step towards her.

"After everything mama, you'll stand there and call me a whore? After everything I've done for you? For this family? You know I used to send you my last cent and go to bed on bread and pilchards. I sent you money every single time you asked me to. I borrowed from people, at one point I owed so many people money just so you could buy that dress and look better than my step mother at that wedding! I even sent you some money I had meant for my fees at some point. I did everything for you", I have to swallow to stop from crying.
I'm not going to cry.

"So yes I met Elik and I fell in love with him and through everything we stayed together. Yes he had money and that was very fortunate. I sent you the money every single month and deep down I know you knew it was from him! I took care of everything on my own. And mama never once did you ask me where I got the money from or cared if I was fine and had any money left for myself. Now you treat me like this?", I say.

For the first time I understand how Elik felt when his family was bashing him yet he had religiously sent them money. It's the worst feeling in the world. You feel like you did everything and sacrificed for someone then they turn around and spit in our face and treat you like a piece of trash! Now it's my time to talk. I can't bottle it in anymore.

"So yes, I may no longer be a virgin. I haven't been a virgin in 5 years! So there, I'm sorry I'm not the perfect daughter you thought I was. And yes I'm pregnant now and I don't regret it. I love my child and I love the father. I was pregnant before

you know? With twins. And I lost them. You have no idea how that hurt me. I needed you but I couldn't tell you because I was scared of you. I lay dying in hospital when you called me to ask for money for your stokvel. I said I was fine but I wasn't. If you really cared you would have heard from my voice that I wasn't ok. I was broken and dying but I sent you the money anyway", I say and stop. I have to swallow.

"Baby...", Elik says, trying to stop me.

"No Elik. Let me", I say.

"Mama. I had a car accident a few weeks back you know. I almost died but again I didn't tell you because I couldn't. I said I'm fine when you called. You needed money for your church uniform. I sent it. I kept telling you I'm fine. But I haven't been fine for a very long time. You know I had to figure men out on my own and you have no idea how that went. I was raped mama, I was beaten up, that man almost killed me! But I told you I was fine whenever you called. You didn't really care. All you wanted to know was when I would send you some more money. It's always been about money!", I'm shouting now and I'm so close to tears.

"And yes I'm lucky I found Elik. He's been patient with me, he's loved me, he's been there for me at my darkest moments, he's sat on my bedside every time I was in hospital. He bought that car (I point at the Fortuner) and the one I drive now. He did this whole solar thing for you. He buys all the groceries I send you. He bought me the house I live in. He listens to me, he understands me, he supports me and he's there for me. No one else is. He's all I have", I say.

I need to stop to swallow again. There's a huge lump in my throat!

I know I probably shouldn't be saying all of this in front of all these people but I don't care anymore. What hasn't my mother said anyway!

"Mama. When Replace died, who stepped up? When you didn't have money to go on your Easter and Passover church trips, who paid? When Inflation didn't have school shoes and his levies weren't paid, who stepped up? Whenever you needed anything or you wanted to outdo the neighbours, who did you call? And today you'll tell me I've been prostituting myself in South Africa? And call me a worthless whore? All you ever want from me is money and more money. I don't even have a job for crying out loud! I'm at school. How about me mama? How about my feelings? How about your daughter?", I say.

I know I said I won't cry but I can't control it now. I breakdown and Elik has to hold me, careful not to touch my back because the blood is seeping through the dress now.

"How dare you speak to me like that Lastborn!", she says.

Just wow!

So she didn't hear anything else I said? All she heard was me being disrespectful?

"I'm your mother!", she yells at me.

"Then act like it damn it! Be a mother to me! I need my mother not this cruel and bitter woman you've become!", I yell back.

I need to breathe and stop crying. I've lost my composure.

She yells and screams and calls me more names. I can't take it anymore.

"If you are this angel you are claiming to be. Then explain how you are trying to marry a married man!", she yells.

Isn't this the first thing she should have said to me? Before all this?

I get off Elik's arms.

"Geez mama! He's not married! Not anymore. He's divorced!", I yell and hold up Elik's left hand.

"See, there's no ring! He is divorced!", I scream.

Breath Fierce.

I can't be here anymore. I'm losing it and might end up saying things I might regret later.

"Let's go Elik", I say.

Most of my uncles are sitting down now, watching a free reality show. I can feel my heart breaking, piece by piece. I need to get out of here now. I'll come back tomorrow.

"Are you sure we should leave now?", Elik says.

"Yes. Please get me out of here", I say.

My aunt comes to me and Elik.

"Don't worry both of you. I know this is hard but we will resolve this. For now just be there for each other. This will pass. Your mother is just cocoo that's all", she whispers.

"I can't do this anymore aunty. I'll see you tomorrow", I say and give her a hug.

"Ok my baby. And you, Ghana man, take care of her, please", she says to Elik.

My aunt is calling him Ghana man to his face now? Seriously?

"I will. I promise", he says.

My mother is still unforgiving. She still wants to shred me to pieces with her hands and my aunt is back to restraining her. So she just found out her only daughter has been raped, abused, suffered a miscarriage, had a car accident and all that but she's still not sympathetic? I can't take anymore of her. It's a wrap for me for today. She's even bringing up how embarrassing it was that I brought a man to her daughter's funeral and how people gossiped about her for weeks! But she was here celebrating and enjoying the money!

Just wow.

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I'll deal with this tomorrow. I'm done and out today. I tell Elik that we're leaving and I'm not asking. It's so quiet! Why isn't anyone else doing anything? My uncles? My father? Anyone? Please? Ok. No one. Are they that scared of my mother? Or they just don't care about me?

"I think it's best if we leave. Let's meet at the Rainbow hotel in Bulawayo and regroup", Elik says to his guys.

"You don't have to tell me twice bro. I'm out of here", Kofi says and is the first to make it out.

They all follow and make it so fast towards the cars. I think they are scared my mother might run after them with her sjambok. I hope they don't forget their braai stand. It's been standing there all day!

Only Lumka stays behind. He gives me a long hug. He's kind of pressing on a part of my wound at the back but it's alright.

"I'm so sorry Fierce. I'm sorry for this. I'm sorry for everything", he says.

"It's Ok bhud' Lumka. None of this is your fault. I'll be alright", I say.

I don't know if I'll ever be alright, but I'll try my best.

Lumka, Elik and I go last. I haven't even taken three steps when my mother screams at me.

"If you walk out of that gate Lastborn Nkomo, don't you ever, ever come back here again! Do you hear me", she says.

I freeze. What the hell is wrong with her?

"What did she say?", Elik says and Lumka quickly translates for him.

Elik's Zulu is quite wobbly but it's there, it comes out when he's trying to be charming. And his accent plus that deep voice, there's no way you won't be charmed! So I'm sure he heard what she said but he wanted to be sure.

"No baby, then you can't do this. You have to stay. I'm not worth it", he says.

I squeeze his hand.

I turn towards my mother. Now she's gone too far!

"Mama. So you will exile me from home? Is that what you are saying?", I say.

"You heard what I said! I won't repeat myself. Walk out of that gate and never walk back in again!", she says.

I think she's serious.

My father tries to say something but he has let his woman run her mouth for so long, he thinks he can control her now? She shuts him down so quick I cringe. She's running this show today, all of them should just take several back seats.

Actually I just had a thought. I take out the envelope with money from my handbag and walk towards my father and hand it to him. I meant to give it to him anyway. "Here's the money you need for your farming and for fuel", I say.

"Don't go Lastborn. You know how your mother is. She doesn't mean these things she's saying. Please stay my child. I had no idea you suffered so much. I'm sorry. Let's all talk about this", he says.

Talk about this? Where has he been for the last hour when his wife has been throwing dagger after dagger at me and dragging my name all over the mud? He's just been standing here quiet so may he kindly continue standing please! Thank you.

"I'm sorry baba. At least you'll have a grandchild before you die. I'm pregnant", I say.

He must have heard when my mother made the public announcement but I remember a chat I had with him where he had said I shouldn't wait too long to give him grandchildren. I'll give him his first from me in about 5 months.

Elik is still glued where I left him. I join him. I just want to get out of here. I don't think my mother is serious about me not coming back! I'll be back tomorrow. For today, I need to remove myself from this situation and get to a hotel somewhere and hold on to Elik and cry my eyes out. I walk towards the gate with my head bowed down. I've had many different types of walks of shame but this one. This one takes the trophy.

Kofi comes back from the car. What now? I don't have the energy to deal with him.

"What's going on?", he says.

"We are leaving. Come let's go", Elik says.

"No wait. Are you coming back? Are you still going to continue with this?", he says.

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

"Nope, it's never happening. This is it", I say.

"So if they don't want Elik and this isn't happening anymore then they must give back the money!", Kofi says.

"No Kofi. It's fine. They can keep it. It's just money come on", Elik says.

"No Elik. That's a shit load of money! They can't keep it! Why should they keep it?", he says.

He's raising his voice now.

"Let's go, it's fine", Elik says.

"No Elik it's not fine! No. People always take advantage of you and I'm sick of it. All you've ever done is take care of everyone and people just keep taking from you. So no they can't keep your money after treating you and Fierce like this! They can't! I won't let that happen", Kofi says.

"Kofi please. Let's just go", Elik says.

"No! I won't let anyone do that to you. Screw that. I'm taking your money back", he says.

"He's right. They can't keep your money after this!", Lumka says.

I can't help but smile a bit. It's cute watching them stand up for Elik like this.

We watch as Kofi strolls to the uncles and have a back and forth with them. I keep thinking my eldest uncle will faint. He can never be the same again if he lets all that money go. He's talking so loud and threatening to hit Kofi with his knobkerrie. He's saying "Once money gets into the home, it can't leave!". I think he's making that up now.

Can they give up the money already so we can go! Kofi is not backing down but I can't hear what he's saying from here. I hold Elik tight. I know he might feel the need to step in if someone does anything to his brother. But, no. He's not going there!

My father disappears into the hut and returns with a bag of flour with the money and the briefcase. They stuffed the money into a flour bag? Now it will come out all white and dusty! And the briefcase? So they were keeping the remaining money as well plus the briefcase? They should be ashamed of themselves! Kofi takes it, says something then walks towards us.

"Let's go", he says and doesn't even wait for us!

We follow.

But my mother just won't stop! What now? What hasn't she said yet? I turn around to look at her.

"So you really going to walk out of that gate Lastborn with these unruly men?", she says.

"Yes. I will be back tomorrow mama", I say.

"No you won't. If you walk out of that gate never set your foot here again!", she says.

"This is my home! I'm coming back tomorrow!", I say.

You know today I understood what they mean when they say it never rains but it pours. I've never met anyone who has as much bad luck as me!

I never thought this was even possible!

"So you really leaving?", she says.

"Yes!", I snap.

"Fine. Go if you want. Ngikufungela ijoyi! (I swear to you the death spell). I dare you to walk out of that gate", she says.

That escalated very quickly! I didn't see it coming!

We've reached a point of no return.

I feel the blood running in my veins turn ice cold and my hands are shivering so bad. I think I'm going to collapse. Elik holds my one arm and Lumka my other.

That's all that's keeping me upright right now.

"What did she say?", Elik says.

I tell him because I need to repeat it out loud to let it sink in myself.

“She just swore to me the death spell. It’s sworn to someone of your bloodline. If broken the breaker dies. So that means I can never return home or talk to her ever again. I’m dead to her”, I say. That just got way out of control! I got disowned in the cruellest of ways. I'm not even sure what exactly it is that I did that was so wrong. I don't deserve this.

“What? No baby. You need to make peace. Come on. Please. You can't do this because of me. Come on Fierce. I’m begging you”, he says.

He looks terrified. He pleads and even kneels down to beg me to stay.

“It's no point baby. It’s too late. She’s made up her mind. There's no going back now. It's done”, I say.

I'm so unfeeling right now it's scaring even myself. The tears are falling but I'm not crying. I'm just, a thing existing.

There's chaos behind me. Like almost everyone screams at once. No one ever thought we would live to see the day anyone from our family utters those words! It feels so unreal because we always heard stories of so and so swearing the death oath at each other. It was always old women who did that. I actually wonder if that oath thing is real or it’s superstition like most things. It's just words mos so how much weight can they have really. I don't think it's true. The fact that my mother chose the side of a woman she doesn't know over me is what hurts me the most.

I don't even look back as I walk out of that gate and wait for Elik to show me which of the black cars we will be using. My big bag and everything else can stay behind it’s fine. I have my wallet, my phone and passport. I’m good. I need to go far far far

away from here. Lumka takes his Rover, Clive and the two strangers each took a car. I still have the rented car that needs to be returned. I find the keys in my bag and find Elik's brother in Clive's car.

"Dude, please do me a favour. Please go get that car and drive behind us. It needs to get back to Bulawayo", I say.

I thought I had left Elik in the car we will share but he's by my side now! How he got here so quick I don't know.

"I don't want to die! You want me to go in there alone? Your mother will chop off my head. I can't", he says.

He actually looks terrified shame, I'm starting to feel sorry for him.

"Ok fine. I'll call the rental agency tomorrow and see if they can come down and pick up the car", I say.

They will charge me a lot probably but like Elik said, it's just money.

"Kofi, take these keys and go get that car! Now!", Elik says.

Usually, they could have gone back and forth, arguing for minutes! But his brother knows better than to cross Elik when he's in such a state. He takes the keys and runs full speed into the yard. Everyone just stops and stares at him. He gets into the car and jumps in and reverses so fast I thought he would run someone over. He's hooting for people to get out of the way this whole time. One day I think I'll look back at this moment and laugh at him.

I thought my uncles and brothers would be running to me, begging me to stay but I thought wrong clearly. I don't blame them though. With my mother standing

there with her hands on her hips near the gate, no one can walk out and live to tell the tale. She will disown them one by one. I don't even want to look at her directly. I don't want to look at any of them. No one had my back in there, they just let her spiral out of control and now I have a death curse hanging over my head! I look at the home I worked so hard to renovate one last time with that nice Fortuner parked over there!

Elik and I share a car. I recline my seat all the way back. He takes off his jacket and puts it on my seat so my back can rest on it. I kind of have a cut on my back from that sjambok! I cover my face with my hands. I've just been cut off from my family and I feel so hurt, I can't even cry. I'm quiet on the outside but inside I'm screaming so loud, my spirit is wailing and my soul has been torn into pieces. My life is a tragedy, always been, I just had to teach myself to laugh through it. It was the only way to survive.

"Drive", I say to Elik.

He drives and the other cars follow.

Well his brother is already over there down the road. He really doesn't want to be anywhere near my home anymore!

They say your darkest hour comes before your dawn, but I guess that was never meant for me. I think my clock got stuck at my darkest hour and now I'm stuck there too. Dawn will never come for me. Everytime I think I see a glimpse of the morning light in the horizon, I soon realise it was just a shooting star passing by and I'm back to my darkest hour.

Elik and I are on our own now. He doesn't have a family and I don't anymore. It's just us now.

"Komla won't get away with this!", Elik says to himself and bangs the steering wheel.

"She better not!", I say, before almost choking on tears.

He looks at me shocked. Usually I would stop him from plotting to destroy someone no matter what they've done. But today, I'm sorry dear Komla, I'll encourage him. I'll make sure he destroys her. I'll help him even! She and that no hairline friend of hers deserve everything that's coming to them. I wonder where they are right now? I wonder where they will sleep tonight! Actually, I couldn't care less!

I have to lie on my side because lying on my back is threatening to paralyse me. My tears are now flowing like the Victoria Falls. I can't anymore. I start screaming and pulling at my hair. Elik has to pull over the side of the dust road and run out towards my side and take me out so he can hold me. The other cars were driving behind us and have stopped too, probably thinking we have a problem. The men just stand there as I cry like someone died. Someone died actually. My mother is dead to me and I'm dead to her. I've lost everything.

I worked so hard on maintaining a relationship with her and I always made fun of how mean she was because I thought it was coming from a good place! My screams keep getting louder and louder as my mother's words run through my head. I'm losing it and all the pain I've been harbouring all day, now I'm letting out.

“Please go. We’ll find you guys at Rainbow”, Elik says to the guys.

I know he doesn’t want them to see me like this. I’m a total wreck. His brother insists on staying behind and Elik doesn’t fight him.

“Fierce I’m so sorry for what they did to you. You didn’t deserve it. You don’t deserve any of it. Elik loves you and he will take care of you. We are your family now and we would never turn our backs on you. Don’t cry. You will be alright”, he says.

I think this is the first time ever I’ve heard him sound this serious! But unfortunately I can’t stop crying yet. My heart is bleeding and the pain!

I just want to throw myself on the ground but Elik won’t let me. He keeps trying to hold me upright. I know he blames himself and I’m sorry for making him feel worse but I’m not in control of myself right now. The pain!

I try to calm down but I can’t. We hadn’t even gone that far from home. People like things and those from neighbouring homes are now gathering. I know I have to get it together but I can’t. I’m unable. I just keep screaming and crying at the top of my voice. My eldest brother Zibulo shows up. I don’t know how he escaped my mother. He joins us near the car.

“I’m sorry bro. Things just got out of control unnecessarily”, he says to Elik.

“Not your fault”, Elik says.

“Sisi. I’m sorry for the way umama treated you. You need to go now though, people are watching”, he says.

He promises to call me and we can talk about all of this. He’s a good brother.

“Can you take that car back to Bulawayo tomorrow please? We will be there”, Elik says.

Zibulo agrees.

“Baby we need to go now. Please my love. Please”, he says.

There’s so much pain in his voice, it adds on to my pain.

Kofi is now going to drive us. I don’t trust his driving! He drives like his brother! Like a taxi driver. He almost killed us one night when we were coming from clubbing in Longstreet after Elik had thrown us out for making too much noise while he was trying to work. We had taken his credit card and car and gotten wasted. Then little brother here was convinced he was still sober and drove us back. We crashed Elik’s car and he had been so upset! Those are good memories though and my brain doesn’t have space for them right now. Today it’s just gloom and misery and darkness.

I curl up in the back seat and put my head on Elik’s lap and continue sobbing. He cradles my head like it’s a new born baby and keeps telling me how much he loves me and how sorry he is and how he will take care of me. Kofi drives silently. His talkative mouth doesn't say anything. I don't blame him though. What could he possibly say in this situation?

As we pass by the shops, Kofi pulls over and I lift my head to see why. There’s Komla and her friend flagging down the car! They are not even standing close to each other, I can only assume their little friendship is over! Obviously Lumka and

the other guys left them or they wouldn't be here still. They look so ridiculous right now!

"Can I just go and deal with them once and for all?", Kofi says.

Wow, he sounds pissed.

"No. Drive", Elik says.

So we leave them there and watch them through the rear view mirror. The two people who single handedly destroyed me. They will make a plan. And since they are not carrying handbags I assume they left them in Lumka's car. Let's see how they get back to South Africa now!

Elik tells his brother to connect his phone and play music. He keeps saying 'next' and skipping tracks, some that I wish he could let play! He says 'leave that one' at 'Each his own'. I love this song and he knows it. It's gentle and soothing and has a message that speaks to my heart. I used to listen to it a lot after my sister died. Akon's voice has always comforted me. I close my eyes and let the song into my head. Anything to displace the thoughts tormenting me in there.

Elik's hand finds mine and he holds it tight. His other keeps massaging my head. Well, my mother is dead! She actually disowned me! I don't believe it! She didn't even give me a chance to explain myself so she will never know my side of the story! She disowned me for my choices yet she's in a polygamous marriage! Double standards much? Anyway, to each his own. Me and her are walking in different directions from today onwards. My life is with Elik now and the twins and the upcoming baby. To each his own. I've found my own and my own is Elikplim

Mufaesi Nkrumah! This song makes me cry so much and is making my sobbing graduate to full blown crying! I feel a tear drop on my face. I think Elik just shed a tear or two for me!

'Each His Own'

Everybody wants, in different directions
The whole world's running to each his own
It's a place that justifies it all
And nobody's ever wrong
I guess we gotta agree to disagree
Even if we're singing the same song

You can't try to change a life that don't wanna be changed
If we all see eye to eye the whole world would be grey

So let's keep running to each his own
If we all keep running then we can toast
To each his own
And we'll be alright
And we'll be alright. Alright.

Everybody longs for success whatever that is
The whole world's longing for each his own
It's a place where the truth stays in the light

Cause nobody ever lies
And we follow our hearts into the night
Wake up thankful to be alive

You can't try to save a life that don't wanna be saved
If we all see eye to eye the whole world would be grey

I am who I am
And you are who you are
I could wish on a cloud
And you can wish on a star
Still we'll be alright
We'll be alright. Alright

CHAPTER 78

I was a mess when we got to Bulawayo. I was completely shattered. Ever cried so much, your voice goes away and you throw up and feel sick to the stomach? It's the worst! I cried till my tears refused to keep flowing but I kept crying anyway. I felt hurt, confused, angry, upset, sad, guilty and scared. I mean my mother seriously told me I was dead to her! We'll see. Easter is in a few months, let's see how she makes it to her church trips!

I didn't eat or anything. I just lay there in Elik's arms trying to keep my sobs to a bare minimum because I may be hurt but I'm still considerate. It's a hotel and there's people in other rooms trying to sleep or do whatever it is people do in

hotel rooms. Elik held me in interesting ways. Considering he couldn't hold my back because of the parting gift on my back my mother gave me. He was crying silently too because I could hear him sniffing and tears would fall on me. I felt sorry for Akon at some point, he must be tired of singing! He sang the whole Freedom album to us back to back and it was awkward when our favourite songs would come up and deep inside we feeling the song but can't really get up and start dancing. Because you can't dance and cry at the same time you know.

When I eventually stopped crying and started living again I started abusing Elik. I checked his back to see how bad the sjambok got him. He hardly got scratched! Either he's made of steel or the suit protected him or my mother didn't hit him hard enough! Then I threw myself on him! I wanted to sleep and since sleep wasn't coming easy I turned to the only way that was guaranteed to give me a rested night. It took a while to convince him that yes I was sure I wanted that, considering I didn't have a voice. And he never really says no so he gave in eventually and took me on an emotional trip to heaven. But him having to avoid touching the wound on my back made the ride quite tricky but we kind of have distinctions in that department so we made it work. The body wants what it wants after all. Besides Elik and I are sexually perverted. We'll do it at a time no normal person would even consider it and sometimes it's the only way we communicate and let each other know we will be alright. Besides they call it sexual healing for a reason.

I woke up the next morning and I was happy for the first 30 seconds or so until my mother's words came rushing into my brain and I remembered I was deleted

yesterday. She told me to never come back! Oh well! Such is life and too bad we cant all walk on rose petals, some of us have to walk on thorns. And on the plus side, it means for money for me. Also Elik is still here holding my hand so I'm as good as anyone could be.

He called Zibulo the next morning and told him to tell Komla and her friend that they would find their handbags at the reception in Rainbow hotel. I found that strange because I thought we would braai their passports and use their ashes as face scrub! But he said "Trust me babygirl". He said that so nicely, I had no choice but to trust him. I didn't even have a voice still so I couldn't argue even if I wanted to.

I still don't know where he got those two men that were at the lobola negotiations or when they left because they were not on the plane with the four of us! With everything happening I haven't had the chance to ask. I was feeling much better and my anger had come down a bit so I had a chat with Lumka and told him if he still wanted his woman he shouldn't let this situation stop him. He said he's young, black and rich plus handsome too so he deserved so much better than that skank. Eh! He said this situation was a blessing in disguise because finally he can get rid of her without any guilt! I'm glad my situation benefited someone at least.

We had to leave the next day because I needed to get as far away from home as possible and I was fast sinking into depression. I couldn't be there any longer and I wonder if I'll ever go back. The pain I felt was too much and I can never face that woman again. The pain is still here obviously but it's sleeping. It wakes up at some

times of the day but I don't have the opportunity to mop around. Elik has made it his mission to make sure I don't feel it. I'm not resisting. I've allowed myself to be loved and locked the pain in a box somewhere deep in my heart. Oh and the best thing ever happened! I can drink coke zero again without puking! I just celebrated and Elik went and brought me three cases of coke zero! My man is a pro in overdoing things. What am I supposed to do with 72 cans of coke zero though. But I smiled and said 'thank you baby'.

Now we are back in Morningside. How I'm still in this house that Elik used to share with Komla, I don't know and frankly I don't care. I spent most of my life being timid and too apologetic. That era is past now! I'm going to love Elik whichever way I want and I don't care who frowns on us. Their frowns don't buy me coke zero so why should they bother me?

It hasn't even been a week but surprisingly, I feel so much better already. I heal pretty quickly maybe I'm a mutant! It's hard not to with Elik, Kofi and Lumka in my face every second treating me like a new born baby who can't do anything for herself and handling me like I'm made of glass. Not that I'm complaining though. I'm loving the attention and it's nice to be loved and supported.

On the day we got back, Elik and I were lying on the couch doing nothing really, him rubbing my stomach and me playing with his hand. He asked if maybe I wanted to slaughter a black goat or brew beer or whatever to go and appease my mother. I made it clear that my mother is dead and I have no business speaking to

the dead! I'm not a spirit medium! He dropped it and we went back to doing nothing.

Then from nowhere he said,

“Would you rather have Komla in jail or deported back to Ghana?”.

To a normal person that question would have been somewhat odd or scary even.

But I'm far from normal. So that was a genuine question and I answered genuinely.

I said I would rather have her dead but he said we don't kill people. I hadn't meant it though. Of course I don't want her dead dead. I don't want the twins asking me one day where their mother is and having to say, “Oh! Your mother? I had her killed. Sorry”. I don't think that would sit very well with them. So I said,

“Deported” and he said, “Consider it done!”.

The way we were so chilled you'd swear we were talking about what to eat for supper!

I figured that's why he needed Komla to have her passport so she could be flagged as soon as she gets to the border or airport in South Africa and be sent to Ghana! I just wish I could be there to see her face! I don't know how Elik does these things but if I've learnt anything in the past 5 years, it's that anything is possible with him. He gets things done and I'm not going to ask how.

The wound on my back is healing but the one in my heart might need another decade or so to get better. My mother killed me. She was right when she said I'm

dead to her because she slaughtered me with her words. I refuse to even think about it because the tears just start falling whenever I do.

Although she has no idea what a priceless gift she gave me! She pushed Elik to redefine love to me in a way I didn't think was possible. I'm thoroughly loved from the time I wake up to the time I go to sleep. He's buying me a new house here in Joburg because I don't like this house. It will be ours but he says everything he has is mine so it will be my house. This one reminds me of Komla and I'd rather forget that woman.

Elik gave me a pass to buy whatever I want with his credit card. Anything I want, he said. And I've bought nothing so far. I don't want anything. I'm not exactly in a taking clothes to the fitting room and trying them on mood so Kofi has been doing all the shopping for himself and dragging poor me with him. He made me get a few clothes though since I left my bag back home. I don't enjoy walking the malls these days. But he can't leave me behind because Elik made it clear that I should not be left alone. I think he thinks I might just kill myself! If only he knew that dying and me are not friends. It never even crosses my mind to hang myself or drink rat poison or sleep on a railway line waiting for a train to grind me to powder. No. I love being alive no matter how hard the going gets.

But he's just looking after me and I shouldn't complain. He has become so protective Lumka says it's unnatural. I feel like a small child these days. I'm still not complaining. I love being loved. Kofi made a joke the other day about how I'm bulging like a balloon and will be a hippo by the time I give a birth. Elik damn near

lost his mind! He told his brother that I look just perfect the way I am and everyone should learn to respect me if they don't want to deal with him! Kofi had to apologise very fast and say English is a problem, he didn't mean to say I'm bulging he meant I'm beautiful, he just got the words confused. I wasn't even offended though but Elik was and he stormed off leaving us all looking at each like 'what just happened?'.

When he said he would take care of me I had no idea he meant he will go all out and buy me all the things I don't need! I have so many flowers in the house it's like I said I want to start a garden! I don't even like flowers! But I say 'thank you baby', smile and find somewhere to put them. And what exactly am I supposed to do with all these boxes of chocolates? He even bought me a new phone and I don't need a new phone! I really don't need anything but he keeps buying.

I'm getting so many things I don't need. I'm still not complaining. I'd rather be given things I don't need than not get anything at all. I pointed out to him that the pair of heels he bought me is very pretty but it's also very high and since I'm kind of pregnant I can't exactly rock stripper heels at the moment. Then he left and brought me the most beautiful pair of trainers I own this far! I'm crying a lot these days, tears of joy though. He just keeps going all out.

He's also buying me a house in Newlands because with the new baby coming I'll need at least 4 bedrooms! So I'm selling my Sea Point penthouse. Then baby asked if we should just go ahead and go to court and get married, I said I'm not in

an 'I do' space right now and asked that we have these conversation again next month maybe I'll be feeling more weddingy then.

And I don't mean to brag but damn my man has a PhD in making my bed rock. He's always been an addict just like yours truly but these days, hay cha, he's bringing on the type of steamy loving that makes me look at my watch all day counting down to bedtime. I actually look forward to him coming home and wake up embarrassed every morning wondering who heard me. Sometimes I think Elik just loves hearing his name that's why he keeps doing this to me.

Love and support is following me around like a shadow! Lumka offered me his Range Rover to use. Elik was going to rent me a car but he insisted. He really feels bad for what his ex-person did although I keep telling him, it's not his fault at all! If anything, it's my fault for ever agreeing to have coffee with that woman! Anyways, so now Kofi and I have a car to drive around and hopefully not crash. Not that it would matter really as long as we don't die.

Kofi is still Kofi. Always happy, always not serious, always ready to say something inappropriate. He gives me life. It's good to have him around. But he's harassing me, in a good way. All he wants is us to have a good time and since I refuse to party we now spending all day shopping and trying a new restaurant everyday. He says if I wasn't pregnant we would do the garden route and do abseiling, rock climbing, tree climbing, bungee jumping and all those extreme activities. He says nothing beats an adrenaline rush. He's amazing! I said I'm not that pregnant so

maybe we should do it. He said he wasn't ready to have Elik chop off his head so no thank you.

I haven't had the time to process what happened back home. I'm honestly not allowed to think! I'm woken up and fed breakfast then after showering Elik hands me over to Kofi, then after work Elik takes me back again to remind me exactly why I have been so hung up on him all these years. I haven't been alone for more than an hour since we got back! The men around me are treating me like they are afraid I will break or something. Kofi, Lumka and Elik are on call 24 hours a day! It's a miracle that I'm not putting on much weight! They keep feeding me and I keep eating!

Elik suggested that I see a therapist and I said I'll think about it. I don't think I need one. If I started talking about my life the poor therapist might need therapy themselves! I've been through the most. And I don't see why I have to pay someone to listen to my problems and start asking me stupid questions and telling me I have childhood trauma and mommy issues and all that! If I want to talk, there's a Catholic church down the road, I'll go confess to a priest and be told to pray 10 Hail Marys and 5 Glory Bes and considering the weight of my sins I maybe be ordered to pray the rosary daily for a week. Then boom, I'll be sinless and white as snow. If the Father really wants to punish me he could order me to refrain from sexual pleasures and all desires of the flesh for a week. He would have gotten me there!

I have so much on my to do list and soon I'll be so busy, I won't even stop to think about anything. I need to find schools for Inflation and the twins. I'm worried because in some of these private schools, kids are registered before they are even born! So how I will get a place now for January I don't know. I hope my mother let's Inflation come and not let her grudge on me spill over. Inflation though! All these private schools are model C type and my little brother's English doesn't really exist. I was now considering putting him up in a public school somewhere but Elik says we should put him in a private boarding school, he'll survive. I'm not quite sure.

The twins are going to Grade R in January and I'm so excited! I can't wait to see them in their uniforms! I miss them so much and I cried last night when I called them. I'm so relieved that Peggy has at least kept them alive and she says they are well. I miss them though and I don't care what Elik says, I'm going to Cape Town next week. My children need me. I also need to decide whether I want to continue staying in Cape Town or if I should move down to Joburg. Big decisions ahead. I'll shelf them for now and get back to them some other day.

If I thought Elik was savage, I realised he had nothing on Lumka! As soon as we got back, he shipped his kids to Eastern Cape for the holidays. Then he had a locksmith change all the locks around his house. Then yesterday the four of us spent the day erasing his ex. We make an evil team! We packed everything that belonged to her in black bags like the trash she is. Well that was my idea, and what I say goes these days! I've kind of become very mean and spiteful.

Elik's phone rang and he had to step outside. When he came back, he gave me a big hug and said, "Komla got a 10 year ban! She'll be on her way to Accra and won't be bothering us anytime soon". The four of us actually high fived each other and laughed! Gosh we are so evil! I did say though that when I'm done with Komla she will be harvesting bananas in Ghana. She better be writing me a thank you letter on that plane! She could be on her way to jail right now!

Then the nerve of Lumka's ex! She sent me a long WhatsApp message talking about how she was sorry and wanted us to be friends and that Komla lied to her bla bla. Until I got to the end and realised the whole point of her message. She was asking me to talk to Lumka for her and ask him to meet with her so they can work things out! I replied and said I will talk to Lumka alright and remind him what a horrible human being she is and that he deserves so much better! I really am becoming very mean! But the way I'm ok you wouldn't begin to imagine that I got disowned a few days ago! I'm fine.

CHAPTER 79

It's Saturday and we are chilling by the pool. Elik and Kofi leave to go get us something to eat. I think they wanted to talk as brothers you know without us outsiders. So that left Lumka to be my bodyguard and we got to talk a bit and laugh at how Elik is treating me like a baby.

"He really loves you though Fierce. I've seen Elik with many girls in the past and from the way he treated them I didn't think he was capable of loving. Elik is cold and has no problem just taking a girl, sleeping with her and leaving her right there

in the hotel and pretending she never existed! Even with Komla, he was just there and never did anything for her really. We could stay out all weekend and he would switch off his phone and not give a damn!", he keeps talking and I'm looking at him like 'seriously bro?', do you honestly think I want to know about all this. And what does he mean Elik has no problem taking girls and sleeping with them? And why is he not using past tense there?

Maybe I'm reading too much into things and a part of me wants to laugh because shame Lumka thinks he's putting in a good word for his friend but all I'm hearing is 'you are in love with a man-whore who just happens to love you back'. But Lumka can't see my thoughts so he keeps talking and I keep sipping on my lemonade.

"Wow! Really! I wonder how he's not broke yet. It must be quite pricey blessing all these girls!", I say.

He laughs.

"Elik is stingy. Those girls don't get a cent from him. Ask Komla! He told her to get a job and buy her own things!", he says.

Elik stingy? I find that hard to believe. He bought me a car and another one and another one in a heartbeat! And he always says 'Go buy whatever you want baby'. So stingy? I don't think that's a word to describe him. Except if he does that just for me? In which case this smile I'm wearing right now is in order.

I don't say anything though but this conversation is not sitting too well with me.

Yes I know my man has questionable morals but I don't like hearing it and I know

if it's coming from Lumka it's very true. I don't know why that hurts when it's probably in the past. But Lumka is oblivious of my thoughts so he keeps talking.

"Then you Fierce happened. I don't know what you gave him because my boy is something else when he comes to you! In the beginning I thought it was a phase but I soon realised it was real. He really loves you you know that! He would kill for you without a second thought!", he says.

Well at least this last part was beautiful. I'm still hung up on that first part though. How many girls exactly are we talking about there? Was Elik sleeping with a different girl every night? Where was he getting them from? And so maybe all his life he's slept with hundreds of girls? Why am I feeling so jealous right now when I don't even know the girls. Fine let me try and brush the thought aside. Elik loves me!

"I need your advice", Lumka says.

"Ok. Shoot", I say.

"I'm kind of back with Thando and..", he says.

"Wait! Which Thando?", I ask.

"Thando. Thando", he says.

"No! You don't say! So you are recycling now?", I can't stop laughing at him.

Eeish and Thando is brutal. The last time I saw her, she put me in my place and told me to mind my own business.

"Ok, so what do you need my advice on?", I say after laughing my lungs out.

"Don't laugh. I'm trying to settle down here!", he says.

He's got jokes. Settle down? Who are we kidding?

"Do you think it would be a good idea to move her into my house?", he says.

"Are you serious? Why would you wanna do that?", I say.

He caught me by surprise.

"I kinda need someone to cook and take care of the house, with you-know-who gone", he says.

He's so full of jokes!

"Then get a chef and a helper! Problem solved!", I say.

He can afford it so why not?

He just looks at me like I'm being unreasonable. Ok maybe I wasn't handling the whole advisor role well and my tone was still off from thinking of Elik bedding all those girls! So I compose myself and become serious. I may not like Thando but Lumka is family and we take care of one another.

"Alright. Tell me, what do you love about her?", I say.

"Well", he thinks and thinks about it for a while and I shake my head.

"She's a good lay!", he says eventually.

I roll my eyes. Who refers to someone as a good lay though! They are not a chicken that lays a lot of eggs! The disrespect! But I'm not judging. Who am I to judge when my man is a universal lay!

"What else?", I ask.

"She's hot!", he says.

I'm done!

"Don't move in with her. You don't like her at all. Leave it alone", I say.

How he even wants to move in a girl when his ex hasn't even collected her trash bags beats me. The way Lumka and Elik just move on is scary!

The brothers come back and disturb our talk about Thando! I'm not looking forward to hanging out with her but for Lumka I'm willing to put our differences aside if he's actually serious about her and if he discovers something he likes about her apart from her skills in bed!

I'm not ok though. That thing about Elik and his sleeping aroundness is really bothering me. I don't have grounds to ask though. Where would I start? So I refill my lemonade and have my pasta salad with bacon and avo. Elik keeps asking if I'm fine and I assure him I am. I say the hormones are acting up and I'm feeling quite low. I blame everything on pregnancy these days. It's nice being pregnant.

The day goes and I fake a smile every now and then but I'm so not ok. I have to go to bed early and I don't know what it is with sleep because that's when all my thoughts intensify. I pretend to be sleeping when Elik finally comes to bed. He tries to get with me but nope. Not today boo boo.

It's like 12 midnight and I still can't sleep. I have to get this out of my chest before I drive myself crazy. I've been doing the Maths in my head and wondering exactly how many girls Elik has slept with. 100? 200? 500? Is it possible for someone to have slept with that many girls? I have to find out.

Gosh this man hates being woken up! He's grumpy as hell but he will live. I have more pressing issues here. I wait for him to start up.

"What?", he says.

"Can we talk?", I say.

I'm sitting at the edge of the bed and he's rubbing his eyes and I can tell he wants to go back to sleep so let me make it quick.

"You already woke me up so get on with it", he says.

"Cybertron", I say.

I need the truth.

"Fine whatever. Cybertron", he says. He's so grumpy, he's adorable.

"Fine. How many girls have you slept with?", I say.

"What? What do you mean?", he says.

"I mean how many girls have you slept with?", I repeat.

Isn't that self explanatory? I don't think I can make it any simpler.

"Where? In my life? What you on about?", he says.

He looks shocked.

"Yes in your life! How many girls have you slept with?", I say.

"Where's this coming from?", he says.

At least he's waking up!

"It doesn't matter where it's coming from. Just answer me already. How many?", I say.

"Well. I don't know. A lot", he says.

"How many exactly?", I say.

"I don't know Fierce, it's not like I was counting", he says.

"100?", I say.

"Maybe. Maybe more. I wasn't counting! What's wrong?", he says.

He's kidding me right? Where do you get over a hundred girls to sleep with? And what exactly is over a hundred? A thousand is over a hundred! I'm getting a headache just looking at him. I've only slept with 2.5 guys all my life! What Athi used to do to me doesn't qualify as a whole number. So it's just 2.5 for me and over a hundred for him? That number is so huge though, I can't help it. I start crying.

"What's wrong baby?", he says and tries to hold me. I shrug him off. Those hands have held over 100 women I don't want them near me. And why can't he figure out what's wrong on his own? Why does he need me to tell him? I could ask him right now if he slept with anyone while I was in Cape Town and I bet the answer would be yes so for that reason I won't ask. I don't want to know for a fact. I can deal with girls in the past but I'm not ready to deal if there's anyone in the present.

"More than a 100 women though Elik?", I manage to say.

"I'm sorry baby. Most of them were before you though", he says.

Is that supposed to make me feel better? He did say 'most' were before me. I don't think he hears himself sometimes! So the remaining where during our relationship or whatever that was we were doing all those years. His honesty is too much. He could have just said 10 and I might have been fine but a whole century of women! Wow!

“You know sometimes Fierce, you just go and look for stress unnecessarily! Why would you wake me up to ask me this?”, he says.

Ok so now he thinks I’m silly! He’s being inconsiderate! I’m going to cry cry now.

“Hey”, he says and actually hugs me by force.

I try to resist but he doesn't let go and eventually I melt in his arms and sob in his chest.

“Look Fierce. I'm sorry. Baby don't you think I know that I put you through hell? I know. And the fact that you still right here with me, means a lot. I love you. I know what happened between you and your mum was my fault. I can never apologise enough for that. And those girls you asking me about never meant anything to me. Nothing at all! But you mean something. You mean everything and I'm going to spend the rest of my life loving you and making it up to you. Look at me”, he says.

Damn I love him. He always knows what to say! He lifts up my head gently and I look at him. He wipes away my tears and kisses me gently on the lips. I hate him. He's just trying to confuse me!

“Look at me Fierce”, he says.

I do as commanded.

“You've made me! You've changed my life. You've kept me grounded. You've given me a purpose, a will to do better and to be better. So yes, I used to play with all sorts of girls and all that because I didn't have a reason not to. Then you. You showed me that I can be loved and I can do better and all I'm doing is loving you

back and hoping one day I can love you the way you deserve. I love you with all my heart Fierce. Please allow me to", he says.

"I love you too", the words just fly out of my mouth. I love him.

I do.

"And now that I'm already awake and we talking allow me to thank you for everything. Thank you for agreeing to be my wife, for carrying my child, for making me feel like a man. And thank you so much for making me love my children. I always loved them but I resented their mother and so as a result I just wasn't there for them as much as I should have been. But in the few months they've been with you, you've brought me closer to them. Thank you", he says.

Ok I just wanted to know how many girls he'd banged. I wasn't prepared for this touching talk and how did he come up with all that so late at night? I thought he was half asleep! That was good to hear and that's all the reassurance I needed. How can I not love this man though? How? It's impossible not to. Besides, I always knew he was quite the skirt chaser, who am I kidding. I know who I'm in love with.

"So does this mean your playboy days are over? No more girls?", I say.

"No more girls. It's only you now. I don't want anyone else. I promise I won't ever cheat on you, again. I promise", he says.

"Promise. Promise?", I say.

"Yes. I promise", he says.

Normally I wouldn't believe him but somehow I do. There's truth in those pretty eyes of his tonight.

I'm glad I had this talk. I'm even feeling silly for crying in the first place but I'm smiling now and playing with his fingers.

"And since you woke me up. It's only fair that you put me back to sleep", he says and I know exactly what that means. I don't see why not.

I'm making ice tea and talking to Kofi about Germany girls. He says he doesn't have a girl he has girls because the girls up there love their coffee extra black so why deny them. I think he needs to stop looking up to Elik! He needs just one good girl and settle down!

Anyways, we keep talking.

"Now that it's December, can you talk to Elik so we can all go to Ghana for Christmas. I tried the other day but he doesn't want. Please convince him, we all know you have a hold on him and he'll listen to you", he says.

I look up at him.

"You should come too. I think the family will love you", he says.

I put down my tea strainer and look at him long and hard. What does he mean? He really thinks his family has forgiven me this fast? And now with Komla deported they will kill me mos! And why would I want Elik to go to Ghana? Why would Kofi even want to go to Ghana after everything? Is he really such a happy soul that he doesn't take these things serious at all?

"You kidding right?", I say.

“Why? No. I’m serious! I haven’t been home in years bro and I miss it. I miss my mum. And it will be nice if Elik comes along and you and my nephews. We can have a proper huge christmas”, he says.

“No Kofi! You can go. Elik is not going there. Don’t even suggest this to him again!”, I say.

He can’t be serious.

“What? Why not?”, he says.

My brain works so slowly I only realised that me and Kofi were on different planes way after the fact.

“Whose side are you on Kofi? You supposed to be on Elik’s side! Those people lied to you all these years and you going to pick their side over Elik’s? Come on, he deserves better than that!”, I snap.

“What you talking about? You know Elik loves our mother more than anything. No matter what he will want to go and see her. So why would you say things like this?”, he says and comes to stand opposite me on the other side of the counter.

“Kofi, I don’t believe you sometimes! Why would you do that to Elik? Why would you want him to go through that again? I was there on the day he found out that woman isn’t your mother and ...”, I say.

“Hold up. Back up a bit. What did you just say?”, he says.

Flip! Only now does it register that maybe he didn’t know. Shoot! My big mouth will be my undoing.

“What exactly happened? What do you mean? Please tell me”, he says.

“I think it’s best if Elik tells you”, I say.

"No. I think it's best if you tell me! I can't wait for 5 pm for Elik to come here, so start talking Fierce!", he says.

I don't know what to do. I can't say anymore. I've already said too much!

"I can't Kofi. It's not my place!", I say.

I feel terrible. We go back and forth, him insisting that I tell him everything and getting angry and me saying I can't and apologising.

"You know what Fierce. Fine. If you don't want to tell me, fine. I'll go find the answers myself", he storms to his room and I dial Elik. He hangs up and texts 'In a meeting'.

Kofi comes back minutes later with a travel bag in his hands.

"Where you off to?", I say

"Where do you think? I'm going to find out the truth", he says.

"You can't just go to Ghana like that? Wait for Elik to get home please", I plead.

"No. Actually, if Elik knew this whole time that our mother is not our mother and kept it from me, how different is he from her?", he says.

He storms out and I don't even have the energy to follow him.

Elik is going to hate me. He doesn't compromise when it comes to his little brother. I'm so finished.

By the time I have the energy to go outside, Kofi is gone. Damn! There's too many Ubers around this area! I text Elik to call me as soon as he can and he only calls like 2 hours later. In those 2 hours I've been blowing up Kofi's phone and apologising and asking him to come back.

"Baby, are you ok? I'm sorry I was in a meeting", Elik says.

"Kofi is gone. Elik you need to come home right now", I say.

"What? Gone where?", he says.

"To Ghana", I say. My voice is shaking.

"What? You not making sense baby. Calm down. What happened?", he says.

"I didn't know that he doesn't know about the situation with your mother, so it slipped off my tongue. I'm so sorry baby. I didn't know", I say.

I'm so scared. Elik is going to bury me alive today.

"You told him what? Damnit Fierce!", he says and hangs up on me.

I might as well start packing. I'm finished.

I keep calling and he keeps ignoring me. I try Kofi again but his phone doesn't go through. Wow. Fierce what have you done?

Elik storms in some 30 minutes later and I don't get my usual kisses and 'I brought you something' I'm now used to.

"Go pack a bag. We leaving right now", he says.

"But Elik....", I start.

"Now Fierce!", he snaps.

CHAPTER 80

We got a flight to Ghana and Elik was in a foul mood the whole way. He was so angry with me I couldn't even apologise! So I just kept quiet and felt bad the whole time. I think he started feeling a little sorry for me because he held my hand

through turbulence. He would just get up and walk up and down the plane as if that would make it fly faster! Like just chill my guy, we have 4 long hours to go! He didn't even eat, only drank glass after glass of wine and even snapped at me when I wanted to pass and go to the bathroom! And because he had been drinking, poor me had to now babysit a tipsy, angry man when we landed in Accra!

I hate Ghana more and more each time because everytime I'm here it's never good. Luckily we are putting up at the Holiday Inn by the airport so it wasn't much of a hustle to get here! We landed late last night and it took a lot to convince Elik that we should sleep and wait till morning before we go looking for his brother. He agreed but I think that made him even angrier. He slept on the bed and I slept on the sleeper couch. I couldn't bear to share the bed with him. His reaction was breaking my heart. I mean, I didn't do this on purpose.

He wakes me up this morning and has the audacity to ask why I'm sleeping on the couch when there's a bed! Unbelievable! He's showered and everything and is already smelling divine and is ready to go!

"Are you coming?", he says.

No good morning. Nothing!

"Coming where?", I say.

"Where else?", he says.

Sigh! It's going to be a long day with someone in this mood!

"Maybe taking me with you is not such a great idea baby. Don't you think?", I say.

"Fine. Whatever. Stay if you want!", he says.

I know that means 'come with me or I'm going to be upset with you this whole trip!'

"Alright. Let me take a quick shower then we can go", I say.

I drag myself into the shower and when I get out he's gone! So why the hell was I woken up! I'm considering getting into bed when he returns with a cup of coffee and hands it to me without even looking at me. I don't want coffee, I'm feeling a bit sick. My baby is acting up and my hormones are everywhere and I feel nauseous. I'll mask my sickness though and pretend to be ok. It will get better I know.

He just sits there as I look for something to wear. I keep asking him where exactly we are going and if he's ready to face his mother and how's he's feeling.

"Fierce can you just shut up for a minute. I'm trying to think here!", he yells at me! I shut up.

I eventually get done and follow him quietly to the car and we drive. We not talking and man he's so angry! I just look outside the window and play with my ring. This ring I got that evening on Signal Hill when I said I will marry you. I'm wondering what exactly I said yes to that day and wondering if maybe I should have just said no.

I have no wish to return to Elik's family after that wedding. But what option do I have since I'm the cause of all of this. It's a miracle he hasn't disowned me yet. On that day I walked into the staff diner and saw this charming black king in a suit, I

had no idea what I was signing myself up for. Had I known, I would have never bought that R5 airtime and called this man! I wonder how my life would have turned out then.

We arrive and dramatic Elik parks outside the gate although there's plenty of yard around the house. It's a typical 2-3 bedroom township house painted an interesting blue. There's shouting inside the house and Elik walks in leaving me in the car! I don't know what I'm expected to do. Do I follow him or do I stay here? I sigh and follow in.

Kofi is screaming and breaking things. I guess he just got here because there's his bag on the floor over there. An old enough woman is sitting there looking emotionless. Elik is trying to turn on his big brotherness and calm the situation but Kofi is having none of it. The two of them end up just shouting and talking over each other. The woman is just sitting there doing nothing so I also do nothing.

Eventually they become calmer, as in they are still shouting but at least one at a time. Elik takes Kofi by hand and forces him to sit with him on a sofa opposite the woman. I just stand behind the door thinking maybe I should just go. They are not paying me any attention anyways and they won't notice I'm gone. I'm scared though so I stay put. Besides, I'm curious to hear what they will talk about. But no, I hear nothing. They go full blown Ghanaian with barely any English word in their sentences! It's like I'm watching a Chinese movie without subtitles! I can tell that

Kofi is the upset and is on the verge of tears, Elik is fuming and wants to kill someone and the woman is just quiet.

After a while she claps her hands and they both fall silent. Wait clapping your hands is all you have to do to make your children shut up? I'll practice that with the twins when I get back. She starts talking and she's so calm, I really wish I could understand what she's saying. Whatever she's saying is breaking Elik apart. I watch as pain feels his eyes and he opens his mouth to say something but closes it again. I want to run to him and wrap his hands around him and tell him I'm here and he will be alright. I stay here.

He stands up, says something that can't be nice and storms out. Kofi doesn't look upset now, he looks more concerned and also hurt. He runs after his brother. Well, what am I still doing here. I have to go now, I have no reason to be here. They forgot me in here. The way this woman is so calm, I want to take that pot over there and hit her on the head with it! What did she just say to my men?

"Sit", she says as I turn to step out.

I hesitate but I decide to sit and hear her out. My mind is not all here though, I'm worrying about Elik. He didn't look fine at all. She's so well spoken and has a uniform tone that doesn't tell you how exactly she's feeling. She wasn't part of the mob of women of women who attacked me at that wedding.

She says since Elik is serious about disrespecting his family and continuing with me, I should take care of him because he's on his own now. I don't know what that

means. She can't disown him! He disowned her first! How can you disown a disowned person? As she talks I just keep thinking 'Yho!'.

So it turns out this is the woman Elik used to think was his mother but turned out not to be. She starts off by saying Elik is just like his father. I'm not sure if that's good or bad. So she says back in the day she was married to her husband, then her husband started cheating with many women. Then in his cheating spree he got a high school girl pregnant! The parents of the girl threw her out and her husband was forced to take her in. So this woman here had to stay with her husband and her husband's pregnant mistress. So now that pregnant high school girl gave birth. But as she gave birth, she died, leaving the child motherless. Then the husband forced this woman in front of me to take care of that child.

She said she was so tempted to throw the child down the toilet and or dump him in the ocean. But she couldn't because she felt like the whole village was watching her. So to keep that child alive she asked her younger sister to come and take care of it. That child is Elik and that high school girl was his mother and the woman who took care of baby Elik is the aunt he grew up living with. Then she says her husband died and she was free to leave the village and come to Accra. She says she hated Elik anyway because he was a constant reminder of her husband's infidelity so she left him with her sister back in Cape Coast. Then she met another man in Accra and had Kofi, who she also shipped to her young sister. So in conclusion, Elik and Kofi are not related! She says when her young sister died, she had to take in Kofi and couldn't leave Elik behind, so out of the goodness of her heart she took him in too.

I honestly don't know what to say. I'm dumbfounded. Zero words just a wide open eye stare and a stab through my heart. This is a lot.

"I've never forgiven Elikplim you know! I tried so hard to cut him off when he was growing up but that boy did everything to impress me and to make my life better, I couldn't", she says.

"Forgive him for what?", that's the first time I speak.

"For his whore of a mother sleeping with my husband!", she says. She says it like it's justified.

I honestly feel like slapping her across the face. No wonder Elik is so messed up in the head! He was brought up by this woman!

"But why after all these years? Why do this to him? When he found out about this he was really hurt", I say.

She never once called after that wedding! I asked Elik.

"Because he's not my child!", she says.

I feel the pain.

"Did you tell him all this?", I say standing up.

I'm done here.

"No. I just told him the summary of it! He's not my child and he came up here at his cousin's wedding with a prostitute while he was married! What kind of man does that?", she says.

I'll let that prostitute comment pass! Now is not the time for my feelings.

"But mama, after everything, why did you keep this secret from him? Clearly you had no reason not to tell him. You don't seem to like him much", I say.

"The family decided to keep it a secret. I didn't", she says.

The more she talks, the more I understand why Elik has so many issues. If this woman spoke to him like this growing up it must have messed him up big time.

"Goodluck with Elik. Komla has told us about his loose ways so you look like you'll need all the prayers you can get. He's just like his father! A pathetic womaniser and good for nothing. Poor Komla. She's the only one who could have helped him but he messed that too like he messes everything up in his life", she says.

"Why are you telling me all this?", I say.

"Because I know you will run and tell him so I don't have to. I know your type. You follow a man around, try and please him all you can, you tear his family apart and you get pregnant hoping he'll love you. He won't. Elik can't love anyone. He can't be loved! He's a bastard, born of sin! How can he love anyone?" she says.

Wow people are evil out here. I'm losing faith in mothers every day.

"So next time you decide to come into my home, don't. Both of you just don't. And come to think of it, the two of you actually deserve each other. Komla told me everything. You are a brave and brainless girl. And you and your Elik, leave my son out of this disgrace of yours. Go back to South Africa and stay there", she says.

I just look at her. She's so soft spoken though it's confusing. Her words and their meaning don't match. Elik raised Kofi what does she mean he must leave him alone?

"You see mama, you are wrong. Elik can be loved. He is loved and he's the most amazing man in the world and a son any mother would be proud of. So no matter what you say, that's the honest truth", I say.

"Lie to yourself all you want, deep down you know Elik is nothing. And you, I'll never accept you as a daughter in law! Look at you", she says.

I laugh. There's nothing wrong with me but there's everything wrong with her.

"You are not Elik's mother so obviously! I wouldn't want you for a mother in law anyway!", I say.

Don't people know I talk back these days? I walk out because I really feel like hitting this woman with that pot. She and my mother would make the best of friends!

I've met many women in my life and most have shared men and remained bitter at the other woman. I never get it really. The women stay with the man but become evil creatures hating everyone who even dares look the direction of their man! It's sad really.

That woman broke my heart. How is any of this Elik's fault? They just keep breaking him and I have to start over and build him back up. It's not fair. I hate it when he's in pain. I can take him being angry but hurt, I can't. It hurts me more because I always feel like I have to protect him from emotional hurt. I'm his armour. And mostly, when Elik is hurt, he hurts me and we end up just hurting each other. It's not fair.

Elik locked himself in the car and Kofi is banging on the window asking him to open. I look through the window and Elik is just staring blankly ahead. There's a vein running on the side of his face and I can tell he's grinding his teeth and it's taking everything inside him not to cry or to kill someone. I hate seeing him like this honestly.

"I'm sorry Kofi for all of this", I say.

He looks at me for a while then gives me a big hug. I'm just thinking 'please don't cry on me. Not right now when I have Elik to take care of'. Thankfully he doesn't.

"No, I'm sorry Fierce. I was so angry and I wasn't thinking. I should have trusted Elik when he said we weren't coming down for Christmas. Had I just done that all this wouldn't have happened. Instead I acted impulsively and look at him now. Look what my actions have done", he says.

"The truth would have come out one day anyways. I'm just sorry it was me who talked", I say.

Kofi sits down and leans against the car and I sit next to him. A few people pass by and say hi to Kofi and walk along. Let's just hope Elik doesn't go mad and start the car and knock us off.

"Elik is not my brother Fierce! That really hurts. That just cut my heart open! What hurts more is how easily my mother said it. She treated him so badly I don't know why", he says.

"He's still your brother Kofi. He'll always be. You know he loves you", I say and hold his hand in mine but keep looking forward.

"I just want to talk to him. I want to apologise. I can't imagine how he's feeling right now. I feel so bad because he's only here because I went off running here instead of talking to him", he says.

"It's ok Kofi. What's done is done. You know Elik. He needs time to process this. He'll talk to you when he's ready", I say.

"I can't lose him Fierce. He's everything to me", Kofi says.

"I know. He can't lose you too. You are everything to him and right now he's scared that he's lost you. I'll talk to him and you can come around to the hotel later. Ok?", I say.

I look at him and it's like for once I really see him. I always thought he looked like Elik but he really doesn't. They just both dark skinned but that's where the resemblance ends. His eyes are glassy and look guilty. He always looks like he's done something wrong. The bone structure on his face is amazing! He should seriously consider modelling. Unlike Elik who's got a roughish look and that 'I might be in a suit but I could also stab you' finish, Kofi has a pretty boy finish like he's ready to walk a runway and be Ghana next top model. And right now he just looks like he's going to cry. What has that woman done to my boys? She's pissing me off!

"Don't you want to go back to the house so I can deal with Elik? Is your Whatsapp working?", I say.

He nods and I promise to text him later. He gets up, helps me up and I give him a big hug. Do they have to be so tall though! Hugging them is a mission. I let him go and he goes back to the house.

Only then do the car doors unlock and I jump in. Elik drives off to the hotel and when we park, he leaves me behind again. I find him in the room and I know he needs me. He's pacing and looks so angry. I hold him but he pushes me off but I just hold him and do my best to push him towards the bed. He could have pushed me away harder but I'm pregnant so I know he won't. I push him and he sits and I stand between his legs and hold him there. Eventually he stops resisting and rests his head on my stomach and wraps his arms around my bum. I hope he can hear the heartbeat of little him.

We don't say anything and we just stay there. I need him to cry it all out. He just hold on to me and I stay there. he can take as long as he wants, I'm not going anywhere.

Only after forever does he say,

“Thank you baby”.

I sit on his lap and hold one of his hands in mine. Gosh I'm so angry at Kofi's mother! How could she!

“Are you mad at me?”, I ask.

“I was but not anymore”, he says.

“I didn't mean to tell Kofi. You know me Elik, I wouldn't do that. I didn't know he knew”, I say.

“I know that. I just needed someone to blame I guess and I blamed you”, he says.

Thank you for that.

“Why didn't you tell Kofi though?”, I say.

"I wanted to protect him. It's always been my duty to. I didn't want him to feel the pain I felt when I found out", he says and buries his face on my shoulder.

He's falling apart and I hope I can keep him together. I hope he can let me. He never wanted to return to Ghana ever again and now he had to for his brother, because of my big mouth. I hope he can truly forgive me. That woman was right about one thing. I'm not going to keep what she said to me from Elik. And maybe I'm being wrong here but I'm going to tell him now so he can process everything at once.

I make him look up so I can look at him. Gods he looks so wounded. But he knows I'm not all about that 'a man doesn't cry' nonsense. My man cries and I encourage him to and I hold him when he cries. He doesn't have a reason to man up around me and act all strong. I'm his woman and I know his struggle and if he doesn't cry and leaves that anger bottled in, he'll end up in jail for murder. I can't have that. So he knows to let down his guard around me and be human.

"What did she say to you?", I say.

"Do we have to talk about this now?", he says.

I nod. Yes we do. I need him to process all of it at once not in bits and pieces. Let's face this Goliath once and for all.

"She said I was a hot headed spoilt brat and I'm radical and I'm a bad influence on Kofi. She said she's Kofi mother but not mine. The way she was so cold and cruel Fierce! She said she can tell i'm desperate because I go around trying to buy everyone's love. She refused to tell me what happened to my mother or who my

father is. She just made it clear that Kofi and I are not related. How? He's my brother Fierce", he says and his voice breaks a little.

He composes himself though.

"But baby. I always thought you and your mother were fine. I mean back then. You never spoke ill of her", I say.

"I chose to think of it that way. I thought she was stressed because she was a single mother raising boys. Even when she put me out sometimes and locked me out all night and said . cruel things to me, I always interpreted it as love and trying to discipline me. She loved Kofi a lot but I always thought that's because he was younger. I justified all her actions. But when I look back now, I realise she actually hated me!", he says.

"I know what happened to your mother and who your father is", I say.

His eyes pop open and he looks at me.

"Tell me", he says.

"You have the most gorgeous eyes in the whole world", I say. Ok that was so random but those eyes made me say it. He smiles a little and puts his forehead on my shoulder.

In as much as that woman spoke so calmly and emotionless, I can't adopt the same strategy. I'm a very emotional being and I can feel the lump in my throat grow. I have to stop blinking so that the tears don't fall. I tell him everything. By the time I'm done his eyes are full of tears again and I have to stand and take him in my arms. He just found out his mother died and his only brother is not his

brother and that no one ever loved him. That's enough to break anyone into a million pieces. I think I'm the one crying more. I kind of really know how to cry. I'm weak. And the one thing I can't stand is seeing Elik falling apart.

I'm feeling a bit sick so I had to lie down. The plan was that Elik lies down too but he couldn't. It's evening when I wake up and Elik is just sitting there blankly. I know what he needs and what could help him but I can't. I'm kind of pregnant and can't really offer myself to be raped right now. So I can't help him. I wish I could do something though. He's breaking my heart.

I have a lot of messages from Kofi asking which hotel we are at and that he needs to talk to his brother.

"Baby. You need to talk to Kofi", I say.

"No. He's not my brother and his mother made it clear that I must stay away from him", he says.

"But baby, Kofi didn't do anything wrong. He's a victim of circumstances here just like you", I say.

He keeps quiet. He can't disown Kofi! He's just misdirecting his anger here. We running low on family. He needs to talk to his brother. But Elik is stubborn, my goodness!

"Kofi and his mother can go hang. I don't need them", he says.

"No baby. Don't be like that! Kofi is still your little brother. He's innocent here", I say.

"Fierce, whose side are you on here? If you think they are so right and I'm so wrong then why don't you just leave and go to them?", he says.

Ok I wasn't expecting that.

"Go", he shouts.

I stay put. I'm still in shock.

"Fine. If you don't want to go, I'll go", he says, grabs the car keys and wallet and storms out. He's handling this situation so badly.

What just happened? Did I say something wrong? Do I run after him? I'm so exhausted.

It's almost 10 pm and Elik has been gone for almost 4 hours now. I can't reach him because we not roaming and he doesn't seem to have a WiFi signal wherever he is judging by my one tick messages on WhatsApp. I text Kofi the hotel name and room number and he gets here 30 minutes later.

We talk and I reassure him everything is fine. We wait and wait and wait. I fall asleep at some point and I wake up at 5 am and Kofi is sleeping on the couch and Elik is still not back. I try calling him on WhatsApp, send messages, even send emails! Nothing. Now I'm really really worried. Maybe I should call the police but he'll be upset with me even more if he starts being known as a missing person.

7 am. No Elik. Kofi says he'll go and look for him at his cousin's place and find a phone and make calls. That sounds like a plan. I'll just sit here worried sick and wait for him to come back.

10 am. Elik walks in and doesn't even look at me. He undresses and throws his clothes on the floor and heads straight to the shower. I sigh. At least he's alive. I was starting to think he was kidnapped or worse, killed. I go through his bag and take out a new set of clothes that he'll wear when he gets out of the shower. I then pick up his clothes on the floor so I can fold them. Something falls out the back pocket of his jeans as I pick it up.

A 3-pack packet of condoms with just 1 condom in there. I sit down and keep looking at this blue packet of Goal Keepers. Oh! Wow. Who names condoms goalkeepers? I mean I get the pun but still. There's just one in here so what happened to the other 2? Is it possible that he got robbed and the thieves took them? Ok that's absurd. And what's he doing with condoms anyway? We never use those! I sigh and put the packet back into his pocket and fold his clothes then just sit there. I'm not sure how to feel.

CHAPTER 81

I know stepping out is nothing new for Elik but it just never gets any easier. It always hurts to know he'll share his body with someone else. And what's that his 'mother' if I can call her that said? He's a womaniser. I feel so much pain in my heart and I haven't decided yet what I'm going to do.

"Where were you last night?", I ask as soon as he steps out of the bathroom.

"Fierce please. I'm tired and I just want to sleep. Please don't start", he says.

"Where were you Elikplim?", I repeat myself.

I'm calm.

He stops and looks at me. Not look me in the eye but look towards me.

"I went back to talk things over with Kofi like you said I should", he says.

"And what happened?", I say.

"What do you mean what happened? We talked!", he says.

"And then after that?", I say.

"What? I stayed the night there and slept like normal people do at night", he says.

He's really going to be corny and give me attitude! I'll stay calm though, I need to keep it together.

"So you stayed the night with Kofi?", I ask.

"Yes. Geez what's with the 21 questions!", he snaps.

I don't know whether to laugh right now or what. Kofi spent the night here with me! He was right here on the couch all night long! Couldn't he have come up with a better lie? He gets into bed and sleeps and I feel like boiling water and giving his face a hot bath! He lied without even blinking!

So while I was out here stressed out of my mind about him he was busy getting it on with some girl somewhere? And we just got here and he hasn't lived in Ghana in like forever so where did he get this girl from? Another one night stand? A

prostitute? And now he has the guts to tell me he's tired and wants to sleep! Tired from working another girl while his pregnant fiancé stayed up waiting for him? Loving Elik is the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. Thinking about this is making me so angry. Yerrr!

But I know the devil I sleep with. When he's hurting he needs rough sex or he drinks himself drunk or both. With me being pregnant and all, I guess roughing me up was off the table so he turned to whoever was unlucky to have him last night. I know it's bad and I'm still angry at him but does it make me sick in the head that I understand? I actually understand why he did it because it's nothing new. I'm just angry but I'm not shocked. And is it also bad that I'm relieved that he's at least using protection?

I take out my laptop and start writing. My life deserves to be documented. I've never met anyone who's been through hell and heaven and even camped in purgatory for a while like me. My life is a huge mess and if I'm to stay sane I need to laugh at myself and write it down. I need to write down all the pain, the betrayal, the lies, the hurt, the damage, the drama and the stress that comes with my life. If I don't write it down I'm scared I'll end up in psychiatric hospital! I keep writing with Akon playing in my background and I cry silently. The pain!

Half the time I think I'm stuck in a dream until I look up and Elik is right there, very real. And now he's sleeping, resting from the wild night he had. Just great! Can't I just kill him right now and end this vicious cycle of happiness and pain. When it's good with us it's amazing but when it hurts it's a bitch! I'm so tempted to grab his

phone over there and go through it but for the sake of my poor heart I won't do that.

I'm exhausted.

When Prof Nkrumah dearest finally wakes up like an hour later, I'm still typing. He tries to talk to me and is nicer now but I keep typing. I put on Akon's (and Lonely Island) I Just Had Sex. I'm hoping he will get the message and I think he does because he looks so guilty! This is a song he should be singing along to right now! He knows what he did last night!

"I'm going to meet up with Kofi", he says.

"Sure", I say.

"Wanna come?", he says.

"No", I say.

"Look baby. I'm sorry about storming off last night", he says.

"I don't wanna hear it. Go meet Kofi and be a big brother to him. He needs you and you shutting him out is not helping. Go talk to him", I say.

I hope he goes to the real Kofi this time seeing that he was with the wrong one yesterday.

As soon as he steps out I take a pillow and cover my face and scream and scream and scream. Why would he do this though? Now of all times? What does he expect me to do? I cry myself to sleep and he wakes me up like 2 or so hours later when he gets back. Crying helped me though because although I'm still angry, I'm in control of myself now.

He now knows Kofi stayed the night with me so he's forced to confess except he lies again! He woke me up to lie in my face! Now he says he went out with an old friend of his and they went out drinking then went home and he overslept. He says he just said he spent the night with Kofi because he didn't want me wondering what friend he's talking about. I listen to him and even ask the friend's name and name of the club and where the friend stays. I just want to see how easy it is for him to lie. He can't even lie properly! He can't maintain eye contact and he has to think every time before he answers.

"I hear all that bullshit you just told me Elikplim and I appreciate the trial. Now tell me the truth", I say.

"But I just did", he says.

"Stop insulting my intelligence. You know what, I don't even want to know! I know you were with a girl or girls or whatever. I saw the condoms! I saw the lipstick stain on your T-shirt and remember I know you! I know when you are lying! So drop the act already!", I say.

He looks like he just saw a dead person and he looks at me. I get up to stand and I guess he thinks I'm leaving so he blocks my way and starts apologising.

This man and sorry!

"I can explain", he says.

"No. I'm good thanks. I really don't want to hear how my man was pleasuring another woman while I was up in here worried sick and carrying his child. So no thanks", I say.

I'm too calm. Not so long ago he promised never to cheat on me again and silly me had actually believed him. And that over 100 girls he's slept with number just went up. I'm sure we probably at 300 or 2000 now who knows! That just makes me so angry! He might as well walk around naked mos since his parts are public not private!

I don't know how I'm ok with this. I'm not ok ok with it but I'm not leaving him and I don't know why. I'm still here in this hotel room. From the time I found out, I've been angry but I didn't even consider leaving him. It never even crossed my mind. I think I forgive this man too much. I don't even know how I do it sometimes. I'm so upset though and I'm wondering how many other packets of condoms he's hiding in his bag. So I go through his things and throw them one by one on the floor. I didn't see the bottle of perfume there so it falls so hard and breaks.

"Fierce", he tries to stop me.

"Don't you dare touch me!", I say to him and he backs off and stands against the wall with one leg down and another bent at the knee balancing on the wall and his hands crossed. He just watches me going mad and throwing his things around. Ok I said he must not touch me but I didn't say he must just stand there and look at me like I'm crazy!

I find nothing and I feel stupid now with him watching me like that. I sit on the bed and cry into my hands. It hurts so bad. He holds me and I tell him to let me go but he doesn't. I stand and start hitting him and kicking him but he holds my arms so I can't really hit him. He pins my arms to my body and holds me there. I can't stop

crying, I'm crying so hard I'm shaking. How could he do this? Now of all times? I don't understand. What did I do wrong?

I eventually calm down and only then does he loosen the hold. I breath in and out and in and out until I can feel my mind quieten.

"I want to go back to Cape Town", I say.

"Our flights are for tomorrow and to Joburg", he says.

"Then get me a flight to Cape Town from Joburg on the very same day we land!", I say.

I'm way too calm now! It comes with years of experience. I can't wait to give birth so I can start drinking. I hate alcohol but sometimes I need it to help me deal with Elik.

"I'm sorry baby", he says.

"I love you Elik but I hate you. You make it so hard to love you. What you did is so inconsiderate. You know I'm still dealing with what happened with my mother. You know I'm in a bad space and I can't handle all this right now. You know how I'm worried about this pregnancy and I keep wondering if I'll make it to 9 months or not. You know all that! But you've been making me feel bad for telling Kofi about this although I really didn't mean to. I'm human and I make mistakes. I would never intentionally hurt you like that. You know that! You dragged me down here to Accra for what? So you could leave me here alone and go find some girl or girls or whatever nasty thing you got into last night? Is that your way of getting back at me? Are you punishing me? All I was trying to do was make sure you don't lose your brother? You know I always put you first and that's exactly what I was

doing! You took it like I was attacking you so you decided to go fuck some random girl out there? Do you ever think of me or how any of these things you do make me feel?", Gosh I think I'm going to cry again but I won't.

He's just looking down and not saying anything. Fine if he won't speak I will.

"So if I hadn't found those condoms you would be acting like everything is normal, right? As if everything is perfect. How exactly do you do that? You mean to tell me that nothing inside you feels anything when you do these kind of things? Nothing at all? I'm pregnant you know and I really don't need the stress", I say.

I'm really not going to cry because I'll be vulnerable again and he will come in and save me and lie to me and confuse me some more. The worst will be if this ends with him fucking me on this bed! I won't allow that to happen. He keeps trying to apologise and frankly he's annoying me now so I need to get out of here.

"I hope whatever girl that was, she was worth it. You know the only reason I'm standing right here halfway across Africa is because I love you and I support you and I want you to be ok. But gosh you make it so hard! I'm looking at you right now and I hate you. I hate what you do. I hate what I'm becoming because of you. And you wanna know what's sad? It's that I'm going to forgive you anyway and I'm going to keep on loving you anyway. I'm going to fight for you and never give up on you. I'm going to look out for you and keep loving your children. I'm going to keep praying that one day you realise what you have in front of you. I just hope when that day comes it won't be too late. I know you think I'm never going

anywhere and that's made you so comfortable. But I promise you, keep doing this and one day I'll walk away and never look back. But you know what? When that day comes I won't feel bad because I'll know that I tried everything with you. I've given you all of me and more Elikplim", I say.

He looks down and plays with his fingers. Gosh why does his guilty face look so handsome! And when he's looking down those bushy eyelashes just make him look like the best thing since sliced bread. And those lips. Ok I need to get out of here. The way he looks is confusing me. And he looks so sad now I'm feeling bad so I really need to get the hell out of here.

I get up and find a T-shirt dress that just gives the illusion that I'm plump and not exactly pregnant. I walk to the mirror to brush out my weave and put on a bit of makeup and put on jewellery and gladiator sandals and wear some perfume. I think I look cute and I'm ready to go. No more crying for today.

But where should I go to? Maybe I can call up Kofi and we have a drink and drown our sorrows? But he's not in a good space right now and he won't do much to cheer me up. He might even make me feel worse. I'm not in a state to go out alone and hope to hook up with some people out there. I guess I'm stuck here with this bad boy of mine. I look so cute though, I deserve to go out! I don't want to be around Elik right now.

Sigh.

Speak of the devil! Kofi says he's outside and I've never been so glad because I need a buffer to help out this tension between me and Elik. I open the door and he comes in. He looks so stressed out and looks like he could use some sleep.

"Hi Kofi", I say.

I know I look equally drained.

The floor is full of Elik's clothes and things. I really went crazy there. Kofi looks at Elik then at me then back at Elik then back at me.

"You alright?", he finally says.

"I'm not! Thanks to your brother here", I say.

"What happened?", he says.

"I'm sure Elik will tell you", I say and get a hairbrush to straighten a strand of my weave.

"Sorry Fierce but can I speak to my brother alone please", Kofi says.

"No she's not going anywhere", Elik says.

"It's fine Kofi. I'm going out anyways", I say.

"Where are you going to?", Elik says.

"You don't get to ask me that", I say and look at myself one last time in the mirror. He gets up and hold my arms and makes me face him. I shrug him off so hard and tell him to step away from me before I smack him upside down with this hair brush. Why is he still talking when I told him to leave me alone and give me space to think! Where I'm going to is none of his business.

"Cash", I say and hold out my hand.

I'm not about to go about swiping his card and leaving a trail of evidence! He hands me all the money in his wallet.

"It's about 1000 cedi", he says.

"Fierce where are you going?", he says.

"Later", I say and get my bag.

Before Elik can ask me any more questions I shut him down by throwing what he did at his face.

"I won't be gone forever so don't bring any girls in here. At least respect me that much", I say.

He tries to stop me.

"Don't you dare Elikplim! Leave me alone!", I say.

He looks down and I'm out of here!

I sit in the foyer downstairs wondering where I can go. I remember a boy called Jay. A nice boy with a beautiful heart and a talkative mouth that I danced with at Shaka Zulu and had a great day with. He was so sweet and looked like he was descendant from Masai warriors.

Honestly if I wasn't pregnant I would call him up and find out if he wants to do me for closure purposes. I'll have found better words to use obviously! But since I am I send him a message and ask to meet up for a chat. It's just a "Hie Jay. Fierce here. I'm probably the last person you expect to hear from. I'm in Accra. Can we do lunch please. I know things didn't go so well between us last time but can you please give me a chance to explain and apologise in person. Please. XoXo. Fierce".

I can't leave the hotel before he responds, if he responds at all, because I need the WiFi. He read my message 10 minutes ago but hasn't responded. I don't know whether to call or send another message or keep waiting. I wait.

I'm about to give up and go back up to the room so I can cover my head with a pillow when Jay responds. "Sure. Meet me at Shaka Zulu in 40 minutes". My heart just skipped a beat.

I ask reception to call me a taxi and I head down to Shaka Zulu. It's closed so I wait outside a bit before Jay finds me. He's still very nice and gives me a kiss on the cheek. I think he looks like Kofi but well I used to think Kofi looks a bit like Elik so my comparison skills can't be trusted. He says he said Shaka Zulu because he knows I know the place so he just wanted a convenient pick up place. He has his friend's car so we pick up some fruits and take aways at a local market and drive down to his university. I apologise for last time and promise to explain later. He says he was just disappointed but really needed to see me again. He says he never forgot about me but couldn't reach me. That's because I'd blocked him but let me not tell him that.

He's staying at rez now. Their rez rooms are much nicer than ours but it's also a bare minimum room. He's amazing. If he's still upset with me for lying to him last time he doesn't show it. It's like we just picked up where we left. Jay reminds me of Kofi so much. He's so free and talks too much and makes jokes. This is the kind of boy I should have ended up with! He's just 2 years older than me and that's

perfect. Maybe the 10 year gap between Elik and I is the problem! He treats me like a child sometimes!

Midway into our lunch, I find myself telling Jay my life story. He must think I'm so messed up. I actually tell him the truth about Elik, Komla, my mother disowning me and Elik repeatedly cheating on me. Of course I leave out more serious things like miscarriages and rapes and all that gruesome stuff. I'm not trying to scare the poor guy away, I just really need to vent.

He's such a good listener and he says I deserve so much better and money isn't worth it if I'm losing my soul in the process. He says it looks like all my problems come down to Elik so maybe I should let him go and find myself without him. I'm crying and he holds me and tells me it's ok. I can't get over the fact that Elik was actually doing someone last night! When I finally pull myself together I'm sure my face is a mess so I have to go and fix myself.

I lost my appetite already so we go back to talking. He tells me his future plans and he's so sweet. He says he fell in love with me the first time he saw me and I admit to him that if circumstances were different I actually would have given me and him a chance. I don't know how or when but we end up kissing and making out. Damn, he kisses so good. Like the only lips I remember on mine are Elik's and this is different. He's taking his time with the kissing and I'm trying by all means to get Elik's face out of my head.

I can't really go any further because of this pregnancy thing. But if I wasn't I would have given it up to Jay right here right now and revenge cheated on Elik! Maybe I would have felt better afterwards. I could go down on him I guess but I just ate and I don't know when he last showered so maybe not.

I tell Jay we have to stop before things get out of control. He says we should just go with the flow and if things get out of control then so be it. I insist we can't and he says I should relax everything is fine and he can tell I want him too as much as he wants me. I have to pull out the oldest excuse in the book. I tell him it's that time of the month and only then does he stop. We go back to kissing though and he's taking his time with my lips. It's just sending electricity throughout my body. He doesn't push for anything further though, thankfully.

Afterwards we just hug and I thank him for listening to all my whining. We get back to hanging out. He turns out to be a DC Comics fan and I'm all the way Marvel so we spend the rest of the time arguing about who's better between the Avengers and Justice League. Like seriously he says Justice League is better than the Avengers. I can't stop rolling my eyes.

"See Justice League has the Bat and Superman! Come on, you have to admit, those are the coolest superheroes of all time", he says.

"Come on dude. Really Batman? Who loves Batman? No one! He's a jerk and Superman is an alien and looks funny! Justice League is unreal and too far fetched. Superman is an alien, Wonder Woman is an Amazon princess and a demi-goddess, Aquaman is what? An Atlantean royalty? Green Lantern is from space.

And what exactly is Cyborg? A robot? We don't relate at all! It's like watching cartoons", I say.

"Well Thor is also a god!", he says.

"But that's about it. Only Thor is from out of earth. The rest of the avengers are human. And be honest now Jay, the storyline of the Justice League just looks forced and crammed together against its own will. And how the hell does Aquaman fight so good on land? Doesn't his super powers lie in water and in talking to fish? And please don't get me started on the Flash! He's a Spiderman knock off", I say and roll my eyes.

"No its just the movie was made bad Fierce. The comic books are so much better", he says.

He's so losing this argument.

"I've read the comic books as well and still Avengers are the best! I have a million more reasons why, if you want to hear them", I say.

"Alright I get you. But tell me, if you had to choose between being Wonder Woman and being Black Widow. Who would you choose?", he says.

"Pssh. Wonder woman of course!", I say. That's a no brainer.

"See. You just chose DC. So I rest my case", he says.

He's so silly. He just tricked me this one.

"You are adorable you know that?", he says.

No, he is adorable. He may not be Elik but he has that intelligence and love of Sci-Fi that I like and he looks good.

I look down and he holds my hands. I wish I could freeze this moment for a while. I'm genuinely happy and not carrying Elik's cross for once. I love Elik but he has so much baggage it weighs so heavily on me sometimes and the cheating just doesn't stop! It's too much. I needed this. I needed to forget for a little while. But anyway, when all is said and done, I'll choose Elik all over again and right now I need to get back to him. I'll stay another 30 minutes or so and maybe get in a few kisses for the road.

It's getting late though so I have to leave. I count the money Elik gave me and it's like 1600 cedi so I give Jay 1500 cedi. He's hesitant but I assure him there's so much more where that came from so he should just take it and not feel bad. We get to kissing some more and I promise to keep in touch. He drops me off at the hotel and I'm actually sad to watch him drive off.

I find Elik fuming and pacing. He tries to shout at me for being out there alone in a foreign city while I'm carrying his child. The way he keeps talking about this child you'd swear I was carrying the pregnancy in my handbag and he was worried someone would snatch the bag away from me and run away with our unborn baby!

He says I'm reckless and what I did was childish and I can't just take off and disappear like that for hours in a city I don't know. Well at least now he knows how it feels like to be worried sick about someone! I don't have time for this. I ignore him, take off my clothes and go into the shower and just stand under the stream

of water. I need to wash off the smell of Jay from me because if Elik smells another man on me he will kill me and then hunt down that man and kill him too!

I want to cry so bad and I'm biting my lower lip to stop the tears. I wonder what my life could have been had I never met Elik. I hear the bathroom door open and I grab the sponge and quickly put soap and pretend to be bathing. Elik joins me and I ignore him. At least he's done shouting.

"Let me help you with that", he says and takes the sponge from my hands and turns me around to wash my back.

He can't see it but my tears are falling now. He hurts me so much I don't know why he doesn't see that.

"I'm sorry for what I did last night", he says.

I stay quiet until he's done with my back and I can turn around.

"Do I deserve this? Do you enjoy seeing me like this? Is this love?", I ask.

"No", he says.

"Then why baby? Why do you keep doing this to me?", I say.

He keeps quiet.

"I was right here. If it's sex you wanted you know I'll have given it to you", I say.

He keeps quiet still.

"I'm sorry baby", he says.

I roll my eyes. It's a waste of time talking about this if all he's going to say is sorry.

He's always sorry!

"Baby. I keep hurting you over and over and I hate myself for doing this to you. I know you are hurt right now and I can tell you've been crying. Maybe I should leave you alone for a while and try and fix myself", he says.

Is he going to ignore the fact that I'm pregnant? He would want us to break up right here? In Ghana? But if that's what he wants I won't fight him.

"Is that what you want?", I say.

"Of course not. What will I be without you? I love you Fierce. I know I fuck up a lot but please believe that I love you. I just keep hurting you and I feel so terrible about it", he says.

"So you want us to break up?", I ask.

"No. I want to stay with you. I want to try and do better", he says.

"Then in that case I'm not going anywhere. We'll fix you up, together. We'll work this out and I'll be with you every step of the way. We'll get through this. We've been through worse and this like all those other ones will come to pass", I say.

"Why are you like this? Why are you so good to me?", he says.

"Because I love you with all my heart and I don't know how you can't see that. You are a wonderful man Elik and you need to give yourself more credit. I just wish you could stop looking for love in the wrong places. I wish you could come to me when you are not ok instead of going around sleeping with random girls. We are raising Peter and Paul baby and we'll have another baby soon. We need to get it together if we are going to survive", I say.

He just gives me the biggest hug ever and we stand there under the stream of water like we are in a movie or something.

"Thank you for loving me Fierce. She always told me no one will ever love me and I wasn't good enough. I think with time I began to believe her, that's why I went from girl to girl looking for that love. I never found it. But in you I've found it and I'm a fool for treating you the way I do", he says.

"Yes you are a fool!", I say.

I'm probably a bigger fool so we will be fools together.

You see now the thing about losing your mind and throwing things around! Elik's clothes are still on the floor and now I have to pick them up and fold them and pack them back into his bag! This sucks. He's trying to help but I tell him to stop because I don't know what type of folding this is that he's doing!

Ghana is not my favourite country anymore for many reasons and I'm glad we're leaving tomorrow. I don't think I'll ever come here again. And yes Elik cheated yet again and yes I'm staying with him yet again. Many girls I've spoken to have bashed me for staying with a man that cheats. I don't know why I stay to be honest. It hurts but maybe I'm so used to him doing it I expect it or maybe I know the girls just get sex and no love? Or I know the sex they get is not the good one I get, they get the rapey one because he'll be blowing off some steam? I don't know. Maybe I'll have an answer one day. For now let's just say I'm stupid. I love him. Besides how could I leave him when he's going through all this?

He says there's been a family meeting called to discuss this whole mess with Kofi's mother and to talk about his situation with Komla and all that. I ask if he's going

and he says, "I've been done with that family for a long time now. The only reason I came down now was Kofi. I still want nothing to do with the rest of them".

I nod.

"Fierce, do you realise that you the only one I have left? Things might never be the same again with Kofi. So you are all I have left now. I have no one else to turn to", he says.

"I'm never going anywhere baby. I'll always be right here for you. Me and the twins and the baby are your family and we are proud to have you in our life. I couldn't ask for a better fiancé and the twins wouldn't ask for a better father. I love you and always will. And I know you can do better and I'll walk that path with you", I say.

I know always is forever and forever is a very long time but I plan on keeping my promise.

CHAPTER 82

My highlight of the trip was watching Elik and Kofi make up and promise to be there for each other and to not let this new information come between them.

They actually said 'I love you' and 'I love you too'. That was too beautiful. I'm glad we get to keep Kofi. He gets me so I love him very much. He said he wanted to stay behind in Ghana for a bit and sort some things out and would come down to South Africa before going back to Germany.

He then pulled me aside and was like, "Dude I know dealing with Elik is a lot but please stick with him. He's a good guy and he really loves you. Please bro I'm begging you. Take care of him".

I said I would. He's a hot mess but he's my hot mess. A sexy hot mess.

The flight back was better. Elik was all over me and giving me a lot of attention and checking if I was alright every minute and covering me up with the blanket even when I was covered and ready to do anything to make sure I was extra comfortable. And telling me he loves me every time our eyes met. He was just doing the most. I guess he really feels guilty for what he did.

He was just extra loving and all touchy and just treating me like he's afraid he'll lose me. Because he actually thinks he might lose me. Well now that I'm not so angry anymore, I said it's fine, I'll go get the kids and we can just all spend the holiday together and drive down to Kruger National Park for Christmas. They love the idea of camping and since they always make me camp indoors, I'll take them proper camping plus they can get to see the Big Five on the game drives. I miss them so much.

I don't understand how Kofi's mother hates Elik so much because of what his father did. I could never hate Peter and Paul although their mother is the spawn of the devil! Maybe I can't hate them because I love their dad so much, I don't know. Besides, Elik is not perfect but he's trying to get it together and this man has loved me at my lowest and I plan to love him at his lowest. He has done

everything for me and all cheating apart, he has loved me thoroughly. We are toxic but I love him, with all his flaws because he loves me with all of mine.

I went and fetched the kids from Cape Town so we could be with them over the holidays. Elik and I are good again and now that it's the festive season he isn't working much. We have forgotten all about Ghana. We are back to playing video games and watching our movies and doing the best we can to be good parents to Peter and Paul. I'm playing the good wife although I'm not wifed yet. I actually cook everyday and still read bedtime stories to the kids and still service my addict of a fiancé at night. Life is good.

I haven't decided whether I want us to just get married in court and that's it or if I should have a small beach wedding or have a destination wedding or if I should go all out and have a huge wedding right here. I'm yet to think about it. Elik wants a wedding though because he says he wants to see me walk down the aisle in a white dress. It's just too complicated though because of our families and who will be my bridesmaids? I don't have friends. It's stressful so I'll put a day aside and think about it. It has to be after the baby though.

We had to rush to a doctor the other day because I was having cramps but it turned out to be nothing. The doctor said it's normal and the baby is perfectly fine. Then Elik was asking the most random of questions and silly me joined him and we made the old man uncomfortable.

"Doc, can I have sex with her till the due day?", Elik said.

"The baby will be born with sperms on its head baby, eeewww", I said and we laughed.

"Actually Doc you prescribe sex everyday for pregnant women right? Please tell her it will help her give birth better. She doesn't believe me", Elik said looking serious.

"Doc please prescribe something for his brain. I think he has a short circuit somewhere in the head", I said.

"Which head?", he said.

"Both", I said and we just couldn't stop laughing.

"So doc please prescribe a daily dose for her, please", he said.

"Prescribed or not, you know you'll be getting it baby. You just have to ask nicely", I said.

I felt sorry for the poor doctor. He looked at us unsure what to say, I guess wondering what kind of human beings these are. He said yes as long as I was comfortable we could have it till before birth and we could have it any way we desired as long as it didn't involve sleeping on the stomach.

Oh by the way! Elik and I are having a boy. I'm so excited I can't wait for him to get here already so we can spoil him rotten. I've even started buying baby clothes and thinking up names. I could call him Elik Jnr but I'm worried that I might be cursing my child and he grows up loving women like his father? I don't want my child to be like that.

Komla's kids are so happy and they haven't once asked about their mother. Elik thinks maybe I should let them call me mum instead of auntie and I was like I

don't know. I don't mind what they call me. They could call me Fierce I would mind really. We get along so well Elik thanks me almost everyday for taking care of them. I'm a natural at this mothering thing.

The twins are going to an elementary school in Rondebosch for Grade R when schools open. The fees is R240 000 per student per year! So we forking out R480 000 in school fees and that's excluding the school uniforms, sports uniforms, numerous extracurricular activities and unnecessary school trips. It's a lot for kids doing Grade R! When I sat Elik down to say I had found a school, I was so scared he would freak out about the fees but he just said, "Is that where you think we should put them?"

I said, "Yes. It's a good school and it's close to my new house so I'll be able to drop them off and pick them up without suffering through traffic and they will learn much more than just school knowledge. They will learn life skills, manners and just learn how to be outstanding members of society. They will also have more opportunities in terms of discovering their talents".

He said, "Alright. Just tell me how much is needed and give me the account details, I'll make the payment".

It was a huge relief and I can't wait for the first day so I can dress them up in uniforms and take photos of them for my wall. Elik has to be there on that day. It's a huge step.

When it comes to being loved and supported I know Elik and Lumka have got my back anyday. The kids were already in Cape Town with the helper and I went back to Joburg to spend some time with my man without the kids around. I'm moving to a new house in Newlands so Elik and Lumka came with me. It's not like we'll do much anyway, we'll just be telling the movers were to put the furniture. That doesn't need three people but Lumka insisted. I think he has a girlfriend down here!

I haven't seen the house yet, Elik kind of took care of all of that. We get to Cape Town around 9 pm and head down to Seapoint. My plan is that Lumka will sleep on the couch, then Elik and I will sleep with the twins since Peggy will be using the other room. Lumka reminds me that there's something called a hotel but just because he phrased it like that, no hotel for him! He's sleeping on the couch! He doesn't fight me. Apparently this pregnancy has made me very mean so they are all scared of me. I don't think it's true. I think I'm very nice.

We get to the house and I tell them to be quiet and that I'm just going to check on the kids. I'm sorry but I'm going to wake them. I miss them so much and I can't wait till morning. I switch on my bedroom light and I swear I'm going to kill someone today. What the hell! Peggy is sleeping in my bed with a man. Thankfully they are not doing the nasty because I don't want to see that. Peggy gets up and she jumps out of bed when she sees me. She's wearing a nightdress. Who dresses up when sleeping with their man? I always assumed all women sleep naked when sleeping with a man! I was wrong I can see.

"What the hell!", I scream and Elik comes running and all I hear him say is "Yho!" before he leaves the room and goes to the living area. I quickly go to the other room. What has this woman done with my children? She moved Peter and Paul from my bedroom to the other room and they've been sharing the bed with two other kids that I don't know! Oh hell no!

"I wake the twins and they are so sleepy shame. But I need to scream at people now and I can't have them witnessing that. I don't believe this!

"Bhud' Lumka can you please take the kids to the car, Elik and I have to take care of this", I say. Gosh I'm so mad! He doesn't argue but takes the twins and grabs the car keys on the counter and goes. I didn't want them to see me going mad. I storm into my bedroom and find Peggy still trying to put a dress over her nightdress. The man is up too now and is wearing boxers. In my Egyptian cotton? Oh hell no!

"What's this Peggy?", I scream at her.

"I'm so sorry madam. Please madam", she says.

"Get your things and get your person and your children and get the hell out of my house!", I say.

"Oh but madam. This is a mistake. I'm sorry. Please", she says.

"I'm giving you 5 minutes to disappear from my house. Otherwise I'm calling the police! What the hell!", I say.

She let a stranger into my house. There's two kids here! I specifically told her no visitors when I'm away!

"Please madam", she says.

And why is this man still in my bed!

"And wena? Get out of my bed right now and get out of my house!", I yell at him. I can't believe there's a full grown, hairy man in my bed! He jumps out in his boxers and I actually chase them out of my room like goats. I have a bit of my mother in me after all. Who knew!

Elik is standing by the door the whole time doing nothing! I'll deal with him later. Why is he here then if he's not helping me with this eviction?

The man is waking up the children and Peggy is still begging me.

"I'm so sorry madam", she keeps saying.

"Peggy take all your stuff and get out of my house now!", I say.

"Everything? Then I would have to come back with my clothes tomorrow?", she says.

"Coming where tomorrow? You are fired! Get out!", I say.

I actually hear Elik laughing a little. What's so funny here? This woman disrespected me! She moved her boyfriend and two kids into my house!

I hadn't told her I'm coming because why should I? It's my house I can come and go as I please.

She was sleeping in my bed with her man! Sies! How disrespectful! And she made my kids share the bed with kids I don't know! I want them out of my house right now. Elik doesn't say anything. This man! They finally get everything and I usher them outside. Peggy! This woman pushed me to the limits. Only because they have children with them, I will call an Uber to take them to wherever they are going.

When they are gone, I turn to Elik.

“And you? Why did you just stand there?”, I say.

“What did I do? You had everything under control madam”, he says and laughs.

“You want me to throw you out as well? You know I’ll do that!”, I say.

“But we are outside! How will you throw me out?”, he says.

“You think I’m crazy ne? You think this is funny? You’ll sleep outside today, you’ll see”, I say and walk away.

“I’m sorry madam!”, he says and laughs.

Yerrrrrr! I need to walk away before I strangle him to death.

I see he thinks this is funny. Peggy and that man in my bed!

Just great! Now I have to change the bedding in all rooms. I can’t believe that woman! People really mistake my kindness for stupidity. Lumka returns with Elik and the kids. I just have enough time to kiss the kids and hug them and apologise for disturbing their sleep. They are so sleepy though shame so I have to change their bedding first and put them to bed.

“Sisi why don’t we just check into a hotel?”, Lumka says.

“He’s right baby. Don’t worry about this. There’s the Winston Mansions just down the road, I can make a call”, Elik says.

I stop what I’m doing and put my hands on my waist and look at them.

“I see what’s happening here! You Elik, with your 4 bedroom house and you Bhud’ Lumka with your 5 bedroom house, you think my house is not good enough for you ne?”, I say.

They look at each other.

"You know what. Go to a hotel. It's fine, go", I say.

"Well, this couch is very comfortable so I think I'll sleep right here. I don't know about you Elik but me I'm good here, I don't want to go to a hotel", Lumka says.

"Me neither. I want to sleep right here with my baby. Actually I need to help her make the bed right now. Come ma, let's go make the bed and sleep", Elik says.

They are so full of it it's not even funny! I get Lumka blankets and Elik tries to help me make the bed but I tell him to go stand there by the door, isn't that's what he does best. He didn't help me with Peggy. He just stood there so he should go and stand there some more! He laughs a little. I honestly don't see what's funny here! I struggle to turn the mattress and I'm too proud to ask Elik.

"You need help madam?", he says.

"What does it look like?", I say.

He helps me and I actually let him help me make the bed. I'm still upset with him though. Why was he laughing and why is he calling me madam? He's making fun of my scene with Peggy. If he calls me madam one more time I'm throwing him out!

I go and check on the twins, check that the windows are closed and everything. Everything is fine so I can go to bed. Lumka is sleeping on the couch and he's on his phone but the T.V is on.

"Should I switch off the TV for you", I say nicely.

"Oh no please. I don't want to hear you and Elik. Leave it on all night", he says and laughs.

Why is everyone laughing at me today? And if only he knew that his friend will be getting none for a very long time he would switch off that TV and sleep!

I shake my head and go to bed.

Elik is in bed already and on his phone.

"Move over. You are sleeping on the far end today", I say.

"Why? What did I do?", he says.

"You know what you did", I say.

"I didn't do anything madam. Can I sleep in the middle of the bed please?", he says.

I take a pillow and throw it hard at him. He's so annoying!

"You so cute when you are mad", he says.

Aaaaagggghhhh! He's driving me mad.

I get off my clothes and sleep at the edge of the bed.

"Elik please switch off the lights", I say.

"But baby you were standing right there by the switch", he says.

"Elik!", I say.

"I'm sorry baby. Ok let me", he says and gets out of bed and gets the light then turns his side lamp on.

I'm lying here and I'm mad yes but I want him to hold me but I can't ask because I've been going off at him this whole time.

"You awake?", I say.

"No, I'm fast asleep", he says.

See, today he's really trying me. I kick him on his leg hard and he says fine since I've decided to be a football player he's going to sleep at the other far side of the bed.

"I know what's wrong with you", he says.

"What?", I say, not in a nice tone.

He starts playing Akon and he rolls towards me and we spoon. I can't help laughing as he sings along. This is such a cool song though, it's called 'You Want Some' but it's making me blush so bad tonight.

"You just want some

I can tell when you want some

Go to sleep half naked throwing hints that you want some

Starting fights in the night for attention

Girl, you want some

Oh, now you just playing?

You just want some

There goes all those things that you was saying when we were leaving

There goes all that fighting we was doing this evening

What happened to the shit that you were saying?

Oh, now you just playing?

Ooh, you in trouble, girl

Cause while we spooning, you keep twerking your booty
I feel you moving and getting closer to me
And why you acting all mad?
Girl, you know you wanna do it
You get horny too fast
Girl, I can feel your fluids
Can't be mad at me forever
Girl, cause you wanna come
Oh, now you just playing?"

Half the time I think our relationship is based on great sex. But then I remember that that's just the cream on top. Love is our foundation, the things we've been through together strengthen us, the twins bring us closer together, the pregnancy makes us love each other even more and because we have so many things in common we just enjoy being with each other. He's right though I could use some.

Ok fine. I know I said he can't hit that tonight but I mean he's already right here and his hands are already teasing me so he might as well. I turn to face him because I think I'll automatically get some after this song but no I'm made to apologise for being mean and for shouting at him and I'm told to beg for it if I want it. I do all that and I'm blushing like a bride. I can't believe he still makes me blush after all these years and I get those butterflies in my stomach and his touch still makes me want to just get a little bit closer to him. He's the best thing that ever happened to me and I just really love him.

"You are beautiful", he says.

I blush.

"I love you baby, with all my heart", he says.

I blush some more.

"So you want some?", he says.

I nod more vigorously than I intended.

"So can we do that one that I like?", he says.

I blush some more but giggle and get out of bed anyways.

"You can't drop me though baby", I say.

"Have I ever dropped you?", he says.

Lumka was right to leave the TV

CHAPTER 83

We finally moved to our new house in Newlands. Like I predicted, Lumka and Elik did abso-bloody-lutely nothing! I have no idea why they were here in the first place. They just shared a beer by the poolside and kept saying they had pressing business issues to discuss when I asked them for help! I directed the movers all by myself. I'm sure the talk had nothing to do with business from the way they were laughing. So this house is mine. Not his! Apart from buying it and providing his finances for furnishing it, what else did he contribute?

It took almost a week to get the house to exactly what I wanted it to be. It's big and furniture had to be bought and all that stuff. Elik hired an interior decorator without telling me but they did an excellent job so I wasn't angry. I never once

dreamed I'd ever own a house with 5 bedrooms and 3 bathrooms and a long driveway and 3 garages and a swimming pool and a garden. For once in my life I felt rich. I felt like this is it, I've made it in life. When Elik said 'do you like it?' I thought what? How wouldn't anyone like this?

Even the air blows cooler and fresher this side of town. And I kid you not, the roads are washed. Like a truck goes by at night and sweeps the road and washes it with water! Wow! It's nice leaving with rich people. I mean I have manicured trees and a guy whose only job is to clean the pool and keep the lawn green. I love that the kids get to play and run around outside. They have their father for that. I'm here busy being pregnant, I can't be running around.

The neighbours are nice although they are pretty older. They brought us a casserole with macaroni and cheese. How cheesy! Now I don't know whether I return the casserole dish empty or if I'm expected to make something as well. Just great! They had to gift me with stress! The cottage at the back is a full 2 bedroom house! It will take time for me to get used to this house. I'm still overwhelmed. Just 10 years ago I was sleeping on the floor in a mud hut and now I'm cruising in Newlands. Village child it's possible. I wish I could say it's through hard work. But well, Elik is hard work so technically I worked very hard for this.

Elik is around a lot these days. He flies out to Zambia still but always comes back. He's busy shame and is still trying to gain my trust. He left his phone strategically right next to me the other day after he had been going on about 'I'll just make your name my password. That way I can never forget it'. I got the hint and I could

tell he wanted me to go through it. I didn't though. I choose to take his word for it when he says he'll come to me with problems and not find a girl to make him feel better. We are in a happy place so why go digging in a graveyard and expect not to find skeletons? I might be stupid but trust me I'm not stupid. Besides I have too much on my plate as it is, I don't need stress.

The kids started school. Gosh they are so cute! They speak so well and Elik thinks I'm doing a good job with them. Sometimes I don't think so but I'm trying my best. You should have seen how the other parents looked at me at the opening PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) meeting. One actually had the audacity to say they wanted parents of the children and not siblings to which I said 'that's exactly what I am. I'm probably your age but well, what can I say, good genes'. I think I've become rude. She's probably twice my age but she doesn't know that. They were all judging me for being young! Like is that even a thing? Too young my foot! They are just old and sour.

It's just sad that Inflation isn't here. My mother wouldn't let him. I don't see how she's letting her hatred of me deprive Inflation of a better future! I try very hard not to think about my mother because it never ends well for my heart. Her words still haunt me. I've found myself almost sending her money but just end up sending it to my aunt instead. I'm so used to sending money home I feel like I lost a huge part of me when that was taken away from me. So my aunt and eldest brother are my new beneficiaries. I miss my mother so much though. She wasn't perfect but she was my mother and she was always funny and there were times she used to encourage me and actually show me love. I wish I could just get on

the next plane and go home and beg for her forgiveness. I'm going to have a baby soon and I wish she could go through this journey with me. Until then, rest in peace mum.

I called her once in a moment of weakness but hay cha, she's really done with me. She didn't even say anything. Just hung up like I was an annoying person trying to sell her a phone contract. I'm a ghost to her. Then I called my father and he gave me a whole history lesson and cultural lesson about the weight of my mother's words. Apparently what she did has been practiced over generations and it's believed that uttering those words is the same as casting a binding curse. He said I can never talk to her again and shouldn't even try. He says the only way the 'curse' can be broken is if my mother and I make peace and what's that he said? We must eat ash? (Sikhumelane umlotha). I'm not eating ash, I'm sorry. He said he will call a family meeting so they can discuss the way I disrespected everyone and appeal to my mother to forgive me. He actually said that! He blames me! Him too? They've all turned against me that easily?

I told him not to bother with the meeting. I don't need anyone's forgiveness. I'm Catholic these days. There's a whole confession room with a booth dedicated to forgiving sins. If I need forgiveness I'll go there, thank you. Yes I'm going to church now. Surprise surprise. Well I went once so far and I intend to go next week again so I think I can confidently say I'm a believer now. I chose the Catholic church because it's not hectic and no one is screaming at me in church or trying to exorcise me or making me feel guilty for not offering. It's quiet, it's chilled and there's a set program for the mass. I don't have to spend all day in church. And

the priest was very nice and looked like he was from somewhere in the past, from the era of crusades, in that dress or robe he wears. They make the priests young and hot these days it's ungodly!

I tried to convince Elik to join me in my newly found desire to go to church and he said he doesn't have to go because the bible says if the wife goes to church she's representing the whole household. I don't know which bible he reads. To be honest, the only reason I go to church now is for the kids. I need them to go to Sunday school and to grow up with a moral compass of sorts. The last thing I wish upon them is to end up lost souls like the men around them. And why exactly Komla hasn't come for her kids, I don't know. Ok I know she can't enter South Africa but she could call me you know! It's like she just abandoned them and is alright with that. Some mothers don't deserve to see heaven.

They are growing up and maybe when they turn 18 and can now travel alone maybe they can go to Ghana and ask her why. In the meantime, they will stay at school. Thankfully the school has a school bus and I don't have to wake up and drop off the kids or pick them up. Life is going in the right direction. Being pregnant sucks though. Can't I have this baby taken out of me and put in an incubator for the remaining months? I feel like I'm carrying 5 kgs with me around and it's exhausting!

Now I'm all the mother the twins know. I couldn't manage on my own so I got a new nanny, Elizabeth. This time I had strict requirements and had interviews and forced Elik to sit in them and I was bad cop and him good cop. I won't go through

what I went through with Peggy! And now that we have a big house it's better because she gets to stay in the back house. She's really good at this whole cleaning and cooking and taking care of children. I like her but we'll see. As long as she does her job me and her won't have a problem. I set boundaries with her from the word go and made it clear that our relationship is purely professional.

Besides babying the twins and Elik, I have to baby Kofi as well. He's back in Germany and he's finishing up that Masters. I think he's not taking the Elik not being his brother situation so well. We can't end a conversation without him asking if Elik hates him. Ain't we all scared of being hated by Elik! He doesn't just hate you, he deletes you from his life and wraps your coffin with a bow. You are dead to him. They are good with Elik still. Maybe unlike before but I believe with time they will get there. I'll make sure of it. They are my boys and I want both of them to be alright.

Anyways, I'm back to going to campus everyday. Although my thesis was submitted for examination I still have research to do. It's not just an exam mark that makes a doctor. There are research outputs expected, I have to convert my thesis to at least four journal articles. I haven't published anything in the past 6 months. It's bad. It's pretty hot these days but I'm wearing boyfriend jeans and jerseys all the time. I'm hiding my stomach. It's quite embarrassing being with child seeing that no one knew I was dating then I turned up engaged to a married man then now I turn up pregnant! Nope. Not happening. And these guys can't tell I'm pregnant! How blind! Ndivhu just said I'm gaining weight. How rude!

I felt awkward the first time I walked into the lab. Like, I thought they didn't like me anymore. But I was wrong. It was as if I never left and we were all hugs and it just feels like old times now. Minus me asking for money of course. So the Chemical engineering PhD foursome is back again and my days are brighter.

Ndivhu is still Ndivhu. He has on the type of haircut that looks like he was at a barbershop then there was a power cut so they couldn't finish. I wonder what he even said to the barber to describe what he wanted! I can't even describe it but I've seen some football players with it. Then Brain. Brainy brain. He broke up with his girlfriend. He says she's been cheating on him their whole relationship and he actually was the side nigga doing main nigga duties. Hay shame. He's a nice guy, he doesn't deserve that. But that's love for you. It kicks you in the nuts when you least expect it.

Then Bunke. My hoodie-wearing tall drink of water. He is exceptionally nice and is back to madaming me and making me laugh with his pidgin English. His actions make me believe that I left a huge impression on him and maybe deep down he thinks we'll go back to the good old days. He was always a placeholder anyways, keeping me company until the rightful owner of me came to his senses. A tenant can't really complain when asked to move out so the owner can move in. It's just the way it is.

He gave me the best academic gift ever and he presented it as an insult coated in chocolate. I accepted nonetheless and gave him a long thank you hug. His words were, "Despite what you think, I still care a lot about you. So while you were out

there making one bad decision after another, some of us were busy with research. I've written 2 papers this far and I put your name on them because should you decide to come to your senses and maybe apply for a postdoc fellowship, you'll need publications to back you up".

I could have flipped and shown him the middle finger but I thanked him instead. It's the best thing anyone can do for you at an academic level. I forgive his insults because he knows not what he speaketh. He also can't tell I'm pregnant! Or are they all pretending not to see? Whatever, I'm just glad things are back to normal. It's our last few months together.

Their theses are back already. Been back for a while now and they just waiting for graduation. I'm a bit jealous but I know I did this to myself. They were focused when I was busy running after Elik, helping him mess up with his family, messing up with my family, playing sweet stepmother and getting pregnant. The fact that I even finished in the first place is a miracle. It makes me so sad though that they are done and I'm not. Ndivhu's thesis from the examiners looks perfect. Too perfect. I'm utterly shocked. I guess I shouldn't have judged him so harshly. At least for the guys graduation is guaranteed. As for me, I'm still hoping my theses finds their way back before the library cut off date.

I congratulated the guys though, with a smile on my face. And since I'm so monied these days I gave them like a grand each to go buy something nice. And they took it! Bloody hypocrites! They were bashing me not so long ago but are going to enjoy the fruits! Hypocrites!

CHAPTER 84

I make it to campus around 10 am. A bit late but it's not like I'm rushing for anything. I say good mornings and complain about everything as usual as I make my way to my desk.

"Prof is looking for you madam", Bunke says.

What now! I go to find him while I still have energy.

It's my thesis! All three copies are back and Prof was waiting for all of them to get back before he could give them to me. I actually let out a young victory shout. I'm relieved, happy, emotional, excited at the same time. I passed! I actually made it! I'm a Doctor, ungraduated yet but still a doctor! I'm so over the moon.

My first thought is to call my mother. She's been waiting for this day longer than I have. I'm about to dial when I remember that I forfeited that privilege a while ago. I can't share this news with her or any news for that matter. I call Elik and he says he never once doubted me. And he says our wedding is going to be lit because that's the day Prof Nkrumah will wife Dr Nkrumah. That made me smile ear to ear. I'm easily charmed.

Well, I might not be slaying on my graduation day because of this growing stomach but I will have the time of my life. I head down to the cafeteria window and ask for a chip roll and a can of coke zero. Food always was my best friend and since first year, a chip roll and coke zero have been my food of choice. Back then it

was all I could afford and now it's just a loyalty thing. They have sentimental value. This was my life before Elik came along and introduced me to champagne and lobster. I head to my bench and sit there watching students walk by. These ducks are a still here!

This PhD is the one thing that's truly mine. One thing Elik didn't buy for me or had nothing to do with. One thing I fought nail and tooth to accomplish. I'll drink to that. As I sit here reminiscing and thinking of could haves and might haves. I think of the now. I got Elik from another woman. And if I'm being true to myself, do I regret it? The answer is a resounding NO. I don't regret Elik. Everything we went through made me who I am today. I lost so much along the way but I gained so much as well. So my universe remains balanced. I sound so sad when I should be celebrating.

Sigh.

The most unexpected call ever comes through. I kept staring at my phone, unable to answer, until it goes to voicemail. He calls again. It's Butholezwe, my medical doctor brother. This is a first. I haven't spoken to him in a very long time. I answer it this time.

"Butho?", I say.

"Fierce. How are you?", he says.

We spend a good 3 minutes asking each other useless questions about our health and work and overall wellbeing. We both establish that we are fine and all is good.

"I heard what mama did to you", he says.

I keep quiet. He's my brother. He abandoned me a long time ago. I used to look up to him growing up and used to write him letters back then. I loved him and always spoke so highly of him but that didn't stop him from abandoning me.

"I'm sorry but I'm not shocked. This is umama we are talking about", he says.

"What do you mean?", I say.

"Why do you think I never came back home?", he says.

"I don't know. You forgot where you came from!", I say.

My mother used to say that about him.

"Yes I forgot. I chose to forget. That woman is bitter and when I got married she disapproved of my wife and said things that made me never to want to see her again. That was the last straw for me. I tried to impress her. When I was doing my internship, I sent her almost all my money and she just complained and complained and never once said thank you. It drained the life out of me. And the comments she would pass, I don't even want to talk about that", he says.

I had no idea!

"Baby sis. Look at this from the positive. She has freed you and can never hurt you again with her vile words. Don't be so sad", he says.

I can't not be sad. I lost a mother.

"I don't know how you stuck it up with her for so long! That's commendable!", he says.

I keep quiet. She's my mother. I was willing to stick it out with her till kingdom come.

"Anyway. I called to say I'm sorry sis. And I was thinking. Since now we both outcasts maybe we could be outcasts together. I missed out so much on your life and I would like to get to know you again and be a big brother to you, if you'll have me", he says.

"I would love that very much Butho", I say.

He has no idea what this means to me.

That was a pleasant surprise. Today is slowly becoming my day! I go back to the lab to be with my friends and to share that I'll be graduating with them after all. My life is a comedy though. I have no girl friends and the only people around me are men. The only people surrounding me are Lumka, who happens to be Elik's best friend so if ever I break up with Elik our friendship will cease to exist. I have Kofi, same story as Lumka. His allegiance is with Elik. I have Brain, a guy who's wanted me for the longest time. How you build a successful friendship with such a guy beats me. There's Ndivhu, but I wouldn't call him a friend. He's just a lab mate that one. Then lately the one friend I hang around the most is Bunke, an ex who still thinks he can get into my pants. So my whole squad is a mashed potato with a lot of milk. Such a mess.

Elik is in Zambia at the moment and will only be back later tonight. When it comes to chasing that paper, he wins the race. I guess if you have a fiance and two kids and another kid coming, you have to put in the hours. Besides, taking care of people is all Elik knows so he gets carried away sometimes.

I told him he can stay there since he has another meeting in 2 days anyways but he insists on coming back. He says he doesn't want to stay away from me and my pregnantness and wants to be there with me. I don't buy that. I think he doesn't want me thinking he's with someone else there. Frankly, I forgave him completely and I'm so over that Ghana girl, whoever she was. If I'm being true to myself I know he might do it again and again and again again. So why waste this happy time when I know stress might be coming?

The day just gets better and better. I'd thought of going out for dinner but I just remembered that Elik might come late so it's fine. I'll tell him to feed himself. The kids and I will eat whatever Lizzy feeds us.

I quickly make all the corrections on my thesis. They aren't that many. It's too clean and my plagiarism report was 2%. I didn't even know it could be that low! I can't say I'm surprised by the quality of my thesis. It was edited by Prof Elik Nkrumah himself with a fine tooth comb. Now it's ready for printing, binding and library submission.

I'm sitting on Bunke's desk and he's asking me silly questions like why am I always wearing a jersey in this weather! I never ask him why he's always wearing hoodies! So why is he asking me? I'm busy kicking him and he's telling me a story about something that happened when he was in Florida. For someone about to be someone's wife, I'm too playful. And right here my playfulness could pass as flirting. I don't know, I kind of like attention.

I'm staring at Bunke and thinking 'But he used to do me so good god damn!'. He catches my eye and we hold the stare for a few seconds before I look away. Do I still have feelings for him? Can't be. That's my cue to leave. Elik and I are too happy for me to be doing this. Besides I'm pregnant so even if I wanted a night of closure with Bunke I can't have it.

The kids are put to bed, Lizzy is gone to her cottage and I'm lying on the couch chatting to my brother Butho and trying hard to catch up. I'm waiting for Elik to get home. I'm too lazy to go the bedroom. I doze off eventually.

"Hey", Elik wakes me and I don't even open my eyes.

"Move over baby, let's share the couch", he says.

I move but stay semi-asleep. He covers us with a blanket and squeezes next to me and puts his hand on my stomach. I'll see him in the morning. Let's see if I can get back to that dream of me having dinner on a boat with Akon.

The kids woke us up and asked why we were sleeping on the couch. I let Elik answer that. I spend the rest of the morning talking about me bagging that doctorate and trying to figure out what colour dress looks better under a red gown. Elik is happier than me. He says he's really proud of me and I inspire him. How exactly I inspire him I don't know because if anything, he inspires me.

But obviously the universe wouldn't dare see me happy for long. It always comes around to remind me that it gave me Elik and can take him back anytime if it wanted. It's like being dangled on top of the fires of hell while looking up to the heavens. You have beauty right in front of you but you know a single drop will land you in the fires. It's madness.

It's mid morning and Elik is taking me shopping because my clothes don't fit anymore. I'm becoming a hippo like Kofi predicted. I'm still a baby hippo though but a hippo nonetheless. He insists I look great but he says that all the time no matter how I look so he's not a trusted source. I keep complaining and whining about how pregnant I look right now. He says so what? He says I should be proud to be carrying a life inside me. Yeah. That's easy for him to say. It's not easy carrying the evidence of sex with you everywhere you go!

I'm in the shower and taking my time when Elik opens the door and says, "Babe. Your phone keeps ringing".

"Answer it baby and tell whoever it is that I'll get back to them in 30 minutes", I say.

I continue showering. I'm getting lazier and slower, even bathing takes me forever and a day.

I'm still busy showering when I hear a smashing sound like that of a glass breaking. Then another smash and another smash. It's like someone is breaking things.

"You alright baby?", I call out.

No reply.

I quickly get the soap off me and jump out of the shower. It takes me forever but I finish eventually.

The living room is a mess. The tall mirror on the wall is broken! The TV screen is shattered! A big portrait of Elik and I is broken and lying on the floor.

What happened here? I scream for Elik but nothing. I run out and around to the garage with just my towel on and my Jeep is gone. We kind of have been sharing the Jeep because I insisted. I think we were just robbed and maybe Elik was kidnapped. I run back to the house and by the time I make it to the door I'm having a panic attack. I can barely breathe and my heart is beating so fast and my palms are sweating and I feel so light headed. I think someone took Elik.

CHAPTER 85

I know I need to get it together and call the cops. I close my eyes and focus on my breathing until I can at least stand without feeling like I'll fall face first. My phone is right there next to the broken portrait. Careful not to step on the glass, I reach for my phone then go to the bedroom. The screen is cracked, like someone threw it hard against the wall or something, but it's still on at least.

10111 is the number I dial and try I to stabilise my shaky voice. I report a break in and a possible kidnap and a stolen vehicle. The operator says I must remain calm and must lock myself in the bedroom incase whoever broke in returns. I do the locking of the bedroom but the remaining calm part is hard. I need to call Elik. I

open my chat with him. There's a message from him. Thank God. I quickly open it with shaking hands and it says 'Was he good?'

What does he mean? Was who good? It's probably the kidnapper right? Texting with his phone? Are they asking if Elik was good when being kidnapped? But why are they texting me? It don't make no sense but a lot of things don't make sense to me right now. I panic some more. Will they come back for me?

The cops are outside already! Three cars! Talk about fast response! This is Newlands. I'm sure each house has a designated policeman and car on standby. I mean we pay the most taxes in this side of town. Elik does the actual paying but me and him are one so WE pay.

I'm still wrapped in a towel and I tell the cops what happened. They ask me if there was anyone else in the yard and I say my helper is in the cottage at the back. Two of the cops leave and go to ask her a few questions. The one asking me the questions doesn't seem to think there was a break in. He says with all the alarm systems and cameras and remote controlled gate, it all doesn't add up. He says it's broad daylight and someone would have seen something and called the police if there really was a break in. Duh! I'm someone and I alerted the police. What's he talking about! I try to tell them that criminals are clever these days but they tell me they know criminals better than me!

They think Elik and I were fighting! They don't even take a statement! I'm so upset I'm going to call 10111 again and ask for more serious police! They don't take me

serious even though they can see I'm about to have a mental breakdown and can see the broken things on the floor. My man was taken here! I tell them that if anything happens to my fiancé, I'm suing the whole SAPS!

The ones who went to question Lizzy returns and asks me to never make a prank call to the police again, it's illegal! They say Lizzy told them that she saw the man I'm describing as mine (her boss) leaving alone and getting into the Jeep and driving off! Lizzy is lying. Elik and I were cool. He was waiting for me to finish showering so we can go to the Mall so why would he just leave? Why would he do that? And who broke all these things then? It doesn't make sense. The one female asks me if I'm married! Like what has that got to do with anything. I say no with an attitude and she gives me back more attitude. Mxm.

"You know we have real criminals to catch ma'am", the talkative one says.

I don't understand. What's going on here?

"Let's go. She did this herself and her partner drove away. You can see she's a bit psycho. These young girls and blessers! There was no break in or hijacking", the female with the stinking attitude says. I really don't understand and I'm in shock as they all judge me with their eyes and walk out.

There's a missed call on my phone from Jay. I didn't even hear it ring. I open my call log so I can redial Elik and there's 5 missed calls from Jay. So when Elik said 'babe your phone' it was Jay calling? Oh shit. Oh that's bad. Really really bad. What did Jay say to him? I quickly go to my WhatsApp and there's new messages that

have been read that I didn't read. It just pieces itself up. Elik read a bit of my chats with Jay. So he wasn't kidnapped! I'm so dead.

I've kind of been flirting with Jay since we got back from Ghana. Not explicit flirting but more of 'Hey handsome', 'nice profile picture', 'I miss you', 'blushing emojis' and subtle stuff like that. We WhatsApp call every now and then just to check up on each other. Nothing explicit really. Then today of all days he had to write 'I really enjoyed you that time. Can't wait to see you again!'. Elik obviously assumed the worst when he saw that. I'm so screwed. My hands are shaking and I don't know what to do. I call Elik and the phone rings and he hangs up. I try again and it goes to voicemail. Can he please allow me to explain. I can explain.

I call Lumka and he says he last spoke to Elik yesterday. I'm hysterical and he waits till I'm calm.

"What happened?", he asks.

I tell him. I mention that maybe Jay called and maybe Elik misinterpreted the harmless messages. He laughs!

Like do these people not know when to be serious?

"You called the police?", he says and is laughing at me.

Honestly what's so funny here! Mxm.

"I'm serious here. Elik is gone!", I say.

"You say you didn't do anything with this guy, right?", he says.

"I didn't. It was just harmless flirting. I swear", I say.

"Then find Elik and tell him that. He'll be alright. You really think Elik would break up with you over this? Come on now. He's just throwing tantrums. He'll be fine.

Well, except if you actually did something with this guy then Elik will find out one way or another. Then you are screwed yes”, he says.

I wish I had the same calmness he has right now. I know Elik would break up with me or probably cut off my head in the process. When there's another man involved he turns into something else I don't recognise.

“But nawe Fierce! Why would you leave evidence lying around like that? You delete these kind of things!”, he says and laughs.

Is he saying what I did is fine? I just had to delete the messages? Such a friend he is!

“Bhud’ Lumka. This isn't funny!”, I say.

“I know. Elik is going to kill you”, he says and continues laughing at me.

I'll get him, he'll see. Is he really going to laugh at me when he can hear from my voice that I've been crying?

I tell him I have to go.

I don't think Elik will forgive me. It's a miracle he didn't kill me already. He's thinking I slept with someone else and he will never forgive me. Who invented phones! Life was so much better without them. And this WhatsApp has always been an enemy of my relationship.

I need to find him. Except I don't have a car so I order an Uber and run down when it's here. I'll check the airport first. He might be headed back to Joburg or Zambia. I can't let him leave without explaining myself. He needs to know it's not what it looks like.

When the Uber is here I run outside and the driver looks at me funny.

"Aaa. You are not dressed", he says.

Oh sugar! I'm still wrapped in a towel. I ask him to wait and I go and put on sweat pants and a T-shirt and grab my falling-apart phone. The driver looks and me. I still have a towel around my head. I take it off and as we drive I try to dry my weave. It's far from dry by the time we get to the airport so I leave it to drip. That's the least of my worries right now.

I think I left my mind at home because I ask the first security guard I see if he hasn't seen a tall black guy wearing all black. That question had me looking the fool. We are in Africa and the majority of the men are black!

I look like a hobo in these sweatpants and carrying a towel so I become a bit self conscious and abandon the mission. It's pointless really. I go back home and I've been pacing and pacing and pacing and trying Elik's phone. I think I'm going mad. My eyes are swollen from crying and my face is puffy. I messed up big time.

My phone rings and I jump but it's the school saying I have to come over because one of children has been in a fight. Like come on now! They are in Grade R. Of course they will fight other children. Why should I go all the way there? I say I will be there in a minute. I just powder my face and go. Since I don't have a car, I Uber to the school. The teacher looks at me like she understands why my children turned out to be wrestlers. I'm always on point when I come to the school and leave the other parents wondering how I have twins already in Grade R. But today

I look like I was chewed and spit out by a donkey. Yeses. But I'm already here so let's go see which one of the twins is inspired by John Cena. Today of all days this had to happen. Elik is still missing so my mind is not all here. It's out there wondering if Elik is on his way to Ghana, or to Zambia or to Joburg or to a brothel.

I don't know how teachers of small kids stay sane. These little humans are too energetic! Apparently, the kid Paul beat up had made fun of Peter or something like that so Paul was just defending his brother. How the teacher doesn't see that as cute I don't know. I think it'd super cute but obviously I don't voice that out! Miss says Paul apologised and has made peace with the beaten child and they are cool now. So great! Wasted my time!

She says, "You need to teach them to resolve their problems by talking and not by violence". I smile and say I'm sorry and it won't happen again bla bla but all I'm saying is yeah whatever. They are kids let them be!

I go back home in a bad mood. My time was just wasted. I must have called Elik a 100 times now but his phone rings and goes on voicemail. As soon as the kids get back from school I quickly tell them I dropped things and they broke so they should stay far away from the glasses. I then ask Peter to call his dad and tell him he's sick. I'm not going to discuss the fight Paul was in. Not today. I don't have the energy really and I don't think he did anything wrong to be honest.

"Please call daddy and ask him to come home sonny. Tell him you are sick. Can you do that for me big guy?", I ask Peter and brush his hair with my hand.

"But I'm not sick", he says.

"Just say you are my love, please. Tell him to come home. I'll make you custard", I say.

"Ok", he says.

He takes his phone from his school bag and dials Elik.

And Elik answers! So he really is ignoring me!

"Hi daddy. How are you?", he says.

Man, these kids are adorable!

"Daddy. Please come home. Aunt Fierce said I should say I'm sick", he says.

Wow! Just wow! And then he looks at me with that 'did I do well?' look! I want to pick him up and throw him in the bin. He looks so cute flipping those bushy eyelids over his beautiful eyes. And that's the only reason I won't throw him away right now.

It's like looking at a small Elik and my heart can't take it. I just start crying. I've always been careful not to cry in front of them but I can't stop myself today. It's too much for me. Elik left and I don't know if he will come back. I actually doubt if he will come back.

"Are you crying?", Paul says.

He's the quieter one that's why it was even more shocking that he's the fighter. I can tell them apart now. I had to learn since they are my children now and Komla has not shown interest in claiming them back.

"I'm not crying sweetie. Something got into my eye that's all", I say.

"But you look like you are crying", Peter joins in.

"No. I'm fine really. Come. Let's go watch Naruto in the bedroom", I say to them.

"It's ok to cry you know. My teacher says it makes you feel better and it cleans your eyes and says when someone is crying we must give them a big hug. So are you crying? Do you want a hug?", Paul says.

"I need a hug yes", I say.

That's so sweet. I nod and they give me a hug. I don't think it's good that I'm crying on the shoulder of kids. I promised myself I'd never let them see me weak. I want to be their strength and show them only the good side of me. I want to be their guardian. And they too might be taken away from me if Elik is done with me.

I leave them in their bedroom watching Naruto from my laptop. They sleep alone now, Elik said he can't afford to be coming home at night and find me in bed with the kids. They need to sleep in their own rooms. I tried to argue but he wasn't asking really and his decision is usual final.

I could ask Lizzy to come and clean up but either I'm embarrassed and don't want her to see this other side of my life or I want to keep busy to stop from thinking. I tell her she shouldn't come to the main house tonight. All I know is I need to clean up the glasses before someone gets hurt. It takes me forever and I battle with the broom through the tears. I have to keep cleaning though. When I'm done I do all the dishes by hand. All of them, I take them out from the cupboards, clean as they are and wash them one by one. I wash every plate and every glass and every cup in the house. After that I cook up a storm. When Elik comes home I need him to have food and to be able to choose what he wants to eat. For once I allow the twins to eat in the bedroom. The house is very clean but I clean it anyway from

top to bottom. Then I do laundry. Anything that looks like it could be dirty, I throw in the washing machine. I just have to keep working.

When I'm done it's almost 12 midnight and Elik is still not home and still not taking my calls. It's pure blazing hell. It's torture.

I call Lumka and he doesn't answer. I'm sure he's sleeping at this time. I keep trying Elik and the phone rings and rings and goes to voicemail. I must have tried over a thousand times. I keep sending 'I'm sorry' and it's not what you think' and 'baby please come home' messages. I can see he's online but he's not opening my messages.

I eventually fall asleep on the couch but I'm up again at 3 am. I had nightmares of Elik putting me out and taking back the house, the car, the kids and his bank card that I use. I was left broke. Then my mother was standing there laughing at me saying 'I told you so'. I woke up sweating. He can't do that though. The house and car are in my name. And I have enough money in my bank account to keep me alive for a while. But this is Elik. If he wanted to he would find a way.

I don't even want to think of what he's doing right now. My best bet is that he's with some girl but I have my fingers and toes and intestines crossed that this once, just this once, he's not going down that route. He promised he wouldn't.

I go through my messages with Jay and try and read them from Elik's point of view. I keep rereading them and the more I read them the worse they seem.

"Hey beautiful"...Jay.

"Hey"...Me.

"I can't stop thinking about you"...Jay.

"Lol"...Me.

"What you up to?"...Jay.

"Nothing much. Just going through silly YouTube videos and you?"...Me.

"I'm studying. I have an exam on Monday"...Jay.

"Good luck. You got this"...Me.

"I love you Fierce. Can we talk about us please? You know that jerk is not good for you. You have to leave him. Please sweetheart"...Jay.

"Not today boo, please"...Me.

"Come on sweetheart. I want to be with you"...Jay.

"I have a man. Remember?"...Me.

"So what? He's not a mountain, he can be moved!"...Jay.

"*laughing face*"...Me.

"Go study boo"...Me.

"I'll wait. For you I'll wait"...Jay.

"I'm dozing. Nyt and sweet studies. Chat tomorrow *kiss emoji*"...Me.

"Goodnight sweetheart. I'll take care of you I promise"...Jay.

Well that's not so bad right? It's suspect yes but it doesn't scream cheating. I'm guilty of flirting yes but I didn't really cheat. I didn't sleep with him! I don't know who I'm trying to convince here. Fine, in a moment of weakness I kissed Jay but I didn't sleep with him so I only half cheated. Right?

These are things I need to explain to Elik. He could have waited for me to get out of the shower and talk to me like an adult instead of breaking my things here. I need him to listen to me.

And Jay has jokes for days! What did he mean he'll take care of me. Take care of me with that? With polony and bread on a single bed in rez? And drive me around in his friend's car? You know sometimes guys say things they don't understand!

I'm trying to be angry at Elik but it just keeps coming back to me worrying about him. I'm upset at myself. Even the way I behaved with Bunke yesterday was wrong. I think there's a whore in me that's suppressed but just pops up at random times. I messed up big time this time. I'm this close to having a mental breakdown. I can't lose Elik.

I can't remember what I used to be like without him. I can't remember being alone and what life was back then. I'm not financially prepared to deal with life and bills. I have been pampered for so long and have had everything handed to me on a silver platter. Where would I even begin? I could get a job I guess like everybody else.

But mostly, I'm not emotionally prepared to be on my own right now. He's been my best friend, my pillar of strength, my go to person, my lover and now my fiance. I know I'm too dependent on him for everything and that's not such a good thing. But it is what it is. Every memory I cherish is tied to him and every pain I harbour was shared with him. I'm afraid that I might lose him for good this time.

How could I be so careless though! I should have chatted with Jay on Snapchat so that the messages would disappear! I'm so foolish. I still can't sleep and I'm feeling a bit sick. My eyes are swollen and when Lizzy comes to wake the kids up and get them ready for school, only then do I sleep.

"Madam. Do you want coffee", she wakes me up with a gentle tap.

Is she for real right now? Why the hell did she wake me up? Geez!

"You alright? You look...puffy", she says.

"I'm fine", I say.

"Where's baba?", she asks.

How is where Elik is any of her business? These are the kind of things that make me upset.

"It's just when I saw him leave yesterday. He looked so angry then the police came around you know", she says.

Why is she poking her nose into my business? Does she know I fire people quick quick?

"He's fine. Now let's not talk about it", I say.

See, I'm nice!

I'll make my own coffee thank you very much. By the time I make it to the coffee maker, I don't want the coffee anymore. I go back to lying on the couch with my broken phone in my hand. I'm so not ok. I need something to knock me out.

I fix myself up a bit so that I don't look like I'm a cocaine junkie. There's a pharmacy down the road so I walk down and tell the pharmacist that I have a bad toothache and would like some Mybulen painkillers. He smiles and says toothaches are a nightmare and gives the pills to me. Toothaches are only a gentle pinch compared to a heartache. These pills are meant to soothe my heart, even if for little while.

CHAPTER 86

I'm sitting on the couch with 5 pain pills in my hand contemplating and trying to do some quick Maths. I can't do these pills anymore, I learnt their side effects the hard way so do I really want to go down that road again? But they used to help me so much. I would sleep like a dead body. The only reason they almost killed me last time was because I mixed them with alcohol. So if I have them on their I should be fine. I go through the leaflet and it says 'Safety in pregnancy and lactation has not been established'. Ok so if safety hasn't been established that means unsafety hasn't been established also. I know how these pharmaceutical people work. To be safe they will just say "safety not established!".

Ok I get that but what harm can once off do really? It's the dose that makes the poison after all. So this one time only. Now I'm conflicted. I want to take these pills so I can fall into a deep sleep and forget. On the other hand I can't risk harming my baby. So I don't know what to do. Once upon a time I was addicted to pain pills and once upon a time I overdosed and had a miscarriage. But with all that

information and my conscious yelling 'throw those pills away Fierce', I can't. So they sit in my hand still.

There's my baby growing in my stomach. It doesn't seem fair to poison him. What kind of woman does that? Then there's Peter and Paul to consider. They need me. I need to keep it together for them. They didn't know what to do when they saw me crying yesterday and they hugged me and all. So I don't want them going through that again. And Elik, if there's any chance of him forgiving me now, should anything happen to this baby then he will never forgive me for real. This is hard.

I'm still trying to decide if I should maybe take 4 pills instead of the usual 5 or maybe 3.5 when my phone rings. I jump. I was hoping it's Elik but it's only Lumka. Sulk.

"Is Elik back?", he says.

"No", I say.

"Where is he? His phone is off", he says.

"I don't know", I say.

"Schucks! I need to talk to him urgently. We have a crisis and I need Elik's brain right now!", he says.

"I don't know where he is. I was hoping you would", I say.

"Tell him to call me as soon as you talk to him", he says.

"Ok", I say.

"You said he took your car right?", he says like a thought just occurred to him.

"Yes", I say.

"Then track it sisi. I gotta go", he says.

How didn't I think of this before! Seriously. I can be so dumb sometimes it's shocking! I can track my Jeep then I'll know where Elik is. I go to the Uconnect Vehicle Finder App on my things-fall-apart phone. I click on 'Location' to find out where my car is. It's in Matjiesfontein! Where the hell is that? I click on 'Navigate'. That's almost 3 hours from here. What is Elik doing there?

I have to get there right now, but how? Eeish. I put back the pills in their container and push them behind the cushion. I go online and rent a car from Avis and ask them to bring it to me. I'm not even going to change, I don't have the energy at all. I'm still wearing pyjama shorts and Elik's T-shirt from last night. I attempt to brush my weave and braid it at the back so it leaves my face alone. It's just a messy braid when I'm done but at least it's behind me now.

There's the kids though! I can't just leave but also I can't wait till after school then drive to Matjiesfontein. I'm pregnant and driving alone so I might not want to do that at night. Well they have Lizzy. I have to go. Maybe Elik's done with me but I'm not yet done with him. I have to make this right.

Damn you Jay!

I give Lizzy specific instructions and tell her I'll be back soon.

"You don't look alright though madam", Lizzy says.

"I'm fine", I snap at her.

I just made her point. I'm far from fine but I can drive 3 hours I'm sure. All I need is a lot of Red Bull, dried fruit and water.

I stop mid journey and my back is killing me. I can do this though. I have to do this. I need to get to Elik. I've left the greenery of the Western Cape and now it's just dry arid land of the Karoo. It kind of reminds me of Namibia. I have to keep moving. I keep checking my App to make sure the car is still there and it is. I don't know what to expect. I hope he's not with a girl there because we already have this to deal with so I can't be dealing with that as well. I can't be saying sorry and asking 'why Elik?' at the same time!

I'm in Matjiesfontein town but GPS keeps saying I have another 14 km to go. This place is like a desert and there's no life here. Only old buildings and a few cars here and there. I drive. I think I'm leaving the town and this looks like most beginning scenes of horror movies. I have to trust my App though. I leave the tarred road and join a gravel road so I have to proceed slowly.

I think I'm entering a farm of sorts but the gate is wide open so I don't know. I end up at a cabin near a small river. Horror movie loading. I approach slowly and the voice in my GPS says 'You've arrived'. There's my Jeep on the other side. Phew! At least. But doubt attacks me. What if he left the car here and left? What if he is with someone in there?

I pull up and get out of the car. It's so quiet and peaceful in a scary way here. The sound of the water flowing over rocks and falling on more water is so soothing. I

stay by the bank of the river a bit to prepare myself and think of what exactly I'm going to do. Crying works all the time and Elik might feel sorry for me. But that will mean the problem remains unsolved and he'll still hate me after the tears dry. I always preach talking about things and being honest so maybe I should practice what I preach. I knock on the door but nothing. I keep knocking but still nothing. Now I'm worried.

I try the door and it opens. I'm not sure whether to get in or not. You know when you know your man is very generous with his body you might not want to just walk in. I can forgive knowing he did ABC but I can't forgive catching him doing the ABC! How would I ever erase that image from my mind?

I don't know whether I should keep standing here or go on in or that's a stupid move. But me and stupid are best friends so I go in anyway. It's pretty neat for a small place with minimal furniture. There's a couch at least. I make it towards what I think is the bedroom. There's empty bottles of alcohol sprawled all over the floor and Elik is passed out on the bed there by the corner. My heart just breaks. I did this to him didn't I? I had one job, to keep him together, and I failed.

I stand there watching him and I can feel tears burning in my eyes. He's topless so I cover him with a fleece blanket and plant a kiss on his forehead. I want to sleep next to him but he's stinking of alcohol and it's making me want to throw up. Besides, I don't want him to wake up and panic and push me off the bed.

I leave and go to that couch I saw. I throw down the pizza box on it and drag the couch so that it blocks the main door then lie there. I don't want to wake up and he's gone! I can sleep a bit now. At least I found him.

I was very tired and when I wake up it takes a minute to register where exactly I am and what I'm doing here. Elik is standing there looking down at me as I sit up and rub my eyes.

"Fierce?", he says.

He's looks tired and isn't topless anymore. His T-shirt looks dirty but at least it's black so it doesn't really show.

"What are you doing here?", he says.

He doesn't sound too pleased to see me.

"Where's the bathroom?", I say.

He just points and I go there. I take the time in there to wake up and recollect my thoughts. I just left the house looking like I'm going to bed. How am I supposed to seduce him now looking like this? If talking fails I might need to appeal to his weakness but I don't think that will work looking like this.

When I get out, he's still standing where I left him and he's not smiling at all. I see he moved the couch back to its position! I feel so small in front of him. I try to give him a hug but he steps back.

Ouch.

"What are you doing here?", he says.

"I had to find you baby. Can we talk about this, please", I say.

"I have nothing to say to you so you can go back now. How did you even find me anyway?", he says.

"Tracker", I say.

"Oh! Track your way back to Cape Town then. I need my peace", he says.

Surely he doesn't mean that.

"Do you hate me?", I ask.

I need to know before I start explaining myself.

"What kind of question is that?", he says.

"Please. I need to know. Do you hate me?", I say.

"Hate you? Don't ask me dumb questions. Now if you don't mind. Get yourself back to Cape Town before it gets dark", he says.

I swallow hard.

"It's not what you think baby. Please give me a chance to explain", I say.

He looks at me and his eyes look like he's ready to either cry or to kill me. I'm not quite sure. He sighs and walks into the bedroom and sits on the bed. I follow.

"Oh you wanna talk? Fine. Start talking then. What are you waiting for? And don't you dare think of lying to me", he says.

I keep quiet. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath and clenches his fists.

What option do I have? I need to tell the truth because lies require more lies and it never ends well.

"Who's Jay?", he gets straight to the point.

"Some guy in Accra", I say.

"Awesome! My girl is a slut! We were in Accra for what? 3 days and you already found yourself a man? Well done!", he says.

"No baby it's not like that", I say.

"It's like what then?", he says.

I keep quiet.

"Speak dammit!", he shouts.

He grabs me by the shoulder and for a moment there I really thought he was going to beat me up. He let's me go though and starts pacing.

"Who is he? Do I know him?", he says.

"Yes", I say.

"From where? Can you just speak already!", he snaps.

"He's that guy from Shaka Zulu that came to us last time", I say and look down.

He punches the wooden wall so hard I thought it would fall. I can tell he's fuming. I'm sure this talk won't end without him beating me up.

"So you mean to tell me that kid that I left you with has been sleeping with you behind my back? I left you with him Fierce because I trusted you. I knew that my girl, my woman, would never cheat on me. Boy, I was so wrong", he says.

He picks up an empty bottle and throws it at the wall and I cringe.

"No Elik. I didn't sleep with him I swear", I say.

"You are pregnant with my child Fierce but you went and fucked another guy?

How low can anyone get? How the fuck do you expect me to feel about that?", he says.

"I didn't. I swear", I say.

He comes towards me and I'm thinking maybe I should pray before I die. I think this is what my ending looks like. He lifts my chin up so hard it hurts and looks me straight in the eye and holds the stare. I don't know what he's looking for in there but I keep looking back at him.

"Did you sleep with him?", he says.

"No I didn't", I say.

He sighs and I think he looks relieved. So he believed me just by looking into my eyes as I spoke? Alright, I can work with that. He walks out and slouches on the couch.

"Come", he says.

I go. I don't know what he means but I go to him anyway. He sits and folds his legs on the couch. I get it though so I sit on the other end, fold my legs and face him.

"So tell me everything and don't even think of lying Fierce. Everything. What's going on between you and this Jay?", he says.

"I had his number from last time. So now when we were in Accra and I found the condoms in your jeans and I found out you had slept with someone else, I couldn't be around you", I say.

I'm looking down and playing with my fingers. I feel so guilty and it's embarrassing for me to say out loud what I did. Can't he just forgive me without making me narrate my shame? Will he forgive me in the first place?

"Oh. So you went out to get your revenge? Is that it? Damn it Fierce! You came back that evening and we talked and you let me fuck you knowing fully well that another man was all over you earlier!", he says.

I don't like his tone or his choice of words but I'll let that slide for now. Besides, he's the one who had slept with someone else the previous night not me!

"I didn't sleep with him though!", I say.

"Then what happened?", he says.

I keep quiet.

"You know what. I'm not going to keep asking you questions and begging for answers. If you don't want to talk, get out", he says.

I drove all this way so getting out is not an option. I'd rather talk.

I tell him everything from the time I left the hotel to the time we got to Jay's room at rez. I keep looking down. I actually cheated on him and I feel so terrible about it. He keeps quiet and keeps looking at me. I'm looking down but I can feel his eyes boring through me.

"You still haven't explained what he meant when he said he enjoyed you?" he says. He's so much calmer now or I think.

"We kissed", I say.

I look up and catch his eye and I'm terrified. He's far from calm. He is boiling with anger.

"I'm so sorry baby. I was hurt and angry and my emotions were all over the place. I'm sorry. I didn't mean it", I say.

"Did you enjoy it?", he says.

What? How do I answer that? Is that a trick question maybe?

“Oh well, umm, no not really”, I say.

That question caught me off guard.

“Was it good?”, he asks.

These questions though! How do I answer that? I actually enjoyed kissing Jay but how do I look at my man and tell him that?

“It was a brief kiss baby. Just 2 seconds. It wasn't a serious kiss. He just kissed me from nowhere. I didn't feel anything really”, I tell my first lie.

He sighs.

“Maybe I should just buy you a one way ticket to Accra so you can go and be with your boyfriend. I think I should do that actually now that I think of it. I told you I wanna make you happy. So I'll make you happy and send you to your lover in Accra”, he says.

The fact that I know he would actually do it makes me jolt and sit up.

“No Elik. I don't want to go there. I wanna stay here with you. I made a mistake and I'm sorry baby. Please forgive me”, I say.

“Is that not what you want? Didn't you and him agree that he should replace me? He went all poetic on you saying I'm not a mountain I can be moved! And that made you happy right? So me and him share the same vision, making you happy. I'll make you happy by letting you be with him”, he says.

Well, I didn't say any of those things. Jay did and I didn't say yes. I just laughed! It will do me well to shut up though right now.

“Give me all his details. I need him found”, he says.

I feel a shiver run down my back. I can't let anything happen to Jay. I led him on and I can't have him punished or worse killed for that. I can't let that happen.

"Please baby. I know I did wrong but please don't do anything to him", I say.

"Have you ever seen me do anything to anyone? Don't be silly", he says.

Is he serious or joking? I can't tell.

"Give me all the information on him or get out", he says.

I keep quiet and I stay put.

"I'm not going to ask again", he says.

"But baby...", I say.

"No actually, you know what. Get out. I'm done talking. I can't look at you right now. Just get out", he says.

I thought we were making progress. Just great. Fine. I'll get out. I'm still holding my keys anyway so I get out and sit in the backseat of my hired car and just let the tears fall. I need to decide right here right now. Do I go back in there and beg him or do I jump into the driver's seat and drive away?

CHAPTER 87

I'm too tired to drive so I'll take a power nap. Besides I need my emotions to settle down. It's past 4 now so I'll be up at 5 and maybe find a hotel close by to check in for the night. Cape Town is too far. For someone older than me, Elik is such a child! I get that he's angry but he's being unreasonable. I've forgiven so much of his cheating but he won't let a kiss go? And the way he spoke to me! The nerve!

Half the time I wanted to laugh. I can't believe he's so upset with me over a simple kiss. He treated me like I'm whore of the year! And I'm worrying for poor Jay. Since Elik can't exactly punish me, he will want to punish him. I won't let that happen though. Thankfully Jay isn't his real name to begin with, it's just an initial.

I can't sleep. I keep feeling like getting back in there and going on my knees and begging him. I also feel like getting in there, picking up a beer bottle and hitting him with it continuously until he apologises for leaving our home. I also feel like staying right here, feeling sorry for myself, if only I had chocolate. Sleep is just not happening at all. The guilt won't leave me alone.

I have to sit up, grow up and make hard decisions. I could choose to be as hot headed as he is and drive away or I can be the bigger person and swallow my pride. I can tell myself the truth it's fine, I won't tell anyone. First I need to establish why I love Elik. I've been asked this question before and my answer is usually a short laugh and 'I just love him'. I have so many reasons though, some that only make sense in my head. In no particular order, I list all the reasons I love him. I'm actually talking out loud because I need to hear this because it will affect the decision I'll make.

1. He has money.

Lots and lots of it. I don't remember what being broke felt like and I don't want to remember.

2. He's hot.

Those eyes, those lips, that complexion, that physique! He's a dark chocolate that I can't stop craving. Add that voice and I'm down on my knees thanking him for being born.

3. He's a sex god.

Need I say more? He totally rewrites the Kama Sutra. At least I'm getting something out of his whoring and cheating ways. He brings the experience home. Ok that's just messed up. DELETE.

4. He's my virginity taker.

On a wooden desk, one late afternoon, I cried out in pain and I emerged not a virgin.

5. He smells good.

Damn he smells divine!

6. He's future husband.

He wants to marry me. He actually wants to.

7. He's the guardian of my galaxy.

He's possessive and overprotective. He had a man thrown in jail and a woman deported and banned from the country for me. Now if that's not love I don't know what is.

8. He gave me his children.

Those children are my life! The best gift Komla ever gave me.

9. He talks.

He opens up and he breaks down the walls. I need that. He tries very hard and trying is all I need.

10. He's a manly man.

He's not a pushover. When he gets serious he gets very serious. When he makes a serious decision it's final. When he commands me it's sexy.

11. I'm kinda pregnant.

And single mum things, nah. Not for me. I won't manage.

12. He disowned, I was disowned.

And in our lack of family we are united. And in our brokenness we are whole.

13. I'm his saving grace (Or I think).

I feel the need to save him from himself. He's a whole bomb of emotions and childhood trauma and mummy issues and could self destruct if yours truly doesn't rescue him.

14. He's my Black Panther.

He's my king and protector. He makes me feel like I'm safe and secure in Wakanda. Through my darkest times, he was my warrior and he stood there by me and held me up. Everytime I woke up in hospital, his face was the first one I saw.

15. He's such a charmer.

He chooses me every time, well except that one time he chose Komla. That was a bummer. He compliments me without fail and makes me feel beautiful.

16. We've been together for so long.

I can't imagine finding someone else and starting from zero. I can't remember what it was like before him. Every memory I have is tied to him.

17. He's good and bad.

Despite his cheating (which I've gracefully made peace with, judge me not) and sometimes his temper and his selfishness and his moronic behaviour and his running away from situations like he did now and his lack of seriousness, he's a

very good guy. He kind of walks that fine line in between good and bad with a perfect stride. I mean he's as good as coke zero paired with a chip roll and as bad as period pains.

19. He's got money for days.

I probably mentioned that already but he's got so much money I have to mention it twice.

20. I love him.

With everything in me, I love him. He's my exciting, wonderful, glorious, chaotic, stressful mess that I sometimes love to hate and hate to love. He's my heartbeat. In as much as he gives me heaven on earth, his hell always draws me closer to him.

Thinking is hard and so exhausting! I could sit here and justify why I shouldn't be with him or blame him for my fuckery. I have many excuses lined up for what I did with Jay. But bottom line, I cheated and I was sloppy about it so I got caught and that's that. I have to face the consequences like a big girl.

But he threw me out! That handsome jerk! This thinking business is really tiring. I might as well drive away and look for that hotel and maybe get some sleep. GPS says there's one, 16 km from here. I drive all the way to the tarred road then I make a U-turn. I can't leave like this. I feel so terrible and so angry and so guilty, I just want to talk to him. It takes me a good 30 minutes outside with the engine still running, deciding whether to go in or not to go in. He was so pissed earlier!

Maybe I could find an Akon song on my phone and throw my phone through the window at the back and hope he thinks it cute. Ok bad idea. My phone is already broken and I don't think even Akon can sing me out of this mess today.

Fine I'll go in. This is Elik. What's the worst that could happen? Technically, a whole lot could go wrong but whatever, he's my personal person and I'm not scared of him. Oh great, he didn't lock the door so maybe he wants me to come back?

I was never ready for the sight that's in front of me. I thought he would still be angry or drinking or throwing things around or punching walls. But he's sitting on the edge of the bed with his face in his hands.

"Elik?", I say.

Nothing.

"Baby?", I say.

Nothing.

Oh man whatever, I lift up his head up. He needs to man up and look at me and listen. I already deal with tantrums from his children, I can't deal with tantrums from him as well!

His eyes are red and he looks like his puppy just died. He looks up at me and says nothing. I keep looking at him. I want to hug him and hold him for a long time. I want to open up my heart so he can see how sorry I really am. I want to time travel and go back to the past and undo that afternoon with Jay. I want him to be alright. And right here, he's not ok. He's hurt and angry and it's my fault.

He returns to holding his face in his hands and looking down. I walked in here meaning to give him a piece of my mind and call him out of his name and argue my case. I'm a relatively good girl. Next to him I'm an arch-angel and he has no right to make me feel this bad for just a kiss and chats. But looking at him, I'm at a loss of words. Guilt just consumes me.

"Baby. Look at me", I say.

He looks up.

"We need to talk about this. I need you to hear me Elik", I say.

He nods. Wow. Alright.

"Go to the couch baby. I'll come talk to you just now, I just need a moment alone, ok?", he says.

Wow! Who is this nice person here and what did they do to my angry Elik?

I lift his face up and give him a kiss on the lips and thankfully he doesn't resist. He doesn't kiss back but he also doesn't resist. I need him to know that I still love him.

A couple of minutes later he joins me on the couch and we sit facing each other.

He says now he's ready to talk and he promises to remain calm.

"Am I holding you back Fierce? Do you want to go and be with someone else? Am I standing in your way?", he starts.

"No baby. I want to be with you. I don't want to be with anyone else", I say.

"That idiot of yours called me a jerk and you let him! That made me feel so disrespected by you", he says.

Well that's how he felt but that's not what it was.

"I'm sorry about that. The whole thing shouldn't have happened baby. It meant nothing", I say.

"So why did you keep talking to him? I don't understand! If it meant nothing why did you keep talking to him?", he says.

Sigh.

Let me break it down for him.

"I don't have anyone Elik. In case you haven't noticed, I don't have family to talk to, I don't have friends to turn to. I only have you and Lumka and Kofi. And those two are your people and their loyalty lies with you. So I don't have anyone to turn to when you cheat or you disappear or when we fight. So that day, I was in that situation and I was all alone. I had no one to call. I'd just found out that you had slept with another woman and I was so hurt. And since I couldn't exactly talk to you because you know, you did that, I turned to Jay. I needed to vent and he was willing to listen so I spoke to him. It was wrong of me yes but you have no idea how broken my heart was. I don't mean to shift the blame but the only reason I went running to him in the first place was because I kept seeing you getting it on with another girl in my head and it was driving me crazy. I couldn't look at you and I was so mad at you. I needed to vent. I needed to be heard", I say.

He keeps quiet. I keep quiet.

"I'm sorry baby. I'm so sorry for this. It will never happen again, I promise. Please forgive me", I plead.

I get off the couch and kneel down next to him and throw my hands around him. I can't lose him. One, because I love him too much to be without him. Two, because we've come so far together and have been to hell and back hand in hand. Three, because after all the panel beating, the stitching, the mending, the plastering, the patching and the repairing I've done with Elik, I can't let him go and have another woman pick him up as a finished product! I put a lot of work in this man!

"I love you Elikplim. Only you. I wouldn't trade you for anything. I don't want any other man", I say.

He rubs his hands together. I think he's trying not to get angry with me again. I'm just glad he's listening.

"I didn't read all your messages. I read enough to give me the idea that you were very comfortable talking to this guy. He told you to leave me and you didn't say no. You bared a part of your soul to someone else Fierce. To another man! That right there pushed me over the edge. It took me by surprise because I couldn't get how my perfect Fierce who's loyal to death could do this to me. Why baby? Help me understand", he says.

See what I mean? It takes a while but when he wants to communicate he does and I would like to take credit for that. So I can't give him up after moulding him like this.

"I turned to Jay because I'm always afraid that you'll go cheating on me again and I guess I needed someone to vent to and make me feel loved when that happens. I needed someone to make me feel like I mattered should you go and be with

someone else for the night. I needed an escape baby. I had no intentions of pursuing a relationship or anything like that with him. I just wanted to know I had somewhere to turn to should you decide to, you know", I say.

He looks at me, then looks away.

"I was wrong though I admit and I'm sorry. Please baby", I say.

I'm kneeling and holding him. I think I'm begging him and maybe it looks pathetic but I don't care what it looks like. Elik has seen me at my worst. Pride is not something I have around him. I'm truly sorry and I'm willing to beg for his forgiveness if I have to.

He just lets me apologise and hold on to him and he just keeps looking away!

"No. I'm sorry", he says eventually.

I look up and I'm thinking what? I guess he's said sorry so many times the words come out naturally. Or does he mean he's sorry he can't do this anymore, we are over. That last thought stabs at my heart like a double edged sword and I actually let out a shallow scream before the tears fill my eyes. Oh bother! I said I wasn't going to cry. What's wrong with me!

"You are mine Fierce. All mine! I don't want any man touching you. Do you understand that? The thought alone drives me mad. You are my girl. All mine", he says.

He helps me up and makes me sit on the couch in between his legs and allows me to lean back on him.

"Don't cry baby. It's ok", he says.

My heart does a young gwara gwara. This is more like it. I'm on the right path towards being forgiven. My tears are magical. Everytime they fall Elik's heart melts!

"Listen. I know maybe I overreacted. But when it comes to you baby girl, I can't control myself. You alone have the power to make me and you alone have that same power to destroy me", he says.

Those words! I have that much power over him? How though? I'm so weak and always crying and always holding on to him and depending on him for everything. How could I have that much power?

I hold on to his arms and snuggle closer.

"You know baby. I was so angry I couldn't think clearly. The thought of another man sleeping with you made me so furious. I had to leave so I wouldn't hurt you. But I can see clearer now. This is my fault", he says.

Inside I'm thinking 'yes, go on, please Sir'.

"I have this one good girl in front of me. One that's always had my back and who stands by me no matter how many times I mess up. One that I know without a single doubt that she loves me. Then she loses her step one time and what do I do? I flip and punish her. I was angry at you but I think actually I was angry at myself. This is my fault. You just reacted to my actions", he says.

Yes it's your fault! Everything is your fault! I agree with him inside my head. But I just lean in closer and keep my lips zipped. We stay there, quiet for a while. It feels good that he's gently rubbing my arm. I know I still have him.

"I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'm sorry I'm making you to become this person. I don't want that. I don't want you to become like me and I end up dating myself. It won't work. I love you baby because you are everything I'm not. You have a beautiful heart and you are patient with me. I value loyalty Fierce. You know that. I can't share you. I won't", he says.

I keep quiet. I need everything he's said this far to sink in. I need to decide if he's being genuine or if he's just wanting this fight to end already. I decide he's being genuine.

"I'm going to talk to Jay and tell him that me and him can't chat anymore. I'll cut all contact with him", I say.

He kisses me on my head.

"I'll appreciate that", he says.

We just sit there and it feels good to know he's still here and still wants me and isn't going to throw me away.

I'm going to grow up and stop seeking for attention from other men. It's childish and uncalled for. So what if he cheats? Will me cheating back balance the scale or it will just destroy us? I need to respect him, he's right.

I apologise some more and he says he has forgiven me. He points out that had I slept with the guy though, we would be done.

"I thought I would find you here with some girl. I was so scared", I say.

He rubs my arm for a while but I'm patient, so I wait.

"I won't say I didn't consider it. I actually thought of hooking up with someone and taking them to a hotel somewhere to destress", he says.

Ya ne! Some honesty! When I say I want honesty sometimes I mean I want it after it's been filtered and reworded.

"I thought long and hard about it though. And in as much as I was angry with you I realised that we were in that situation because of me and these girls. So I couldn't. I promised you I'd stop and I'm glad I managed to resist that urge", he says.

"I'm glad too", I say.

"How did you end up here? Whose cabin is this anyway?", I think I can ask now that the fire is dying down.

"It's mine", he says.

"We own a cabin now? How come I didn't know that?", I say.

I turn my face around to look at him.

"No. WE don't own it. I own it. It's mine", he says.

My facial expression says 'what?'.
My facial expression says 'what?'.

"Lumka owns part of this farm and he gave me this cabin years ago. It's my safe hideaway. I sometimes drive down from Joburg to be alone. I haven't been here in a long time though", he says.

"It's in the middle of nowhere!", I say.

"That's the whole point", he says.

So Lumka has a farm now! How much money exactly do these guys have?

“Do you bring girls here?”, I blurt out then quickly cover my mouth. That just came out. I was thinking it and I didn't mean to say it out loud.

He makes me turn around and face him. Eye contact is everything to him.

“I've never brought anyone here. This is MY space! I mean even you, I didn't bring you here, you brought yourself”, he says.

I believe him. But that last part had me blinking fast. Does Elik hear himself when he talks?

“Not that I'm complaining. I'm glad you came. I was in so much pain I might have done something stupid. I'm grateful that you came to save me once again. Thank you”, he says.

I squeeze his hand to say ‘it's all good. I know I'm your saviour and you are nothing without me’.

We've been talking for so long, I'm starving now! But since I was wrong here I can't just say ‘End of discussion’ and change the topic to food.

“Baby. Do you know why those messages upset me so much?”, he says.

I shake my head but keep my eyes on him.

“They made me realise that you actually could leave me. That you really could walk away from me and be with someone else. I can't have that. If I lose you I'll have lost everything. No girl has ever meant what you mean to me”, he says.

I look down and my heart smiles.

“All those girls I slept with meant absolutely nothing to me. In fact I hated myself everytime I got with them. It just proved everyone's opinion of me right. But for the longest time baby, I couldn't stop and I was beginning to accept it as fun just for my own absolution. I fucked them yes, and it was just that. But I've only managed to make love to you”, he says.

I just keep looking at him and he drops his eyelids and looks down. He knows that last part was unnecessary! Maybe it made sense in his head but nope it doesn't sound right at all.

“I promise, I'm going to try as hard as I can not to hurt you anymore. I'm grown up now baby and I know what I want in life. I want you. I learnt a lot from my time with Komla and now I know what I don't want in love. I'm not going to be selfish, or immature or all that stuff. I want to be open with you and tell you everything like you always encourage me to. I want to listen to you and make decisions with you. You know that I look at everything I have as ours, right? Fine, I put in the work but the money and everything that comes from it is ours. We are a team now baby. You mean everything to me and my only wish is that I make you happy and treat you right. I know I probably have a long way to go and I might make mistakes along the way. But I'll try hard. Please keep helping me”, he says and looks at me. Those eyes! Those eyes make me want to take off this T-shirt!

He's so precious. And at least he says he's going to try and not he's absolutely going to do. I don't want statements of action that are not seen through so I

prefer a promise to try. He's a work in progress. When everyone sees a horrible human that I should run away from, all I see is a man I'd do anything for and I would drive across the karoo to find. He's a diamond covered in mud, I just need to keep washing the mud away to get to that sparkle.

And I love the turn of events. He's the one apologising now! This is good. I sit at an angle and wrap my arms around him. If there's one thing I'm thankful for is finding a man that allowed me to teach him to talk and to open up. Sometimes the things that come out of his mouth leave me wondering about his state of mind but he talks and that's all I'm thankful for. That way we get to work things out faster. He handled this better than I thought, I must say. I thought I'd be dodging beer bottles and probably get thrown into that small river.

I can't believe I made it all this way in pyjama shorts! Talk about temporary insanity!

"Anyway hunn. Please call Lumka. He said he needs your brain", I say.

"Doesn't he have a brain of his own?", he says.

"Probably one of his girls stole it", I say.

At least we laughing now. The way we laugh at Lumka and his girls you'd swear dear Elik here isn't the same if not worse.

The sun has already set by the time we step outside. He laughs at me for having blocked the door with the couch earlier. Well, a girl had to make sure her man doesn't leave without hearing her out.

I bring up my hunger and he says he's starving too. He says there's no food in the cabin though so we have to drive out to see if we can grab something.

"You stinking", I say.

His T-shirt smells of beer.

"I still look better than you in that T-shirt!", he says.

Mxm. I don't look that bad, he's lying.

"You can have that T-shirt. It looks cute on you", he says.

He said I look bad in it a second ago and now he's saying I look cute in it? And what does he mean I can have the T-shirt? I can have any of his T-shirts and I'll wear whichever one I want. I don't need permission.

We drive down to the farm quarters and the tuckshop is closed! There's nothing! We ask and we are told to drive down the main road to a garage kiosk. Some 10 km later we get a garage with a tiny shop. All they have is the last loaf of bread. You can tell by looking at this bread that it's been here for days. It's not fresh at all and the crust is so dry. We buy that though and a can of baked beans and the closest they have to a drink is Drink O'pop, the sweet-aid powdered drink. I get the cream soda. We just have to make do today. I told him we should drive towards town but he's stubborn!

We make it back to the farm and it's getting dark but there's still dim light on the horizon. There's no cutlery here or plates or cups or anything, I use an empty 1 L bottle in the boot of the car to dilute the sweet aid.

We sit by the river bank, behind the cabin and have our supper. Since the bread is unsliced, we have to break it with our hands then take the open can of beans and pour on the bread then eat and pass the 1 L bottle of drink between each other. I think this is what serenity looks like.

"I should write a book about everything we've been through", I say.

"You want people to hate me for being such a demon and for treating an angel so badly?", he says and kisses me.

"Come on. You not that bad. Well maybe a little. But on a serious note, what do you think? ", I ask.

"Go ahead and write the book. People wouldn't believe you anyway", he says.

CHAPTER 88

So I have succumbed to societal norms and I'm throwing a housewarming party this evening. It was my idea because with the way our lives go, I feel like we need to celebrate every passing day. I've never thrown a party before or been to a housewarming party before. I hope no one buys me those 6 pack water glasses or those wall clocks from China Town. I actually don't want gifts. I hate gifts. They make me feel like I need to buy the giver a gift as well in future and I hate walking around feeling like I owe someone something. And I might never get to use the gift anyway.

I've been up and down buying alcohol and having people look at me funny in liquor stores because I'm pregnant! People, always so quick to judge! Hennessy and Courvoisier for Elik, Gin and Tonic for Lumka, Malibu, Vodka, Wines, Savanna and Castle Light for whoever shows up and wants that. Elik said as long as there's meat and alcohol then everything will be fine. If you saw us right now, you'd forget that someone had run off to the Karoo and someone had panicked and followed him.

I don't have many people on the guest list. I don't even have 10! It might just end up being a group discussion with refreshments instead of a party. When I first wrote it I had 3 names on it. Fierce, Elik and Lumka. Elik said it's fine Lumka could organise girls to liven the party up. It's worrying that he didn't see anything wrong with that statement. And no he wasn't joking.

And who knew! Lumka was actually serious about trying it out with Thando so he's bringing her and her friends from Joburg. Elik insisted that I invite my 'friends' a.k.a lab mates and I said no, they are busy and stuff, but he wasn't having it. I tried to argue but it wasn't open for discussion, it was "Fierce invite your friends from your lab. Fullstop".

I don't want Bunke and Elik within 100 m of each other seeing that I sought of forgot to mention that Bunke was back from Florida. One misplaced word could blow my world apart. And Bunke kind of saw me and Elik having sex in the lab so I don't know if he has forgotten that image. Elik might recognise him as well and

who he is then kaboom. It's pointless to stress in advance. I'll cross that bridge when we get there. In the meantime, the guys are invited.

On days like this, I wish Kofi was around. He's the life of the party and I really miss him. He gets me and can cheer me up in microseconds. And he says things as they are, one trait he takes from his 'brother'. If I wasn't pregnant I'd have gone to visit him already.

I don't even know what I'll wear because well, this stupid stomach just keeps growing! I don't know how women say they enjoy being pregnant! How? This is pure torture! What's there to enjoy here? Unless if your idea of enjoyment is being unable to wear whatever you want and feeling anxious all the time! And I want to have sex, like all the time! At least the orgasms are off the charts. I guess that's why Elik doesn't mind my weird cravings and mood swings because he knows I apologise the best way I know how. At least the mood swings are better now and the morning sickness only comes around to say hi like once a week or so.

Elik has been 'busy' on his laptop all day. Shame, he missed an important meeting in Zambia when he was out in the Karoo throwing tantrums and he's been doing 'damage control'. But he's been using that excuse everytime I ask him to do something! He's lying I know. He just doesn't want to do anything! He only got busy when I gave him a list of things I needed him to do! Lazy bones.

It was fun watching him unmount the TV he broke and mounting a new one. He looked so sheepishly shame but I didn't lift a finger. I just folded my arms and

looked. We can't reward violent behaviour! And he got a car for himself. I'm jealous and I'll be driving it all the time, he'll see. I'm just glad should he want to run off again, he won't take my car. He got me a phone as well and he backed up all my settings, apps and configurations and restored them on the new phone. It looks just like I have my old phone. I could have done it myself but he wanted to do it so I let him. Making him feel better is something I deserve a PhD in.

Anyway all is set and my house is ready to be warmed. It has to be warmed from the outside though, I don't want too many people in my house. By 6 pm I say I'm going to go and fetch the guys from campus but Elik insists he will go. He doesn't even know them so I don't know why. He says I must just tell them to be ready and give him their numbers. I try to argue but again, he wasn't really asking. So Elik is going to pick up Bunke. Awesome. My ex and my current in one car. Good times.

When gone, Lumka arrives with Thando and two other girls! I just stand there in my dress wondering if we are casting vixens for a music video or what. These girls are dressed like they are here for a model casting. You can see they took hours getting ready. They are on fleek, jealous down! At least they are nice. They say hi and give hugs. They are just happy people and it's refreshing. Thando gives me a half hug and I just roll my eyes.

They ask if they can help with anything. I ask that they take care of the drinks and just make sure everything is there. I can just tell they know how to party and they

are really nice and sizzling hot too. If I was Thando I wouldn't let those girls around my man!

Lumka pulls me aside and asks that I play nice with Thando. I say I will if she will. I'll try my best though. He goes to get started with the braai stands and I go and change because well, those girls kind of made me feel like a maid over here. When I'm done I look so much better.

These girls have already started the party all by themselves! They would have made good friends had we met in my early university days. I'm so glad for them whoever they are, they will bring the party alive. I forgot their names already because they will never hang out with me again so why waste storage space in my brain by downloading unnecessary names?

I'm just looking at the one dancing and I'm thinking, "Dang, she's flames!". I feel like asking her how many squats you do per day to get your ass to look like that! She's the kind of girl your man cheats on you with and you say, "I don't blame you baby. I understand completely".

Lizzy made all the food so there isn't much to do. I'd said we buy but she'd said cooked is better, so she cooked and I made the salads. Perfect division of labour. Me and the girls sit outside and talk. They talk and I sip on my lemonade and listen. The conversation jumps from which foundation is better between the liquid and the stick to sex very fast. These girls are certified harlots! The stories! My

word! My mouth hasn't really closed in the past 10 minutes. As soon as I close it one of them says something that makes my jaw drop again.

So these two girls here slept with some guy they are calling 'Juicifer'. Juicifer because apparently he's a lucifer in bed but he's also king of juice boxing so hence the name. They say this guy did things to them they can't get over and they are generous with details. Apparently, this guy is the ultimate dickmatiser and had them falling in love after just the one night. I just sit there looking at them and wanting to lay my hands on them to pray for their deliverance. Good gracious!

The detail is too much like I can almost see this guy in my head. But I'm an engaged woman I have no business imagining naked guys! Both of them apparently slept with this Juicifer entity, at different times though. What a stupid name! How are they ok with having slept with the same guy and then discussing it? I just raise an eyebrow and sip on my lemonade.

When Thando starts talking about Lumka, that's my cue to leave. I have a certain level of respect for him and I don't want to see him in that light. I excuse myself and go into the house. I honestly can't allow my ears to hear about Lumka's performances. Eeewww.

Elik gets back so now I can go out and see if Bunke is still alive. Elik is over there by the pool arguing with Lumka! It looks serious because he's actually shouting and using his hands. That's a first! He looks pissed. I kind of like things so if I'm being

honest my walking across to them is just to find out what the fight is about. They keep quiet when they see me approach!

“Hey. What are we talking about here?”, I say.

“Business”, they both say.

Mxm! They are so annoying. I want to know. I'll make Elik tell me later when we in between the sheets!

I leave them and go say hi and give my lab mates a tour of my house. Ndivhu is thoroughly impressed, Brain keeps pointing out silly things like how my choice of curtains is depriving me of external light. I tell him I hate natural light so I knew exactly what I was doing with these curtains. Bunke looks like he's impressed but doesn't want to show it.

When the tour is over and we go outside, I'm told those pretty girls just left! I thought they were staying, I didn't know they were passing by. They said they were staying. Is my party that boring? They were fun though and they had sex stories for days, I'm sad they are gone. Now I have to hang around Thando alone. Just great! I ask Elik why the girls left and he says what girls. I say Lumka's girls and he says “Oh well ask Lumka”. I guess whatever they were fighting about with Lumka was serious and now he's grumpy. I'll get him a double shot of Hennessy on the rocks to calm his tits.

Anyway the party goes on. Bunke is playing with the twins. I don't know where they came from! I couldn't find them earlier. The way they just get along with people bothers me. That means they can be easily stolen mos! I need to address

that soon. I actually wonder if Elik made the connection of who Bunke is. I think I'll ask Lumka.

"Are you and Elik fine?", I ask.

"We good", he says and I can tell he doesn't want to discuss it.

"So bhud Lumka. I have a small problem here. That guy over there (I point at Bunke) is that Nigerian guy Elik hates. Should I tell him?", I say.

"Why is he here?", he says.

"Elik insisted. We share a lab you know", I say.

"Just make sure he doesn't say anything", Lumka says.

"Umm. Ok. So should I tell Elik or not?", I say.

"Sisi. Let me tell you something. As a rule of thumb: Never confess things you were not asked", he says.

I look at him.

"If you don't tell Elik, nothing will go wrong. If you tell him, you'll end up running around all night when he's left you here and you'll be busy calling the police and driving across the province looking for him. So just let sleeping dogs lie", he says.

Mxm. Was it necessary to phrase it like that? And the advice Lumka gives me though!

"I don't want to lie to Elik", I say.

"It's not lying if you were not asked! Lying and withholding the truth are two different things. Huge difference! Withhold your truth ke sisi and allow us a peaceful evening please", he says.

I look at him.

“Elik is upset right now. Go and tell him the guy he hates is in his house and playing with his children. Let's see how that will go. He just bought that new TV sisi please. Don't make him break it too. I'm sure he'll drive your car into the swimming pool this time and drown it. Maybe with you in it”, he says.

I can't tell if he's serious or not.

“Fine. I won't tell him. I get it”, he says.

“Good girl. Now go play nice with Thando”, he says.

This guy!

Another group of people just arrived so I go to welcome them. It's a group of guys I don't know with three other girls. Awesome. At least these ones are wearing jeans and look normal. My new hangouts for the evening! Everyone is drinking and I feel so left out. When I tell the girls I can't drink because I'm pregnant they all start saying how I'm glowing and start telling me their own pregnancy stories! One girl says she was in labour for 48 hours! I don't need such horror stories.

At least Thando's attitude has gotten better and she helped me put ice in ice buckets and she actually said I look great and I'm carrying my pregnancy so well it's hardly showing. I can see why Lumka likes her. She can be lively.

Before long, there's like 30 people here. I didn't even know Elik had this many friends in Cape Town! But again it's Africans. For every one person you invite expect at least 3 to show up.

I don't know how I feel about the presence of Lemon though! That guy gives me the creeps with his tattoos and muscles and scars on his face. Maybe it's because I know that he's a drug dealer and a gangster and I know what he's capable of. Ask Athi! I don't want drugs here or in this party. I'm raising two beautiful boys right here and it's my duty to shelter them from such! Those boys are still hanging around alcohol and grown ups by the way!

I find Elik and he assures me everyone will behave. How he knows that I don't know. But he seems so sure so I let it go.

"I'm tired baby. Was it necessary to get me pregnant though?", I whine to him.

"It was necessary. Look how gorgeous you look now. You should be thanking me", he laughs.

He's too silly.

Gosh, can't I finish being pregnant already. Now I'm getting tired so early but I have to stay up.

"Come with me. I need to show you something", I say.

He takes my hand and we go into the house and into our bedroom.

"What?", he says.

"Can I have some, please?", I say and blush immediately after.

I asked like I'm asking for a biscuit.

He laughs but he stops laughing when I take off my dress.

The guests can wait, we'll be done just now.

I'm happier afterwards and we meet Lumka as we go out.

“Seriously? You left us out here and went to get it on?”, he says.

I don't know how he knew. But I blush and leave them. We were just gone 30 minutes what's the big deal?

All is great and I'm going around chatting everyone up and trying to get people to mingle. I even have a chat with Lemon! He has an extreme Cape coloured accent and it's just fun listening to him. Half the time I don't know if he's speaking English or Afrikaans. It's confusing. I have to keep saying, “Say again”. He's full of compliments so I kind of don't dislike him as much as I did earlier. He said I look like his white BMW. I think that's a compliment. I like his silver tooth as well. It's different from these golden ones everyone else has. I still don't want him around us though for obvious reasons.

It's a great party really. Way better than I expected! Elik is happy now, well because he just got some of course and he has alcohol in his hand and Lumka next to him and the twins trying to talk to him, so his life is complete. There's alcohol and meat galore. They are playing house music and I don't know these songs but occasionally I find myself nodding to the beat. We have to keep the music down because of the neighbourhood. These people will be calling the police on us for noise making and we new here so we don't want that label. I was explicitly told that I shouldn't bore people with Akon tonight!

The girls are sitting in a group this side and the men are laughing and braaing more meat that side. So naturally, I go and join the girls. As soon as I sit, Elik pulls me up and says I must come and sit with them rather. I'm like no because come

on now, why should I go and sit with men? He says he misses me and I roll my eyes. Like you just had me, like had all of me so how can you miss me now. I don't want to hear things men talk about! I want to hang out with these girls here. He insists but I refuse and I actually start getting upset when he keeps insisting so he says fine and leaves.

Surprisingly he's not drunk yet! I'm glad. I don't mind him being wasted but I don't want Bunke seeing my man like that. I don't know why I care. He's a fun drunk and will either make you feel like the sexiest thing walking just by his words or give you a full lecture in Robotics or explain to you in fine detail how to hack anyone's phone or computer remotely and if you ask nicely he'll tell you how to bypass security systems and disable alarms. I love that part though. Maybe that's the engineer in me.

I'm fine chilling with the girls though. These girls don't sleep shoo! People are busy at night out here getting it on with strangers for fun. Listening to other people's lives make me realise I'm actually not that bad after all! I'm a saint! They keep talking about their Tinder hookups and I can't stop blinking. I thought Tinder was a dating App! But clearly I'm wrong. So you mean to tell me you hook up with a guy you don't know online? Then have him come to your house? Then let him hit that without you even knowing him? That's crazy! How can they think it's fun! But I won't comment, they said I need to loosen up a bit earlier when I made a similar comment about how hooking up with strangers could leave you dead in a ditch somewhere with your organs being shipped to Russia! I want to ask if the guy pays

you the next morning so I can know if they are selling themselves or if it's just community service. But I can't ask that too.

By 11 pm almost everyone is drunk or getting there and I go to find my man. Even Brain is drunk! Elik is tipsy but he's fine though. He's being a good host I suppose. Thando is sitting on Lumka's lap, I'm sitting on Elik's lap and Peter and Paul are chilling with Lemon and some girls. Elik said they are fine, Lemon won't drug them. This public display of affection in front of my lab mates is uncomfortable for me but Elik sees nothing wrong with 'loving his woman' as he puts it.

Elik talks too much! The lecturer in him is just interrogating everyone about their research fields and PhD projects and future prospects. I'm just glad he doesn't say Chemical engineering is not really engineering. That may be funny to me but these other guys might take offence. Then he starts asking about girlfriends. Lord come quickly! Brain gives his sob story about how his girlfriend dated him concurrently with another guy! Then he says he blames this one girl he has wanted since the first day he laid eyes on her.

"Does she have a name?", Elik asks him.

I cringe.

"Fierce", Brain says and everyone just stops and looks at him. Has he lost his mind?

"Fierce? As in my Fierce?", Elik says.

"Well yes", Brain says and we all just looking at him.

Alcohol be not proud!

"Oh is it now? So why hasn't she said yes to your advances?", he says.

"I don't know man. I don't think she thinks I'm good enough for her. She never gave me the time of day", he says.

Wow Brain! Do you have a death wish?

Lumka changes the subject and Elik is on to Bunke. I have my heart in my throat and I'm pleading Bunke with my eyes, like 'Please don't talk like Brain!'. Bunke says he has a wife but she's back in Nigeria. Phew!

"Wait. Dude I know you from somewhere! You walked in on me and Fierce in your lab that time! It's you, right?"

Wow Elik! I'm a fiancé. A little respect over here please.

"Yup. On my desk. How can I forget?", Bunke says.

"But man! You cock blocked me bad that day. You know she wouldn't let me continue after you left!", Elik says.

We all turn and look at him.

"What?", Elik says.

Have they been smoking weed maybe? Or is this how guys talk?

I've never seen such. I'm sitting on the edge hoping that he doesn't say, 'you are the guy who used to sleep with my girl right?'. Thankfully, Lumka changes the subject again and I can breathe. He's got my back tonight shame. He knows if Elik loses it everyone's night will be spoiled. I'll high five him later.

Elik and Bunke get into a debate about which browser is better between Firefox and Chrome. Like seriously? Isn't it obvious? And how they are making such valid points when alcoholised, I would like to know. I can't make some of those

arguments sober! I'm just looking at these two men that I know all too well and thinking 'I've got taste!'.

Ndivhu is too drunk and is starting to doze off and the kids are dozing shame my little pumpkins. Why didn't anyone think of taking them to bed? We are going to church tomorrow morning and they should be asleep by now. Bunke offers to help me carry Peter and I carry Paul into the house and put them to bed. For the first time he says my house is beautiful and he says Elik really loves me and he spoke about me the whole time I wasn't there with them. Awkward to have that talk with him but ok.

By 1 am it's time up. Party is over. Poor Lizzy. She has serious cleaning to do tomorrow. I call the guys an Uber because no one is driving them to campus at this hour! Lemon leaves with his people and his car is so loud! It's a Citi Golf revamped. It is pimped from top to bottom. It's painted red and Lemon says it was painted using blood. And he says that with that type of smile someone gives you just before they stab you! It's creepy. It even has a sunroof! And it's dropped so low I wonder how it makes it over speed humps! When he drives off it's like there's gunshots firing.

When everyone is gone, it's just Lumka, Elik, Thando and I. I peacefully take a stroll outside to have some fresh air since all the strangers that were in my yard suffocated the life out of me. I sit on a poolside chair and look at the stars shining so bright and listen to my neighbours' dog barking. Thando finds me! Which part of I want to be alone didn't she get?

Sigh.

I hope she's not here to disturb my peace because I want to be alone.

"Nice house girl", she says.

"Thanks", I say.

"The party was lit! Wasn't it?", she says.

"It really was. Thanks to you", I say.

"We will have more of these you'll see. I'll teach you how to do vosho (dance style).

Just give birth first and I'll teach you", she says.

I give a fake laugh. I do vosho probably better than her!

"So, tell me, how did you do it? How did you make Elik leave his wife?", she says.

I look at her long and hard.

"I didn't. It just happened", I say.

"Was it because you got yourself pregnant?", she says.

What? How does one get themselves pregnant? I'm not a flower, I can't self pollinate! Also, I hope she's not implying that I trapped Elik!

"So if I get pregnant do you think Lumka will ask me to marry him as well?", she says.

This girl though! She already has a child. Why would she put herself in that situation again. Lumka can't exactly be trusted. And they just got back together and she already wants to get herself knocked up? Someone needs to apply the brakes.

"Do you love him Thando?", I ask nicely.

"What do you mean?", she says.

"I mean do you really love him? Like you will stand with him no matter what? Like you will do anything for him and will deal with all the stress that comes with him?", I say.

"Hell no. Do I look dumb to you?", she says.

Is that a trick question?

"Come on Fierce, it's not like you love Elik, right? These are not the type of guys to love. You stay with them because they make things happen not because you love them. Love for who? For the what?", she says.

"So Lumka is like a blesser to you?", I say.

I can't believe her really!

"Of course. Elik is that to you too", she says like she knows for a fact. She even looks at me surprised.

This girl, This girl!

I care a lot about Lumka you know! And he really wanted to give this conniving bitch a chance but she's just using him for his money!

"He actually wanted to try with you, you know! He wanted to give your relationship a shot. But you just want to be a gold digger?", I say.

Well Lumka loves her because she's a good lay and she loves him for his money. It's a fair deal if I'm to be fair. But I'm team Lumka here!

I don't learn shame. Those words become my undoing. Yho! The girl stands up and breaks it down for me piece by piece. Her eyes are rolling so much under

those long feather eyelashes I think they will fall out! I stand too, incase I need to hit her you know.

“Listen here Spongebob! You think wena you are all that in a bag of chips ne? That doctor doctor thing is still messing up with your wires upstairs ne? Who the hell do you think you are? I thought I’d let your holier than thou attitude from last time go and give you a chance to actually try and be a decent human being like the rest of us. But clearly you are stuck on being a homo naledi and that pumpkin head of yours doesn’t function. You think you are Beyoncé ne? Still acting like you sleep in heaven and come down to grace the earth with your awesomeness every morning?”, she says. I have to keep moving back to avoid those talons scratching my face! Those nails are so long I wonder how she does anything!

I wasn't ready! She actually called me Spongebob! Is it because I'm wearing a yellow dress? I feel like laughing at her. She looks funny as she keeps looking me up and down like she’s measuring my height or something! But if she keeps talking I swear I’ll hit her and pull that beautiful Malaysian wig off her head! If this girl ran as fast as her mouth, she would be in Europe by now! She keeps spitting venom shame. And now she’s pissing me off.

“Lumka. Come take your trash over here”, I call out.

I think I’m ratchet too. I’m not sure.

“What did you just say? Between me and you, who do you think qualifies as trash? Your problem Dr. Fierce is you've let Elik shelter you and keep you away from the

truth! He's made you think you the finest thing walking the earth! I see your problem dali (darling) and allow me to fix it for you right now!", she says. I'm just looking at her and shaking my head.

"You think Elik loves you too much and would never do anything to you right? You think because he put that ring on your finger it means he's faithful and always waiting patiently to come home to sweet Mother Fierce Theresa. Well, I've got news for you. Guess who Juicifer is? Take a blind guess! Yes, you guessed right. It's Elik! Your man slept with those two girls. And he invited them over here. He wanted them here. Who knows why? Maybe he's bored of you and wanted a threesome with my girls! Who knows?", she says.

Nooooo! Elik can't be that guy those girls were talking about. For real? Goodness gracious! He's such a freak! Like what! He did that to her and he really did that to that other one? Nooooooooooooo! Imagine having listened to girls give a step by step description of what your man did to them. I think I need to sit down. Wow! Whaaaaaaaaaat?

Well, that was in the past though and at least he did them so good they said it was the best they ever had. Gods, the way I justify things is so messed up. I should have known though. It did sound like Elik!

I don't give Thando a chance to see what I'm doing. I push her into the pool and she goes plunging in. How much makeup did this girl have on exactly? The blue water turned muddy around her face! I want to stand here and watch her drown.

I'm going to kill her. Then I'll hunt down those two girls and kill them. Then kill Elik. Then kill Lumka for bringing them here in the first place! Then kill whoever asks why I killed them! Then kill the cops who try to arrest me. I'll kill everyone.

I don't know when but Elik is holding me. I must look crazy now. Lumka is pulling Thando out of the pool.

"What's wrong baby? What's going on?", Elik says.

Lumka holds a dripping Thando in place and keeps telling her to shut it. She looks like a wet chicken with that wet wig.

"Oh I see what's going on here! I had two girls here that slept with my man, standing in my yard! So what was that exactly? What were you all trying to do here?", I say.

"Bro, I told you!", Elik says to Lumka and he just looks at him like 'Sorry bro'.

You know what I'm not going to turn into Komla. I'll breath in then breathe out. I'm going to my bedroom and I'm going to sleep. Those girls did say it was over a year ago so I'm not a historian. I refuse to revisit history when there's enough to deal with in the present.

"Baby", Elik says.

"I'm going to sleep now hunn. I'm tired. Just get this bitch out of my face", I say and ask him to let me go.

I listened to those girls talk about all the mind blowing things Elik did to them! He really did that thing! I thought that was just for me! I'm unable to can. I need to lie down. I can't.

I go into the house and he follows. He's still talking and saying sorry but I'm not mad at him though. I'm mad at Thando! I can't be mad at him. Come on, with him playing Hugh Hefner everywhere he goes, I'm bound to meet my penis-mates at some point and I can't always be upset about it. I tell him I'm good and I'm not even mad at him. I mean he made them leave as soon as he got here. That counts for something. He doesn't believe me and keeps saying he's sorry. I go to shower and he stands by the door saying he's sorry. I don't know how else to convince him I'm fine really. I just want to shave Thando's hair off then steal her wig and throw it away, when she's sleeping, that's all.

Bunke was here too, so in a way, we are even I guess. But Thando so! I'll deal with that girl tomorrow after church. She'll see.

"Are you sure you won't kill me in my sleep baby", he says.

"I'm sure. Now stop worrying and let me sleep. I have church tomorrow morning. Please", I say.

"I don't even remember their names baby. And Lumka just had to allow Thando to bring them here!", he says.

I give up. I said it's fine!

He's just standing there looking guilty and I'm watching him. He's standing against the wall and looks defeated. Damn he looks so fine! I don't know how to explain it but I get up and lock the door. Just seeing him standing there makes me want him so bad. I've been wanting him all evening. I had him earlier but I still want him

some more. I watched him having a chat with Lemon earlier and I was just imagining going down on my knees and letting my mouth and hands worship him. Maybe it's the hormones running through me or it's just the effect he has on me. I'm just drawn to him in a way I can't explain.

I'm supposed to be mad at him right? Why am I not? It wasn't his fault though and I can't hold him accountable for Thando's verbal diarrhoea. I hold him and we just stand there with his chin on the top of my head. I look up and kiss him. I think that took him by surprise. I actually throw myself at him.

"Did I tell you how beautiful you look tonight?", he says and takes off the towel I have around me. Damn his voice!

"You look even more beautiful without anything on", he says.

He pushes me back a little and I stand there in nothing. I'm tempted to cover my boobs because I'm just standing there. It feels like that very first time he undressed me and just looked at me. I'd just blushed and blushed. I don't even think he's blinking and I feel shivers on my skin. He's drinking my body with his eyes and I love how he looks so thirsty for me.

"You are gorgeous!", he says and smacks his lips like I'm a delicious meal waiting to be eaten. I blush some more and look at my toes.

He pulls me in and his lips take mine. His hands grab my bum and he kisses me with so much urgency I'm crying into his mouth in no time. He's crushing, sucking, wanting, punishing and soothing all at once. It's like he wants to prove a point. I hold on to him and keep my eyes closed so I can feel every sensation. I just want

him inside me already. I let him kiss me some more and let our tongues get acquainted with each other. I want his body on mine right now but I'm not there yet. I've been fantasising about kissing him in other ways all evening.

I work the buttons of his shirt and when there's like two left I tear it off him and hear the buttons land on the floor. Now it's just beautiful black skin in front of me. Rope after rope of muscle begging my hands to touch and grab and explore. It's all man in my hands, my man. And I want to touch and run my fingers across his chest and down the length of his hands. I want my eyes to take him in. This body right here is the reason for most of my bad decisions.

He starts to unbutton his jeans.

"Please. Let me", I say.

I push him against the wall then sink down to my knees. The jeans soon join his shirt on the floor and I'm ready to thank give and show reverence. I try not to remember the first time I did this. I used too much teeth and bit him and he had winced. I was embarrassed but he just kept laughing at me! I've had enough practice now though and I won't stop before the job is done. I'm a swallower.

I wipe my lips as he helps me up. Obviously he can't kiss me now so he kisses me on the neck and whispers "I love you so much". Damn his voice! I hold on to him. I need to take in his scent a little longer.

He pushes me onto the bed and I lie on my back. He attacks me like he hates me. He's licking and touching and grabbing and kissing. I swear he has a point to prove tonight! He takes his time returning the favour I gave on my knees. I'm grabbing at

the sheets with one hand and holding his head down with the other when his tongue hits the spot. I take a scream trip to the heavens and I come back breathless. He gives me a second to catch my breath. But I don't want to catch my breath. I don't care about breathing! I just want him. All of him.

"You are so beautiful", he says.

I'm just useless and weak right now. I want him to stop talking and start doing but his hands are not done exploring my body. I'm just a receiver tonight. He pulls me to the edge of the bed, then off the bed and turns me around. I stand with my knees pressed against the base of the bed. I'm trapped between him and the bed. I close my eyes. I need to shut the world out and take all of Elik in. He grabs my neck and makes my head turn so my eyes can look into his. It's straining but what's a little pain?

"Look at me", he says.

I obey and stare into those eyes I love so much.

"You are everything to me", he whispers.

I nod. That's the best I can do right now.

"Are you ready for me?", he says.

I nod vigorously.

I've been ready since the time I saw him standing there looking all kinds of guilty!

"I hate you", I whisper.

"I know. I love you too", he says as he pushes my upper body forwards a little and finds his way into me. I almost fall forwards onto the bed but his hand on my stomach has me locked in place.

My body is like 'welcome home' and I go berserk. I don't care if I'm waking up the whole neighbourhood right now.

"You are all mine", he says into my ear. Take his voice and add sexual passion to it and you have Fierce surrendering herself completely.

I wish I could respond but the speech portion of my brain is on vacation right now and all it knows to say is 'Yes.....Elik'. I'm all his. All of me. He can have me and take me and keep me and do whatever he wants. I don't care. I'm all his. I'm at his mercy. Bound to him by him.

"I love you", he whispers in my ear.

He tries to be gentle at first but with every second it gets ungentler and ungentler and I love every stroke of it. His insatiable need to own my body and his breathing in my ear threaten to send me over the edge. Again.

He lets my upper body fall forwards and I hold onto the sheets and give up all will to hold back. I can feel warm sweat drop onto my back and I say his name. The ride is rocky and intense and selfless and sweaty and amazing. It's good. It's severe. It's primitive and beautifully barbaric. I just want it to never stop.

He sends me over the edge. I couldn't stop it. And maybe it's my screaming or my saying his name over and over again or my shaking legs and trembling body but as soon as I finish my own race he plain right grabs me so hard by my neck and presses my head onto the mattress. He holds my head down and mercilessly slaughters me as he gets here too.

When we are done and I'm catching my breath in his arms and he's running his hand up and down my back. I feel so connected him. I'm just so in love with him and I find myself getting lost in his eyes and saying, 'Promise me you'll never do this to any other woman'.

He laughs a little and kisses me.

"I promise. I won't", he says.

This Juicifer of mines!

CHAPTER 89

Hypnotized - Akon (Elik's song of the day that woke up the whole house!)

At first I thought I was in a concert in Los Angeles and Akon was serenading me. That was fun and I was enjoying it. But the music just wouldn't stop! It just went on and on until I realised it wasn't a dream. Elik was playing his song so loud and singing along! How are we expected to sleep?

Sometimes I wonder where he gets his energy from! I mean, we get that he's in a good mood but he's making my mood sour. I used to think it's just women who wake up singing after a raunchy night but in my relationship it's the man while I continue sleeping like a log.

Akon is singing the walls down all the way from the living room. Elik didn't even have the audacity to close the door, even though we live with children and we are

hosting Lumka and Thando! He has the song on repeat! Like how inconsiderate of the sleeping can one be!

But because it was playing for so long, it's stuck on my head now and I'm just humming to it and it's joining the others in my 'favourite' playlist.

This is my new favourite song.

HYPNOTIZED - AKON

"Oh, I wanna be with you

Oh, I know you want me too

So can I get a toot toot for the lovers tonight

Don't you, love it when it's just right?

Toot toot, it's about to go down

So here we go, here we go now

Why you gotta feel so right?

Why you gotta, why you gotta leave me open wide?

Love it when you love me right

Why you gotta, why you gotta take over my mind?

Every time, why you gotta take over my mind?

Every time, why you gotta leave me hypnotized?

Oh, you got me in your palms

But I want, want you in my arms, yeah

You got my mind, girl, spinning 'round and 'round

You got it spinning

So far away, girl, where it can't be found

Just gotta admit"

I try to put a pillow over my head but it just won't stop. Aaaggghhh! I'm going to kill him! I drag myself out of bed so I can go and throw a remote at him for this! The music goes off and I hear Lumka complaining! Oh well he beat me to it but I also have words for Elik!

"So much noise in the morning baby!", I say.

"You made me sing baby!", he says.

"No baby", I say.

Do I look like a choir teacher?

"I'm in a good mood. How is that a problem?", he says.

"I don't know. Maybe because some of us were still sleeping?", I say.

"Oh I'm sorry. Did i wake you? Come give me a good morning", he says.

He's so annoying! I forget to hit him with the remote and give him a hug instead.

"Well, it's still better than the noise y'all were making last night", Lumka says.

"I had to make up for the damage your girl caused", Elik says and they laugh.

The hell? I'm right here! Hello!

But I smile a little because make up he did!

It's my house though. I should be allowed to make all the noises I want at whatever decibels at whatever time of the night! Anyone with a problem knows where the door is!

"We couldn't sleep though for real! And you guys just wouldn't finish!", Lumka says.

Oh great! Now I'm going to stand here and let my man's best friend talk about my screaming abilities!

And Elik laughs! Why is he laughing? I think I missed the joke!

Thando walks in just as I'm ready to go back to bed. I just need another 20 minutes of sleep. At least now my sexcapades won't be discussed further.

"Oh look what the cat dragged in", I say.

"Ha a baby. Don't be like that", Elik says and I make a face.

What is this girl still doing in my house?

She says her good mornings to the guys and completely ignores me!

"Oh great! You both here. Take a seat over there we need to talk to the both of you", Elik says.

I look at Thando and roll my eyes and she does the same too. But like good little girls, we sit. So her lashes were stick ons? They are gone now and she looks umm different. Lumka stands in front of us and just stands there. Elik soon joins and hands me a cup of warm water with lemon. Isn't he just perfect!

So these two men stand in front of us and take turns telling us how we need to grow up! When did they decide to do this because I thought Lumka just walked in seconds before me?

I give Elik an eye and he says, "It wasn't my idea baby. It's Lumka. Don't look at me!".

Seriously, I can't take him serious sometimes!

Lumka apologises for bringing those girls in the first place and blames it on Thando. He says all she had to do was keep her big mouth shut. No! All he had to do was not bring them here in the first place! Are these guys serious right now? And why are we still talking about this? Isn't they heard me forgiving Elik last night! What's the problem now?

"I don't have time for this. I need to get ready for church. And I still need to get Paul and Peter ready as well", I say and stand up.

What's this? An intervention?

"Fierce. Sit down", Elik says.

I look at him to say something but I can tell he's not joking this time, so I sit.

"Fine man let me handle this!", Elik says.

Watch my man take control. Sexy Sexy.

"Listen. You are our women and you will treat each other with respect. You'll stop this nonsense of always fighting and acting like pre-school children! Grow up!", Elik says.

I'm looking at him like how could he ask this of me seriously! Besides, I think he misused the word 'always' in that sentence! I've only had words with Thando twice!

"Thando apologise to Fierce for what you said to her yesterday and baby apologise to her", he says.

"What should I apologise for?", I ask.

"For pushing Thando into the water. She wouldn't stop complaining about her wig!", Lumka says.

"I'm not apologising for nothing!", I say and sip on my water.

"Oh is that so? That's cool ma, suit yourself. You won't go to church then! Both of you will sit right here until you apologise and promise to stop acting like spoiled brats", Elik says.

Why is he being like this? Whose side is he on?

I'm mad at him now! I stay quiet for a good 10 minutes. Lumka and Elik tell us not to move, they are going to have breakfast and if we want to join them we need to grow up. Growing up is a process though! I'll need a couple of years to achieve that! Minutes are not enough, it's not like we are on growth hormones and GMOs over here! We are being bullied here mos!

I don't even know why exactly we listening to them. I mean I can get up right now and go do whatever I want. I stay seated though. My man said I'm not allowed to stand up before I say sorry. And when he commands I obey.

It's 9 am and mass starts in an hour. You know what, I'm a Christian woman now and forgiveness is kind of part of the package. Besides I just have to say it, I don't have to mean it.

"Thando, I'm sorry for last night", I say it loud enough so those two facilitators can hear.

"Ya me too. I just wish you could just stop thinking you are better than me!", she says.

"Oh no sweetie, I don't think I'm better than you [I know I am ... I say silently]. You are probably intimidated by me but that's fine, most people are", I say and smile sweetly.

She looks at me confused.

"Fierce!", Elik says.

Fine whatever!

"I'm sorry Thando", I say.

"I forgive you. Everything I said was true though I just added a little spice to get to you. So we good", she says.

She forgives me? This girl!

"Come here girl", she helps me off my seat and gives me a big hug. I think she's just pretending like me.

"It's fine. Eat. I'll go get your mini loaves ready for church", she says and walks away.

Why she is calling the twins, mini loaves I don't know!

"Well, that wasn't so hard now, was it?", Elik says.

Mxm.

I have mass to get ready for! I don't have time for this. When I'm done it's 20 minutes before 10. I find Thando and the mini loaves ready. She says she's coming with me to church. Just great. Now she's going to make me sin in church! And those jeans and that heel for church? But the church says come as you are so who am I to judge! When people start looking at her I'm just going to look at her too and pretend not to know her!

We make it just a few minutes before the altar boy procession walks in. As we stand and sing 'Enter Rejoice and Come in', I can't help wanting Peter and Paul to be altar servers as well. I'm enrolling them for Catechism classes after mass. They will look good in those white tunics and heavy crosses around their necks carrying bells or a chalice or incense. I can almost see them. My two angels.

The priest giving mass today is quite older but he looks almost celestial in that purple robe.

"Why is he wearing purple? Red might look better on him", Thando whispers.

"It's Lent babes", I say and hope she knows what lent is.

The priest says The Liturgy of the Eucharist in Latin. How? Why? We are in South Africa and no one speaks Latin so why?

After church, I escape the women who want to recruit me for the Youth group and I leave Thando with the kids and make my way to the confessional. There's a nun

in front of me and she goes in and is out in like 2 minutes! How little are her sins?
Wow! I'm jealous.

I go in and close the curtain. It's that hot priest in there, I can tell from the voice. Where do I start? I have so many sins my goodness, I'm sure I have my own special book in heaven. This is creepy, I'm on one side of a wooden wall and the priest is on the other. Is he inside a closet? It looks like a closet. The wall has tiny holes but I can't really see through.

"Welcome child. Open your heart and confess your sins with your mouth", the priest says.

What else can I confess with?

I make the sign of the cross.

"Forgive me father for I have sinned. I'm a girl aged 26 going on 27", I say.

"When was your last confession?", he says.

"This is my first, ever", I say.

"Open your heart and speak your sins my child", he says.

He's only 2 years older than me but is busy calling me my child! Don't ask how I know his age!

He explains to me how to go about the confession and that I must say everything. Cool, we will need at least 3 weeks to get through my list!

I start. Some of the things I say have the poor priest fake coughing. I guess I'm the worst person he's ever had to forgive. I keep going and I'm not even sure if some are sins but I say them anyway. I talk about Elik, Komla, my mother, my family,

Elik's family, Bunke, Athi, Lemon, the miscarriage, Replace, Lumka and his ex, Lumka, Thando and everyone. I think I'm treating this as a therapy session more than a confession. I cry as I talk about some of the things and laugh as I talk about some of the things.

"Pain is a beautiful gift we were blessed with. Without pain we would be numb and our souls would be silenced. You need the pain to remind you of the unpleasantness of a situation and to urge you to move on. The mistake we make as humans is that we harbour that pain, we keep it locked away because we are afraid to feel. Afraid that it will rage out of control and destroy us. But no, you need to face pain if you are to deal with it. Don't fear it, conquer it. Do not be so hard on yourself young one, forgive yourself", he says.

His voice is so soothing and I find myself holding onto every word he says.

"Do you have more confessions to make?", he says.

I don't really. I've spent the last hour or so pouring my heart out. But I need to hear him speak one last time so let me derail a bit just to keep him talking.

"I have unnatural thoughts sometimes", I say.

"Like what?", he says.

"I want to be a vampire. Tell me, can I be a vampire Father? Are they real? I've been doing research but the evidence I'm getting is inconclusive and contradictory", I say.

"So you want to be dead?", he says.

Wait, so he knows what I'm waffling about?

"No not dead dead. I want to be dead but alive, you know? Like a vampire. I don't want to stop living but I also want everything inside me to die. Well except the baby of course. Can vampires have babies?", I say.

This is the kind of conversation I would normally have with Elik.

"I don't think so. I've never met one", he says.

"I'll read up some more. I don't want to drink blood though, like NO, yuck! I want to be a vegetarian vampire. I could be the first and I'll sire others and have a colony of good vamps. And the best part is I'll never grow old! I know it's wrong because me wanting to be something else means I'm not content with the image I was fashioned after. So that's my sin there but you understand right?", I say.

The priest sighs.

"Ok fine! Maybe not a vampire. I could be a werewolf. Do you know werewolves?", I say.

"Ummm. Lycans is the right word", he says.

"Exactly! I want to be one. I'll still be human except on full moons. I just want to walk around knowing that I have a wolf inside me. I want that amount of strength. I'll probably kill a lot of people along the way though so maybe I don't want to be a werewolf", I say.

"But He who is in you is way greater than any wolf or lycan or vampire. Why are you not drawing your strength from Him?", he says.

"My faith is not that strong yet Father. But I'll get there. I'm working on it. Ok. How about I become a witch? A good witch", I say.

"Like the Harry Potter type?", he says.

"Hell yeah!", I say and cover my mouth. I don't think I can use 'hell' in a nice way in this place.

He sighs.

"Child. Focus. Tell me your sins", the priest cuts me short. How rude!

He's so cool though so he's automatically forgiven.

"Alright I'm sorry I got carried away there. Ok. I almost forgot. I fornicated with two men in one day. I wasn't dating them then though. No, please don't judge me. Let me explain. It wasn't a threesome or anything unholy like that. No, no ways. I had one in the morning and one in the evening", I say.

Flip. I need to stop talking because this is coming out so wrong. Let me quickly move right along and hope he won't linger on that one.

"Ok I'm done. That's all of them", I say.

He sighs! And sighs again! But I'm serious now, we getting to the forgiveness part now. That's the whole reason why I'm here.

"These are all my sins that I can recall. I confess to you Father and to all my brethren out there, that I have sinned through my own fault. In my thoughts and in my words. In what I have done and in what I have failed to do. And I ask blessed Mary, ever Virgin, all the angels and saints, and you Father, to pray for me and help me ask for forgiveness", I finish my confession.

He makes me recite the "Act of Contrition".

"I'm heartily sorry for having offended Thee. I know you are deserving of all my love. Help me do penance. Help me to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin", I read from the church prayer book.

He tells me to refrain from sin and that my body is a temple and I should treat it like it.

But if my body is a temple, why should I deny Elik entry into a place of worship?
Ok maybe I shouldn't say that outloud.

He then says a prayer of absolution and I say Amen.

"Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace and sin no more", he says.

"All of them?", I say.

"Yes. Even the worst of the worst are welcome in the kingdom", he says.

I think he just insulted me but I just had my slate wiped clean a few seconds ago and I refuse to sin so soon.

"What if I sin again?", I ask.

I know I will sin again. I'm a walking sin.

"Then come again for confession", he says.

"For your penance, I really don't know", he says.

"Come on. I can't be that bad!", I say.

"Ok. Do 5 Hail Mary's and 5 Glory bes and recite the stations of the cross tomorrow morning. Make the sign of the cross with holy water before you depart", he says.

"Only?", I say.

"I wish I could ask you to bring a lamb so you could make a burnt offering on the altar, or ask you to punish yourself every morning by hitting your back 20 times with a sjambok. But alas! those days are behind us", he says.

I laugh. This priest! So he really thinks I'm that horrible?

"Actually, Go and pray at the altar then return here. I will give you a rosary and a list of patron Saints to look after you", he says.

"Cool. Thank you Father", I say.

I go and pray and pray and pray and go back. He's out of the booth and waiting for me. He tricked me. He wanted to see my face! I don't think that's allowed but well his sin not mine.

"Walk with me", he says.

Can I tell him he looks good? He reminds me of those priests in high school that had girls cutting their skirts short and wanting to go for morning prayers every morning in winter nogal!

He looks divine though. And that purple robe flows down his body perfectly like it was made specifically for him. Do they make fitted robes?

This church is involuntarily exorcising the whore in me and now it's restless and wants to come out to play. Gosh. Such thoughts should be forbidden! He's hot though with that white collar on his neck. We walk out and into the church cemetery. A walk in the graveyard? Is that a thing priests do? What's with Catholic churches and graveyards anyway? It's spooky!

"What's your name again?", he says.

"Fierce", I say.

"Oh yes I remember from last Sunday. I'm Father....", he says.

"Father Francis. Fresh from St. Augustine's Seminary", I say.

Why is he looking at me like that! I'm not a stalker, I'm a researcher. Huge difference. I have a lot of information on him that would shock him if I repeated it right now. I know why he was almost dismissed from the seminary in his second year.

"You know Fierce, commonly I assign people one patron saint. But I feel like you need more than one", he says.

"I'll assign you St. Raphael the Archangel and St. Valentine of Rome, the patron saints of love so they may help you find love", he says.

Seriously? I told him I have a fiance and told him all about Elik and now he thinks I need to find love elsewhere? Judgemental much? I'll take the patrons though but they have to help me with my current love affair not a new one.

"I'll also assign you St. Teresa of Avila the patron of those who have lost a parent and St. Catherine the patron of those who have suffered miscarriages. They will help you find healing", he says.

Ok I'll take those.

We talk about other things. He says he's enjoying it here and is learning a lot from the older priest.

"I've sinned against a holy man Father", I blurt out.

"What have you done now?", he says.

"I've lusted after him. I've looked at him and had inappropriate thoughts of him.

Forgive me", I say.

"Who is he?", he asks. Ever so calm.

"You, Father", I say and laugh.

I need divine intervention!

What? He said I must tell nothing but the honest truth!

"Fierce", is all he says and we walk on.

"Lastly, I'll assign you St Jude", he says.

"What is he patron of?", I ask.

"It doesn't matter. Just take him", he says and changes the topic to asking me about school.

I'll take St. Jude alright.

Walking in between graves is so weird. Of all places he took me through a graveyard? Is he sending me a message? Is he trying to say my soul is dead? I hope not because that's just wrong. My soul brought me to church! I ask about exorcisms and the crusades and he explains as calmly as he can. The walk is over and I thank him graciously and say I will see him next Sunday and leave.

I still want to know what St. Jude is the patron saint of. And you know when you walking around sinless, good luck just falls on your head. I bump into the older priest going to greet the parishioners.

"Father", I call out.

"Yes my child", he says.

"Thank you for the sermon. It was powerful", I say and shake his hand.

I have no clue what it was about! I kind of dozed off around that time.

"Thank you. I'm glad the seed did not fall on rocky land but in your fertile heart", he says.

Ok.

"Father, what is St. Jude patron of?", I ask.

"St Jude is the patron saint of desperate cases and lost causes", he says.

I can't help but laugh. Father Francis ne! I see you! You think I'm a lost cause! I'm watching you!

I find Thando. She says she looked for me everywhere and is asking why the kids only speak English. What does she want them to speak? They speak a bit of their dad's language and they are taking French classes! They are just forced to speak English most of the time because of the people around them. I sign the kids up for Catechism classes then we go home.

I feel so safe I might not even need to wear a seat belt! I have 5 patron saints watching over me. Thankfully, Lizzy cooked a full Sunday lunch and these men had the sense to wait for us. They probably ate already and will just eat again.

I'm warming up to Thando I think. She's not that bad. I need to loosen up a bit and not be so hard on her I guess. After lunch I go and lie down. The food didn't agree with me and now I'm nauseous and I have minor cramps. Besides I feel so exhausted. And you'll hear someone say 'Being pregnant is nice!' Gerarahere!

Dinner has been had and the kids have been put to bed. It's just adults now. I suggest we play 30 seconds, you know, do couple things. I team up with Elik and Thando with Lumka. This is the best game I've ever played. I swear I've never laughed so hard. My word! This girl is so thick in the head it's not even funny!

I think Lumka is getting offended by Elik and I laughing. We say we just thought of an old inside joke that's why we keep laughing so hysterically! He's not stupid though, he knows we laughing at Thando. She's a special breed shame.

Lumka gives the clue as, "It's a fruit, it's small and it's grown in vineyards and it's used to make wine".

She thinks.

"Come on. It's mostly grown here in the Western cape. It's small and almost round. It's actually in season right now. It makes wine baby come on", he says.

And the girl says "Tomatoes".

I have never laughed so hard in my life. Maybe I missed the memo. Are tomatoes grown in vineyards now? And do they make red wine out of them maybe these

days? But Lumka is determined to move at least one spot forward so he gives another clue before the hourglass runs out.

He says, "It appears after a rainfall and has seven colours and it forms an arch in the sky".

She thinks.

"It first appeared after that whole Noah flood as a promise not to kill us all with water", he says.

I start laughing even before she answers. So when she says, "Oh I know! It's stars" I die.

She said stars! I kid you not. Elik says I must behave just before he bursts out laughing! Well, we play and only move one step. We couldn't focus with all the laughing. Then it's back to them. Maybe she will do better with asking questions.

"Ok Lumka focus. It's easy this one", she says.

She goes off on a tangent. Laaawwwddd! The answer is Marie Curie and it's ok if she doesn't know her but the funny part is how she tried to explain 'Marie biscuits' for the first part. The way she went about it had me in stitches. Elik and I laugh so hard Lumka says he doesn't want to play anymore. And that's the end of the game. How can he find this not funny?

I suggest we play Settlers of Catan or Dungeons and Dragons rather. Lumka says he's done with stupid games and wants to sleep. Such a sore loser! We apologise for our unruly behaviour and he agrees to stay awake. We watch a movie. I excuse myself halfway. I'm feeling funny. Elik asks if I need him to come with me, I insist

that he stays, I'll be fine. I have minor cramps again. The doctor said it's expected. I'll just sleep them off like I did in the afternoon.

"Elik wake up", I say shaking him.

My phone says it's 4:23 am.

"Wake up", I shake him harder and harder until he wakes up.

"Something is wrong. I'm in pain", I say.

I also feel so sticky and wet. I must have been sweating in the night. He's so grumpy but I said something's wrong so he gets up. He gets the lights on his side, then gets the main lights and pulls the covers off.

"No", I say.

This can't be happening to me. I'm sitting in blood and the cramps on my stomach and lower back are getting worse.

"No", Elik says.

CHAPTER 90

Elik quickly throws on sweatpants and a hoodie. For the first time ever I'm glad he leaves his clothes lying around! The cramps are getting worse by the second. I'm trying to sit, to turn, to get up, to stay still but they won't give me a chance. I saw blood and I panicked. It just keeps getting worse. I think this is how labour feels like. But I'm not even 7 months pregnant yet so how can I be going into labour?

I let out a scream as a pain cuts across my lower abdomen and all around to my back. It's like someone is trying to claw my spinal cord out of back and at the same time pull my uterus out of my womb. The tug of war is excruciating. I can't deal with this!

I try to drift my thoughts to happier times but I can't find a memory to hold on to. All those that come to mind are dark and are making me feel even worse. My mother. Komla. The last people I wish to think about right now.

Elik is trying to hold me so I don't fall off the bed. I just want to roll off the bed and maybe the carpet will make me feel better. He's telling me to try and stay calm. There's knocking on the door. I scream again as the cramps take another stab at me. The door opens. It's Lumka. He looks lost and when I let out another scream, he comes around the bed to us. Elik is now trying to make me lean back so he can lift me up.

"Shit", Lumka says.

No one cares I'm naked right now. I for one don't care.

"Let me call an ambulance", Lumka says.

"No there's no time. Get the car out of the garage and I'll bring her out", Elik says.

"Which car?", Lumka says.

"Any. Just grab any key and run man", Elik shouts.

"Come baby. It's ok. I'll get you to hospital. You will be just fine", he says.

I wriggle some more. I'm trying not to do anything because the pain intensifies when I move. I try to not even breathe. I close my eyes and hold my breath, when I finally exhale the sharp pain is released throughout my whole body like an electric current. Only a scream can explain what I'm going through. I can't let Elik touch me. He will move me and I'll die from pain.

"I know it hurts but please work with me here. Be strong for us baby girl please, just to get to the car. Please ma", he says.

It's unbearable. My entire body is on fire. It's like my insides were dipped in Sulphuric acid then rinsed out in boiling oil. Elik lifts me up, naked as I am and carries me out of the room. I don't resist. Blood is dripping everywhere but again no one cares. Thando is up now too and she's trying to ask what happened when Elik screams at her to open the door.

"It's ok baby. Hang in there. Please", Elik says.

Lumka holds the door open as Elik puts me on the back seat of his new car. It's going to be so bloodied but I don't think any of us care about anything right now.

"I'm coming with you", Lumka says.

"No. Get her some clothes and follow", Elik says.

"No Elik. You can't drive! I'll come back for clothes. Jump in", Lumka insists.

Elik jumps in the back seat and puts my head on his lap. That feels better. I'm humming softly to myself so I can listen to the pain and see where exactly it's

coming from. Elik keeps saying it's alright but his voice is shaking and I can tell he's just as terrified as I am.

"Please don't die on me baby. Please, I'm begging you... Don't worry we'll get to the hospital now now... Lumka drive... Please baby. Stay with me my angel... Go Lumka, fuck the red lights, just go... I promise I'll do everything for you baby. Whatever you want, I'll do it... Stay with me... No, don't close your eyes...", all Elik.

I'm in no capacity to respond. My eyes are so heavy but I can't afford to keep them closed. I force them to stay open. I feel so faint but I know I can't afford to pass out now. I can't die. Not today. If I die the baby dies and I can't have that. When Lumka drives over a speed hump I almost become paralysed.

Thank goodness I think we at the hospital now. The car has stopped and Lumka jumps out of the car leaving the engine running. I'm numb from trying not to move, but the moment the nurses try to put me on the stretcher bed my body bursts into flames, like a thousand tiny needles attacking me. I bite my lower lip and screw my eyes shut to suppress the spasms running through my spinal cord.

Everything's happening so fast, my brain can't keep up. I mean to say 'I love you' to Elik as they wheel me away but my mouth is so dry. In case I die, I would have loved him to know that no one ever put so much effort in me and made me feel the way he did. He's my soulmate. I need to stay awake. I don't know what's happening but I'm terrified out of my mind.

They tell Elik he has to stand outside. He tells them it's his wife lying on that bed and he's not going anywhere. I'm his wife now? That's sweet. They let him be. They try to stabilise me and check my vitals and all that emergency patience routine check ups. I can't see Lumka but it's fine. The man I need is right here.

Without warning I feel the urge to push. I know I need to stop pushing but I can't. And the pain is excruciating. It just started and I just keep pushing. It's happening on its own and I'm trying to stop it. I keep pushing and pushing and the pain is killing me. I can't give birth now. It's too early. I try to close my legs but two nurses hold them wide open.

"Elik", I mean to shout but it comes out as a sad little whisper.

I swallow hard and choke on my tears. I have no scream left in me and the truth is hitting me hard in the face.

"I'm losing our baby. Don't let me lose the baby. Please help me. Please. I can't lose him. Someone help me, please", I plead with everyone in the room.

They are all busy and no one is listening to me.

I know it's quite early in the morning but I hope my patron saints are awake and doing something about this situation I'm in. This is pure blazing hell. I can't lose my baby. I just can't.

"I'm so sorry. I promise I'll go to church more. I'll change my ways. I'll do anything, just don't let me lose my boy please. St Jude? St Catherine? Anyone? Please help me", I say a little prayer in my heart.

“Elik. I can’t lose our baby. Please help me baby. I can’t stop pushing. I don’t know what to do”, I see him wipe his eyes with the back of his hand through my tears. “Hang in there baby. I’m right here. I’m not going anywhere”, he says. They ask him to move back and I thought they asked him to go out. Noooooo! Elik can’t leave. I need him here. They can’t kick him out. No! I strengthen my grip on his hand. I find his eye and my lips say “Don’t leave” without uttering a word. “I won’t leave you”, he says.

That stabbing pain again and I push one last time. I feel life just leave me. I feel like I just died, except I can see that I’m alive, except everything is so silent around me, except I can see Elik holding my hand and his lips moving, except I feel an emptiness within me. I just died or a huge part of me did. I smile at Elik. I’m at peace. “Thank you”, I say. I feel my consciousness leaving me and I shut my eyes and give in to the darkness.

I wake up I don’t know whether minutes or hours or years later. Elik is still sitting by my bedside and his clothes are still stained with blood. I’m in hospital! I thought the last time was the last time! I never wanted to lie on these beds ever again and feel weak and helpless like I do right now. And like the last time and the last, Elik is right here by my side.

There's a particular void inside of me that I just don't understand. I immediately touch my tummy, out of habit. I try not to rush my thoughts but the moment I look at him again. I remember. In between what seems to be a suppressed cry and hurt, the words "I'm sorry baby" come from him and echo in my ears. What is he sorry for this time?

I look at him with eyes saying 'what?'

"We lost the baby", he says.

I just sit there, staring blankly at him. I can hear that he's talking but his words don't make sense. What does he mean?

"I'm so sorry my love", he says and gets up to hold me.

I can tell he's been crying and he looks so drained. He shouldn't cry. I'm sure I'm still pregnant. It was a false alarm. I'm fine. Right? Wrong!

I can't feel that little heartbeat that's been beating inside of me for months. It's gone. I don't feel the connection. He died and I think I died with him. My precious little boy, gone like a kiss in the wind. Just like that. No warning, no goodbye, no closure. Nothing. I carried him for almost 7 months and I get nothing? Gone to be with the twins I lost in a similar way. I could be a mother of 3 now but I'm still on 0.

There's only one nurse and doctor left in the room. The doctor tells us some medical jargon and says I'm fine and in perfect condition. But if I am why couldn't I retain my child? 2 more months is all I needed. Just 60 more days. Was that too much to ask for? He says not to worry, the foetus will be disposed of accordingly.

I think Elik is more hurt than me. I'm not hurt anymore. I'm just sitting here waiting to die. The good doctor says they did all they could to prevent me from any infections and stuff like that. He says the baby was already dead on arrival so really nothing could be done. He says I'm fine. Am I fine really?

"Where's my baby?", I ask.

"Aah ma'am. I just explained that he'll be disposed of accordingly. No need to worry", he says.

"Disposed? Like garbage? That's my child! I want him. Bring him to me", I say. I'm calm. Too calm.

My spirit is raging though but I screamed all my shouts away earlier so all I have left now is this thin, cracky voice.

They all look at each other.

I'm not mad, I promise. I just want to see my son. Fully formed or not. Why can't they understand that. I'm not going to take him home. I just want to see what he looked like and hold him just this once. After 7 months of being attached to him don't I deserve that?

Elik is just holding my hand and looking at me. He doesn't have to say anything, his eyes say it all.

"Where is he? Please bring him to me. I'll bury him myself!", I say.

There's a beautiful holy graveyard behind the church. I'm sure they will allow me to dig a little grave there to let my little one sleep.

My voice is broken and comes out raw and tainted with sobs.

“Ma’am. That’s not possible. He wasn’t fully formed yet and we have procedures”, the good doctor says.

“I don’t care. Fuck your procedures! Bring me my child!”, the tears are back and they just won’t stop.

I try to get off the bed. I’ll go find him myself if they don’t want to bring him. But the pipe in the vein of my right arm stops me and gives Elik a chance to hold me back.

He just holds me there. He’s not talking.

I am a lost cause, ain’t I? St. Jude, pray for me.

I walked through the graveyard with Father Francis yesterday. It didn’t mean anything then. But then what if it was symbolic? What if he took me there to bury my past and move on? What if he wanted me to walk in there carrying my burdens then walk out with nothing? Was my child also considered a past that needed to be buried? No. That can’t be. When I did the confession and asked all my sins to be washed away, did I unintentionally ask my child to be washed away too? Was going for that confession a mistake? Am I being punished for lusting after a priest? Is that an offence punishable by death? If I’m to keep my senses together, I need to make sense of all of this.

Like at 4 am this morning I was pregnant and now I’m not. Just like that? What did I ever do to deserve this? Why couldn’t I be allowed just this one thing? I have proven I can be a mother. I do everything for Peter and Paul, you can ask them. I

might not be perfect and I feed them too much junk food but I try my best. I got them Lizzy, didn't I? I read them bedtime stories and tell them I love them everyday. I try. I would have tried with this little one too. Where are my patron Saints? Why didn't they help me? I did confession yesterday and I was forgiven. So what did I do wrong? Why do other people get to have children and I don't? Don't Elik and I deserve a child together? At least one?

And all those baby clothes and toys and pram and crib that I already bought. What must happen to them now?

I took my supplements, I ate well, I prayed, I practiced yoga, I meditated, I stayed away from alcohol and pain pills, I took care of myself! I even started going to church! I did everything right! So why did he die? What did I do wrong?

The doctor asks Elik if it's ok if they sedate me and he says yes. I don't even know why they need to sedate me. Are they sure they are not oversedating me? But I'll never say no to anyone offering me hours of undisturbed peace. I'm just a statue in all of this. Numb. Elik just sits there, holding on to my hand the whole time. My poor baby. His mind is not here at all. I feel so drowsy and I hate them for putting me down like an animal. I need to stay awake and face my pain so I can conquer it. That's what Father Francis said.

When I wake up next, I'm still in hospital! What am I still doing here? I'm no longer pregnant mos so they should let me go home. Elik is still here and Lumka is trying to convince him to at least change his hoodie for a clean one he brought. He refuses. I'm up now though so Lumka needs not worry I'll tell Elik what to do. He takes off his hoodie and throws it to the floor with so much anger and puts on the one Lumka hands him.

Thando isn't here. I'm glad. I'm not in the mood for her. They both start talking to me asking me silly things like am I hungry or am I thirsty or how am I feeling. I'm none of the above. I used to eat so my baby would stop kicking me. He used to throw tantrums like his dad. I hated it then but I miss it now. I wish he could be here kicking me all day and giving me cramps. I would gladly give anything to have that again.

I have a hospital gown on now, at least. I hope Lumka has forgotten what he saw earlier. Elik's eyes are red and I have to look away to stop my tears from coming. He sits on the edge of my bed and takes me into his arms.

"It's ok my love. Let go. Let it out. I'm here for you", Elik says.

"I love you more than anything and it's tearing me apart seeing you like this", he says.

I let my hands wrap around his neck and I cry. Softly at first but I let it out. I unashamedly weep. Lumka steps out I think because I hear the door open then shut. I feel tears drop on my neck and hear sniffing.

I can't explain what I'm feeling. All I know is I want it gone. All of it. Like I've done so many of my demons in the past, I want to open a shelf and put this one in there then lock up and throw away the key. I want everything inside of me dead. I don't want to feel anything at all. But until then I'll hold on to Elik and cry my eyes out. I can barely feel the physical. It's the emotional stab running between my heart and head that's driving me insane.

When the doctor comes to check on me, Lumka comes in with him. I'm more behaved this time. He gives me tablets that will remove any tissue that might still be in my uterus and says I have to wait at least 5 hours for observation before I can go home. I take the pills and thank him. I ask if he can put me under for those 5 hours. He says no, no more sedation.

"Please, 5 Mybulen pills is all I need", I say.

He looks at me and I look down.

"You can't give her that Doc. She has abused them in the past and I'm not going down that road with her again", Elik says.

How can he say that? I need them, can't he see that? Is he that blind? He's got his vices, I've got mine. So why is he being so unreasonable?

He squeezes my hand and I keep looking down.

"What happened?", Elik asks.

He pulls me into his arms so my head rests on his shoulder.

I'm not crying now. I need to hear this.

"Her body was under a lot of stress", the doctor says.

No it wasn't, I want to say, but the lump in my throat won't let me speak.

"Couldn't you save him?", Elik asks.

"No. Nothing could be done. She had what we call a missed miscarriage. It's strange that it happened so late in the pregnancy. It often happens in the first trimester. The foetus had been dead for almost a week now. Her body just didn't notice so it continued producing hormones thinking it's still pregnant. What's strange is that the foetus was well developed and we couldn't find anything wrong with it. And stress, although it's a common cause of miscarriages, I don't see how in this case it affected her, she had gone so far into the pregnancy", he says.

What exactly is this man with the stethoscope saying? I don't think I heard him right.

So you mean to tell me that I've been walking around carrying a dead baby in my stomach for a week! So at that party when I went on and on about my pregnancy I was talking about a zombie? Was it rotting in there or just there? I don't think I want to know that part. So I went around carrying a corpse in me for a whole 7 days? What witchcraft is this?

I curl up to Elik and hold on to his arm as he keeps talking to the doctor wanting to know what exactly could have happened. I just want to die!

"She had a significant amount of CRH in her system. It's a stress hormone and I suspect she's been under a lot of stress. It's the only way to explain it. Besides that I can't tell you at this present moment what exactly happened", he says.

I shake my head and wipe my tears.

“Stress is stress. You may conceal it and cover it up, but your body will still take strain”, he says.

Is he trying to convince us or himself? He just wants a medical explanation so he can sleep better at night. Stress? Me? Nah!

I start laughing. Seriously! Stress? Come on! He must go run more tests because we not accepting stress as cause of death. I’m talking to the doctor but not exactly. I’m more thinking out loud.

“I wasn’t stressed! Are you a doctor or a psychologist? I’m a little confused now! I told you I wasn’t under any stress but you telling me about subconscious stress now! I’ve been very fine throughout my pregnancy! More than fine! I was pampered and had everything I needed. Fine, minor insignificant things happened, like my mother disowned me, my lobola process didn’t happen, I almost didn’t finish my PhD, I constantly missed my twins that died, I had bad nightmares, I suffered anxiety and my man cheated on me. But I wasn’t stressed at all, I swear”, I say.

My voice is so croaky and talking is such a strain. Then you tell me I was stressed? I don’t do stress! Stressed is desserts spelled backwards and that’s exactly what I do to my situations. I eat them up like dessert and lock them away where they won’t bother me.

“What? Why you all looking at me like that for?”, I ask.

I laugh a little but I can't remember what the joke was. Now I just want to go home. Why are they looking at me with so much concern?

"I'm done here. Please let me go home! Doctor, you said you going to dispose my baby. So what you waiting for? Go ahead and dispose of IT!", I say.

"Come on baby", Elik says.

"What? I'm fine baby. Very fine", I say.

"You have to wait until all the bleeding has stopped before you have sexual intercourse and wait at least 2 menstrual cycles before you try to conceive again", the doctor says.

"Make that a lifetime of menstrual cycles! I'm done trying. I don't want to be pregnant ever again. I want the 3 year implant please", I say. And sex? I never want that thing near me ever again. I'm done.

"See Doc. Not stressed at all. I'm making logical decisions here. I've never been stressed in my entire life. What's stress? What's the medical term for it?", I say. Gosh! It's getting hot in here.

"Can I have a minute with her, please Doc", Elik says.

"Take all the time you want", he says and walks out.

"Look at me", Elik says.

"Why?", I say.

"Look at me Fierce!", he says.

There's so much hurt in his voice I feel guilty for laughing. Why was I laughing? I can't remember. My emotions are all over the place. I didn't mean it. It's a rollercoaster.

"Please don't leave me", I say in between sobs.

"I'll never leave you! Now look at me!", he says.

"I'm not crazy baby. Don't let them take me to a psych ward. Don't leave me Elik, please", I plead with him.

He wipes away a tear that just ran down my face.

"I'm not going to leave you. This was my child too. The child I've always wanted with you. So we are in this together. They won't take you away and I won't leave you", he says.

I nod.

"I don't know how I'll get through this baby. I'm not strong enough. I want the pain to go away. Please make it go away", I say.

"You don't have to be strong at all. Let me do that for us. Let me take care of you. I got you", he says.

I nod.

"I love you. And I know exactly what you going through right now, because I'm going through it too. I just need to be strong for you. Can you let me do that?", he says.

"Yes", I say in between sobs.

I put my arms around him and thank the patron saints of love for coming through for me.

My thoughts are just disorganised today and keep jumping from one emotion to another. Now I remember why I'm in this bed. My child is gone. I complained so much about my pregnancy and now that it's gone I miss it. I miss the morning sickness, the cramps, the anxiety, the weird cravings, the throwing up, the back pain. I even miss the kicking. It's like a huge part of me just got taken away without notice.

I ask to lie back. He sits and holds my hand. He did say he wasn't going anywhere, my black panther. My mind drifts far away and I'm trying to remember what that last ultrasound scan looked like. It was an outline of a baby with a big head. I smile a little as I imagine my baby looking something like Peter and Paul. Would he also talk that much? Would he be as cute and adorable? Would he have Elik's eyes too? And his eyelashes? I will never know.

But what if he's here listening? My aunt once said even though the body is not fully formed the spirit would be whole. So let me just talk to him and only hope he can hear me. I'll talk anyway. It's so quiet here, I wonder what time it is. I start talking and Elik sits up because I guess he thought I was talking to him.

"I'm so sorry my sweet boy that we had to part before we even met. I'm sorry that I'll never get to hold you. That I'll never get to smell you or hold your tiny hand or kiss your sweet face or hear your heartbeat. I'm sure you would have been just as

handsome as your father. I saw his pictures from primary school (choke-giggle). His ears were running away from his head but he looked so handsome (Sad smile). He looked just like your brothers, Peter and Paul, and I'm sure you would have looked the same. I would have my house full of four of the most handsome boys in the world. Your brothers would have protected you with their lives, I'm sure of it. I'm so sorry that they will never get to play with you. I don't even know what I'll say when I get home and they ask how the baby in the stomach is doing (sigh). Your father would have loved you with everything. He loved you from the very day he found out about your existence and he treated me like a queen because he loved you that much. He's here with me. I'm so sorry that I failed to carry you to the end.

I would have named you Elikplim Jnr. because I've never heard a more beautiful name. I would have named you that so you can turn out to be like your dad. Drop dead handsome, beautiful skin, gorgeous eyes, smartest brain ever, a big heart and all these qualities that make him so irresistible. We would have sheltered you from the snares and the wickedness of this world. You are safe now. I love you with everything. Rest in peace my heart", I say.

If Elik thinks I've gone mad, he doesn't say it. He just moves closer and holds me in his arms and tells me to cry it all out. What did I ever do to deserve this though?

CHAPTER 91

*****FIERCE*****

It's been five days since the miscarriage. These have been the hardest and the most confusing days of my life. I look in the mirror sometimes and I have no idea who that girl looking back at me is! I've laughed, I've cried, I've cussed, I've prayed, I've stared at the wall blankly and I've tormented Elik. I have gone mad! All my multiple personalities came alive from day one and all, except Sweet Fierce, crucified Elik left right and centre. In their defence though, they didn't mean to, grief made them. He's taking it all like a man though and never once complains.

SWEET FIERCE

Her motto: 'No one dies a virgin. Life screws us all. Just get up, shake off the dust and move right along'.

The good girl. She carries on like nothing happened. She makes her own coffee, she showers, she checks her emails, she smiles, she hugs the twins. Too bad Sweet Fierce never lingers for more than 30 minutes at a time. The other personalities overpower her. She is too sweet and as such too weak. It's a jungle within Fierce right now and only the fittest survive. Sweet Fierce gets trampled on too many times so she's scared to come out.

CRYING FIERCE

Her motto: 'Cry a river and maybe the pain will be washed away'.

Tears are for the shedding so why go against the order of the cosmos? Well, Crying Fierce isn't as mean to Elik but she just cries her eyes out and makes Elik

hold her. If he doesn't hold her and says he has to work or has to lock himself in the study because he has an important conference call, she cries some more. That makes Elik miss important meetings! He looks drained around her but he never once complains.

NUMB FIERCE

Her motto: 'Be like a vampire. If you keep your mouth closed the fangs will remain unseen'.

Numb Fierce is alive but dead. She's strong but weak. She's soulless but heartfelt. Just like a vampire. She just sits there looking dead. She stares at the wall not wanting to do anything. She ignores the twins when they try to play with her and just sits there and thinks about her lost baby. She blames herself and often gets lost in her thoughts trying to figure out what exactly happened. She refuses to eat or talk or do anything. She is a zombie. Walking dead. Numb Fierce usually makes way for Crying Fierce. Elik just sits with her, begging her not to shut him out and allow him to be there for her.

ANGRY FIERCE

Her motto: 'Fuck the innocent flower, be the serpent underneath! Spit venom and Bite'.

She's the scariest of them all and the most difficult to deal with. She broke 5 plates, threw them against the wall just because Lizzy didn't dry one of them properly. She is rude and disrespectful and she spits venom. When she looks at

the twins, she feels something like a dark volcano arise within her. An anger towards them she can't justify.

She stood in front of the fridge drinking water when Paul walked up to her to ask something. Looking at him made her so angry because the one child that had grown inside her and might have looked like Paul was no more. She smashed the glass on the wall and the water splashed Paul who then started crying. Elik had to quickly pick up the child to comfort him and so he wouldn't step on glass. Angry Fierce stormed off and became Crying Fierce when she reached the bedroom. Again Elik had to come to her rescue.

DELUSIONAL FIERCE

'It's all in the mind. It's only as real as you want it to be. The dead are only dead if you believe they are'.

This one is the worst personality by far. She refuses to accept that her child is dead so she carries on like nothing has changed. She talks to the baby and claims to still be pregnant. She woke up in the middle of the night and started ironing the baby's clothes and watching videos on how to make a baby wear a pamper and the likes. Then when Elik reminded her in the morning that Junior was gone, she called the church and asked for Father Francis. She asked him if she could bury her little boy in the church's graveyard. Elik took the phone and explained to the priest and apologised. She woke up yesterday morning and told Elik that the baby was kicking in her stomach so he wasn't dead. Poor Elik.

Delusional Fierce came fully alive last night when she started packing a bag.

“What you doing baby?”, Elik asked.

“Packing my hospital bag so that when the baby comes I’m ready. Make sure no one touches this bag baby. It has everything I’ll need for the delivery”, she said.

Elik just looked at her like what the hell!

“What? Why you looking at me like that?”, she said.

“Come back to bed baby”, he said.

“You need to be a better parent Elik! You need to show interest in this baby!”, she snapped.

“I think we need to see someone baby. A professional to help you deal with this loss. I’ll make a call in the morning. Come to bed for now my love”, he said.

“So you think I’m crazy?”, she said.

Then Angry Fierce showed up and she had thrown everything in sight at Elik and told him to get out. He ended up sleeping on the couch and her in the bedroom talking to her imaginary baby.

DESPERATE FIERCE

Her motto: ‘A baby is the glue to a relationship. Without it you are doomed’.

She believes that without the baby Elik has no reason to stay with her. She chooses to forget how he stayed with her long before she was pregnant and stayed with her after the first miscarriage. In her desperate plea, she continually begs Elik not to leave her. She begged Elik (In front of Lumka) to have sex with her and get her pregnant again. He tried to tell her they had to wait for sometime and even if he wanted to they couldn’t right now. She lashed out at him accusing him

of finding her not attractive anymore and for wanting to leave her for someone else. It didn't help that Elik and Lumka were trying to prepare for an important business meeting. Elik had to abandon the meeting and tend to his woman.

It's day 5 now and I'm still out of my mind. I'm a legit mess. All those personalities came from nowhere and I've been battling with myself trying to hang in there like the saying goes. I know I'm just grasping at straws and honestly I don't know why Elik hasn't left me yet. All I've done since we left the hospital is abuse him. It's like every passing hour I'm a whole different person.

Thando left that evening as she got a call that her child was sick. Lumka has been walking on eggshells around me and tries by all means not to be around me since the smallest thing sends me into tears leaving him not knowing what to do. He left for Joburg this morning. Lizzy is an angel. She helps me with everything and takes care of the kids for me.

I feel like my body betrayed me because it's forgetting way too fast! The bleeding stopped yesterday and I have no pain left anywhere. I want that pain back as a reminder of what I lost. My body is perfectly fine but I can't say the same about my mind.

It's been a roller coaster of feelings going at fast speed through a dark cave. I'm sinking fast and feeling like I'm free falling through a dark hole. I just want my baby back. That's all.

Elik is at work. He had to go and work from some office in Claremont because he can't focus at home. Because of me I know and he has an important deal to close. And he can't go to Joburg yet.

I need to get over this, be a big girl and dig a river, build a bridge and get over it. That's exactly what I intend to do and I know the right person to help me. I clean up and get into my car and drive to town and park by Longstreet. I still remember that club Elik disappeared to that time after my first miscarriage.

I get in and ask for Lemon and thankfully I'm told to wait because he's around. Minutes later I'm ushered up the stairs and into a small office-like looking room. Lemon is in there and he asks his guys to excuse us. I always hated the fact that Elik had this guy in our lives but today I thank him wholeheartedly. He's my last hope.

"Hi Lemon. How are you doing?", I say with the best smile I can muster right now. I'm sure I look like purgatory right now. I looked like hell before but foundation and powder and eyeliner helped me some. They couldn't make me look like heaven but I'm not looking like hell either, I'm somewhere in between. So, purgatory.

"Hi my skat. Do you have a name?", he says showing that silver tooth.

"I'm Fierce. Remember at the party in Newlands? Elik's girl. You said I look like your white BMW", I say.

"Oh ya. El's goose! Hoe gaan dit (How are you)? Gaan sit (Sit down)", he says.

"Thanks", I say.

"Ain't you knocked up? Where's the belly?", he says.

"Gone", I say and look at him.

He raises an eyebrow but doesn't ask. I sit. He offers me whisky, brandy, gin, a joint, a cigarette. I say no to all.

"Vat can I do you for?", he says.

"I need a huge favour", I say.

"Praat met my (Talk to me)", he says.

I look around to see that no one is listening, then lean towards him and drop my voice.

"I need something strong. Like cocaine, crystal meth, ecstasy, anything. Not TIK though. Anything else. Whatever you recommend", I say.

"Wait", he says and goes on his phone a little while.

"Okies. Say what you say again", he says.

I repeat.

He looks at me like I'm insane.

"Please Lemon. I wouldn't be here if I wasn't desperate. I don't know anyone else who can help me", I say.

"Does El know you here?", he says.

"No. And please you can't tell him. Asseblief", I say.

"Ever done drugs before or anything lekker like that?", he says.

"No. Just pain pills but no not really", I say.

He studies my face for a while.

"Jammer (sorry) meisie. You's El's goose. Ek kan nie (I can't)", he says.

"Please, I'm begging you. Money's not a problem. I'll pay double what you sell for",
I say.

He has to help me. He's the only drug person I know. I'm on the verge of tears.
And can't he at least be impressed that I understand Afrikaans and reward me
with some drugs? Crying Fierce wants to come out now and I'm trying my best to
suppress her.

"Okay, tell you what. Lemme see what I can do. I'll hit you up", he says.

Phew! Great news.

"When?", I ask.

"Later", he says.

The way he pronounces every R in words is strangely fascinating!

I thank him and go out. He's so creepy! I make sure my phone's volume is on
loudest. I really need something strong to help me cope. I feel positive. I know I'm
probably going about this the wrong way but at least I'm doing something to deal
with this so my life can go on. I'm not planning to be an addict, it's a temporary fix.

I make a stop by the mall to buy some coconut oil for my hair. I don't know how I end up at Earth Child but I leave the shop with 4 bags of baby clothes. I drop them all in the room that was meant for the baby and go to take a shower.

I'm in a good mood today. The thought of getting drugs excites me. At least I'll finally stop being an emotional wreck and get my life back together. I want my life back. I know drugs are bad and addictive and all that bad stuff but I will be careful. I just need them to help me for a short while. At least until I can cope with all this that's happening. I'm waiting on Lemon's call and I was hoping he would have called me by now.

*****ELIK*****

I know my job right now is to take care of Fierce but I'm so drained. She's sucking the life right out of my spirit. I might lose a huge deal worth millions because I'm not pulling my weight. I can't tell her that though because it will lead to another sleepless night of crying. She's handling this worse than I expected. Half the time I feel like screaming at her to shut up! And this new business I wanted to venture in is stressing me up. It's all so fucked up.

I wonder why I pay my accountant so much if he's going to make a mess of things all the time. I think I should probably fire him. Why the hell do I need to do a cashflow forecast for a business I haven't started yet? How come all these figures

seem so wrong? Lumka told me this was going to be a cash cow but from what I am seeing this is going to need more of my money, what a cluster fuck!

Cluster fuck, everything is such a mess. It's been 5 days since the miscarriage. I lost my Junior and it seems like I am losing my girl as well. Then now business doesn't seem to be moving well at all and that's probably because I can't focus on my work.

Fierce, at just the thought of her my world becomes alive. Let's see. What do I love about her? She has the brain and the maturity and the playfulness and the beauty I need in my woman.

She's nothing like the brainless girls I leave the clubs with. All they need is a small waist and nice ass and a pretty face. It's not like I need them for talking! Fierce is my girl and none of them have ever compared. I love looking at her.

And that body and the way she's always teasing me! I can't believe I haven't touched her in days. I haven't felt those soft lips of hers or tasted the sweetness of her mouth in mine. Goodness those curves, the sound of her screaming my name after I've reminded her that she is all mine, maybe 3 times already through the night. That perfect ass in my hands, that body grinding on me, those legs on my shoulders, those arms pinned over her head. So deep I'm touching her soul. Goddam now I have a hard on, one I can't do anything about because the doctor said to wait it out. Maybe a week or two?

But I need her and she needs me with the way she is acting like a lost puppy. How best can I show her that she is not in it alone, if it's not me in between her thighs, delving into the depths of her valley, warm, silky, with me driving her wanton? The way she's so fluid with them positions. Gosh she says my name so beautifully when she squirts all over me! Why am I doing this to myself again? Why am I back to thinking about sex again? A week or two, I can wait. I have to wait. For once I want to be the man she deserves and right now she needs the loving me to come out wherever he is. I should head home.

I keep thinking there could have been something I could've done to prevent the miscarriage. Was she stressed? Did I stress her that much? Did I neglect her and my son? Does this mean I am failing again at being a father? Oh no! I failed Junior. I couldn't protect him. Should perhaps let the ambitions of being a good father go?

What's with the noise and why are all the cars hooting? Drivers these days can be frustrating! Oh the robot is red, and I'm at fault? My bad, but I wonder how long I was waiting there. I must be going crazy like Fierce. I should get her something to eat, maybe that will make her feel better and happy to see me, I really miss her smile.

Walking into the house I find a bright and bubbly Fierce, wow is my girl back? She's friendly, and I even get a kiss.

"Come see what I got Elik, you going to love this".

This is not good I think as she pulls me towards what was meant to be Junior's nursery. I am wary at the sight of all the bags I see.

"What's all this baby, care to explain?"

"So, I went shopping, obviously silly, help me unpack".

I am not sure what to make of this, why would we be shopping? It's a bad idea to ask but I must,

"Why were you shopping Fierce?"

Her facial expression changes, I could have sworn she was about to point a dagger to my throat, so I step back.

"What do you mean why Elik?"

She is stern, and I am certain my next response should be wiser, so I try,

"The baby is gone, there is no need to go shopping anymore."

I instantly regret those words as I say them out loud. Wise choice of words Elik, it's all you had to do, but look at you. I watch her closely. She bites her lower lip and she squints her eyes and I'm almost certain steam is blowing through her nose.

"My child is still here, he didn't go anywhere, I didn't lose him, I didn't lose my baby Elik, I am a good mother".

She is banging her little fists on my chest shouting at the top of her lungs. Aww my baby girl, it's breaking my heart to see her like this. I hold her close, hush her down. "It's going to be okay", I say out loud. It's going to be okay I repeat, this one not just to reassure her but me as well. I need a reminder.

I sleep as soon as I get into bed. Working my job and working Fierce and working the children is so exhausting! Something doesn't feel right, so I wake up and check to see if Fierce is okay and she ain't there. I feel the sheets on her side of the bed

and it's cold, that means she hasn't been here for a while and it's certainly not a bathroom break. I check the time and it's 2 am. Panic hits me, where could she be? I wake up and search through the house and there's not even a single trace of her. Her phone was on her bedside table so I can't call her. I call Lumka and he hasn't heard from her. I call Lizzy and also nothing. I do another sweep of the house and she is nowhere to be seen. I can't believe she left me, snuck out like a thief in the middle of the night.

I also can't deal with the sudden loss, I knew it was hard but I never not once thought she would leave me. I was going to do better, I was going to love her through this. I needed more time. Why would she just up and leave? Couldn't she talk to me anymore? For crying out loud I lost a son too, how can she be so selfish? But I don't blame her, I was never good enough for her and now she knows it. I have finally outdone myself and given her a good enough reason to leave. I need a drink and should probably pass by the nursery just to say farewell to my son. The maid better pack all that shit up in the morning. 1st thing when the sun comes up is searching for Fierce, I will find her, and she will come back home.

Standing by the door to the nursery, my heart constricted in my chest, so tight it hurt, I find certain comfort by just seeing my son's room, or what was meant to be. Seeing the touch of Fierce's work on it is also comforting. She is so talented. I don't believe I never told her what a good job she was doing in here. I am startled by a sound, more like a snore, I know it's not me, so I look around, bracing myself for whatever it is as I walk into the room. I get the lights and there curled up into a little ball on the other side of the cot bed is my Fierce. I am flooded with relief,

happiness and joy all at once such that a tear escapes my eye. I quickly wipe it off, real men don't cry! I carry Fierce back to our room, we going to have to talk about her behaviour in the morning, for now I just wrap my arms around her and go back to sleep.

If I thought last night's disappearance scare was too much to deal with, I wasn't ready for this morning. From breaking plates and glasses to the constant outbursts of tears. I can't keep up with the different moods of Fierce and each one catches me off guard each time. Zombie Fierce is my favourite now. It's a painful sight to watch her stare into space and not move, literally seem like a statue, but it is the only time I have to take a break from cleaning up after her, wiping the tears and reassuring her that I love her and that she is enough for me. I am somewhere near tired and fed up. I should probably pack a bag and send her to her aunt in Zimbabwe.

I haven't had a chance to get work done today and honestly, I don't feel like it. My phone has been on flight mode all day, Lumka promised to take care of everything and I trust him. But now I just want to touch base with him and find out how the day went. It has only been a little while since I switched from flight mode and my phone rings. I have been waiting on Lumka to call but I'm surprised to see its Lemon. We haven't spoken in a while and I don't feel like a chat, so I ignore his call. You would think that it would stop him. Five attempts later I am annoyed and desperately want to tell him off.

"Not now you mother...."

I catch my tongue and ask him to repeat what he just said.

"I said your bro wants drugs from me. Wassup with that my bro?"

Fierce? Drugs? Can't be.

"You must be joking" I tell him.

But he had his conversation with my woman recorded and indeed it's her.

"So, should I give them to her or not?"

"You stay away from my woman and family or else I will come for you."

"Relax El. That's why I called you first."

I hang up, feeling all type of sorts, I can't wrap my head around the fact that she is taking such measures. What is going through her head? We need to talk, and I am not waiting for her to wake up. She better wake up and explain herself. I stroll to our room, in deep thought. I should choose my words carefully. The kids are sleeping and I don't want this to escalate and startle them.

Fierce!! I tap her on her shoulder and luckily, she gets up. She sits upright, and I decide to get straight to the point.

"Baby, Lemon just called and said he is on his way with your things."

Very sly of me I know but last-minute changes, I needed the truth more. There is guilt on her face, like a baby caught stealing sugar. "I can explain baby, it's nothing, I wasn't going to use them, I was just, it was in the spur of the moment."

She won't even deny it. I'm so angry I can't see clearly, and I should move away from her before I do something crazy and stupid, like slap her back to her senses. I fold my hands into a fist. We aren't those type of people, that's not what we do. And what? Bring drugs into our home?? That crosses the line for me.

CHAPTER 92

It's afternoon and the twins are taking their afternoon nap. School holidays have them staying home. Elik couldn't go and work because I was a wreck again this morning so he had to stay home and make sure I'm ok. He keeps insisting on taking me to a psychologist but do I look mentally ill to him?

He wakes me up. He says Lemon called and has my stuff. I freak out and fully awaken. The betrayal! I asked that tattooed muscled man not to tell Elik! I need to think fast and get out of this one. I lie and say I wanted them but wouldn't use them. I just wanted them for a project I'm doing. That doesn't even make sense. He asks again. More sternly this time and I find myself admitting.

He's furious and I'm scared. But angry Fierce thinks it's a great idea to flip the script and blame Elik. Reverse psychology. But he's not having any of my bullshit today and that just makes me so angry! I always control him so why isn't that working now!

"You did this to me Elik! You did this!", I storm out of the room.

I get out and go off to the kitchen. When he gets to the kitchen he finds me wanting to destroy everything. I just want to break something. I want to break someone's neck. How dare he judges me for wanting drugs? Does he know the pain I'm going through? Does he not care? I break the glass sitting on the counter, then a cup then a plate from the cupboard and throw another cup at the wall.

"Fierce! Not again! Stop", he says.

I stand there with a pile of broken things on my feet. Did he say stop? Why? I'm just getting started! We have a new TV that needs to be broken and I might just slash the tyres of his car and put sugar in his fuel tank!

He walks up to me and pins my arms to my body and makes me stand against the wall.

"Get it together woman! This can't go on", he says.

"I'm going to ask you once Elikplim Nkrumah! Get the fuck out of my way!", I say.

"No princess. You don't talk to me like that!", he says.

I'll talk to him however way I want! He just cost me the only chance I had of getting something that will help me heal. And I'm so mad at that Lemon guy. He's such a Judas' Iscariot! He smiled at me in that club office and he betrayed me just like that! You can't trust anyone these days.

"Let. Me. Go. Elik", I say slowly this time so he knows I'm serious.

"What's going on?", I hear a little voice.

We both turn and it's Peter rubbing his eyes.

For a moment, I'm ashamed of myself. I look away.

"What's going on? You are making noise!", Peter says.

"No big guy. It's nothing. Fierce and I are just playing. Come let me take you back to bed. I'm sorry we woke you up", Elik says. He shoots me an 'I'm not done with you' eye. He picks up Peter and disappears.

I can feel my anger receding and the tears coming. The shame. What have I become? What am I doing? But now is not the time for tears. Crying Fierce should go to sleep and let me handle this. I need to defend my foolishness. I need those drugs. I'm not stupid! I wouldn't turn to drugs if I had another option. Besides why is he overreacting, it's just a combination of chemicals that I can manipulate. Chemicals are kind of my thing. I'm getting a PhD in manipulating them. Elik comes back as I'm still piecing together my argument and he's not smiling. He's so furious with me, I don't get it.

"Fierce!" his tone is harsh and I can't make the expression on his face. And why is he walking towards me so slowly? Suddenly I'm aware of how tiny I am as he stands right in front of me, I feel like a little lamb ready for slaughter.

"I won't have this nonsense in my house", he says, his eyes shooting daggers to mine.

I take a step away, somehow feeling the need for space lest things get physical, because I don't know the man standing right in front of me at this moment.

"Come on Elik! I'm a chemical engineer! Trust that I know what I wanted to do!", I say.

"I'm intelligent you know!", I add on unnecessarily.

Said an about-to-get-a-PhD Chemical Engineer to a Professor with a PhD in Robotics and Mechatronics! Wrong move.

"Intelligent?", he laughs at me.

"You are a pretty dumb engineer! Beyond academics you have no clue! Don't tell me about engineering, that could impress your friends out there but not me", he says.

Ouch! That hurt.

"You want to bring drugs here?" "Around MY children?", he says. Short sentences, short breaths in between, why are my knees shaking? The emphasis on MY children grips my heart. What is this, spitefulness because I lost my child? So it's his children now not ours? A bolt of courage hits me, I won't let him intimidate me, not now, not after he said that.

"Your children Elik? Because mine died you'll rub it in my face that these are yours?", I say.

Mental note: Never again poke a beehive and expect not to be stung. I shouldn't have said that, the look on his face says he doesn't care.

"Goddammit Fierce!" he says, throwing his hands in the air. He starts pacing around the room, if I wasn't in the middle of a fight I would have thought the man was going crazy. He clenches his hands into fists and raises his voice at me.

"They are MY children and I don't care how you take it! I won't let you do your drugs in here or whatever you think you need to do to get your head together. I won't sit and watch you endanger MY children or disrupt their lives. I won't let MY children grow up around this chaos. I won't have them see all this (points at broken things all over the floor)", he says.

"This is all your fault!", I say.

I feel the need to defend myself. Why am I being made the bad person here? It's just this once. I have raised these children too and been around them more than him, he should cut me some slack. The nerve to act holy!

"Oh no ma. Hold it right there! What did you just say? What the fuck is wrong with you? Huh? You gonna blame everything on me? Everytime? Fuck that shit! It's old", he says.

I'm staring at him in shock, from the look in his eyes he is battling with himself, he probably wants to slam his fist into something. Hopefully not my face! I am hoping he does that though. That way I can spin the tables and be the victim. Don't judge me, I'm desperate, this seems like a fight I won't win.

"You need to grow the fuck up! I'm fed up of your nonsense! I won't have you disrespect me every day in my own house when all I'm doing is being there for you! Don't you think I feel the pain too? Do you think I'm made of adamantium?", he says.

Wow big words Elik! Adamantium isn't even real! Big words or not, I still won't back down. And ain't we swearing a bit too much today?

I can't believe he's talking to me like this! The nerve!

"Fine! I'll leave you and YOUR children then. Clearly you want me gone so let me make this easy for you. I'm leaving", I say.

I'm not going anywhere. Like where would I go? But let's see how he likes that idea! Didn't see that coming did he?

I know he'll start begging me soon! He's so predictable *rolls eyes*.

"Go", he says.

"What?", I'm utterly shocked.

This throws me aback; it takes me a little longer than usual to think of a response.

"Go. What you waiting for? Get out", he says.

I look at him and I think he's actually serious! His body language suggests he is so serious he will drag me out himself if I don't leave. Toughen up girl, stand your ground, boy he doesn't know me! Fine. I'll get out. I'll go to a hotel somewhere! Fine. I'll blow his money to cents!

I scurry to the bedroom and he is right on my heels. Folding his arms he stands by the door, unfazed by the reality that I'm about to walk out that door.

Is he going to just stand there and watch me leave? Daddy, you about to lose the best thing you ever had in your life! And you'll just stand there and do nothing?

I put on those jeans that make my ass pop that I know he loves and pair them with that Forever New corset I've been saving for a rainy day! I need the corset to hold my stomach flat. He has no idea how hot I'm going to look! I put on my Sissy Boy heels because they are so comfortable and I take the red pair because I'm feeling sexy and dangerous! This jacket I got in Milan will keep the cold out. I hope he's looking.

I was so focused on my look I didn't see him move from the door, just as I take out my makeup bag to contour my cheeks and shape my brows, he takes it from me

and I catch a fright, I wasn't expecting that. He throws it on the bed. Good gracious what has gotten over this man?

"I'm not gonna stand here waiting for you all day. Get out", he says.

And now I have had just about enough of whatever it is that's gotten into him. I can't deal with this, I have had enough to deal with and Macho Elik and suddenly Father-of-the-year will not be going on that list.

"Fine!" I snarl at him and I reach for a weekend bag in the closet to throw in some clothes. I think I'll be gone a while so I need a number of outfits.

"What do you think you doing woman? You not taking anything out of this house! What makes you think a drug addict, crack whore deserves anything my money bought? Huh? That's the shit you should have thought about before going behind my back and trying to get yourself a fix. So get two stepping Amy Winehouse, all the shit in this house is mine. Leave it", he says.

I freeze and look at him. Information overload, what did he just call me? Amy what? This bastard better not think I'm coming back after this, I refuse to be disrespected. Wait, but when did we get to name calling and shaming? Hell no, I'm leaving and I ain't coming back. This man forgot the shit I had to take from him and now he's throwing me out and calling me a crack whore?

"Leave woman! Don't make me repeat myself!", he says.

He's determined to see me go. I am filled with the urgency to leave as well, like who wants to stay for this kind of nonsense anyways? Dear ancestors, I've never

seen this Elik! I want the Elik I woke up to. The one babying me and saying sorry all the time.

He takes me by the hand and shows me the door.

"I can walk by myself! Get your hands off me!", I shrug him off.

I refuse to be manhandled.

He walks behind me. I grab my handbag by the couch then reach for my car keys and my phone.

"Where the fuck you think you going with my car?", he says.

"You are pretty stupid aren't you? What makes you think you can leave with my car after you couldn't take a pair of socks?"

"Stop wasting my time Fierce", he says, grabbing the keys from my hand.

"You said you want to go, so go. Get your ass out of my house princess! This is MY castle not yours", he says.

"But Elik!", I say. Where will I go without a car?

"I bought you that bag as well, didn't I? Leave it!", he says.

My jaw drops. I quickly take his bank card in the bag and then toss it away. He can keep it. I'm going to buy another one.

"Good girl. Now get out. I need to get back to MY kids", he says.

"So now everything is yours. Not ours but yours?", I say.

I don't believe he's doing this to me.

"Yes they are mine! I work hard Fierce and I take care of you! But that's made you way too comfortable! You think now you can talk to me however you want! The

houses, the cars, the kids, the bank accounts. Everything is mine. I own it, including you too Princess, I OWN you!"

Why does that sound sexy? Even though it's meant to be an insult, it's making me want to jump him and maybe let our tongues wrestle each other. He's a good kisser he will probably win. I'm quickly taken out of my little fantasy, how I got here in the midst of this turmoil beats me. St Jude, I hope you praying for me. "Too bad I don't have space for drug addicts and junkies in my life so you are out missy", he says.

My jaw drops and I feel tears building in my eyes. Douchebag! Was Elik always so spiteful and vindictive?

"It must be nice being you Dr Fierce! Just have Elik put you up on that pedestal and bust his ass for you, working long hours! Then having him come home to you and try to spend as much time with you? Then have him run around doing everything and afraid to break precious little you. What does Elik get in return? Your disrespect? Your uncalled for attitude? Well, reality check your highness, that ends right now! Everything here is mine! Look around", he says.

I'm trying to grasp the meaning and reasoning behind everything he's saying as tears roll down my cheeks. He looks at me unmoved and shakes his head. Since when do I cry and he doesn't apologise and hold me?

He motions to grab me by the arm but I don't want those hands on me so I move away. He won't have it, so he forcefully grabs my arm again moving much faster

than me this time. The grip is tight and unforgiving, I'm sure it will leave a bruise. Then he proceeds to push me out the door. I hear the door shut behind me and lock.

I don't remember the last time he shouted at me! And I'm tempted to kick and scream maybe wail as well, but I'm dressed too good for that kind of drama.

The gate slides wide open and I walk out. I stand to watch as it closes and the truth in Elik's words sinks in and I realise I have nothing! I have my phone and his bank card, I can at least find comfort in that, it should suffice for now. Gosh it's on 20%. I really should learn to keep my phone charged! I order an Uber.

*****ELIK*****

Where's my damn phone! I need to call Lemon and make sure he doesn't sell her those drugs. I'll kill him if he does! And Fierce! What's wrong with her? What does she think this is? Fuck! She's so ungrateful! And the number of times I say fuck need to reduce! I'll mess up the kids. And where is the maid? I want this mess cleaned up! There's kids living here!

I have to call Lumka. Fierce is going to go running to him with this!

"Hey man. Listen. If Fierce contacts you and asks for anything DO NOT help her". He tries to ask what's going on but I'll call him later. He needs to focus on that Zambian thing I fucked up last time because of Fierce! This girl really has no idea how much I've given up for her does she? Does she even know how I've changed myself and done everything to shelter her? She thinks that makes me weak? Does

she know of meetings I've cancelled because the 'come home' and 'I miss yous' and 'the kids miss you' wouldn't stop? I've treated her so much better than I've ever treated anyone ever then she turns around and does this shit! I can see she thinks she owns me now and I've let her ride that thought for too long. I'm fed up.

I call my banker. He needs to make sure my card lil miss Fierce uses is disabled. I tell him to freeze Fierce's account as well. I don't care how, he must just do it and do it right now or I get a new banker! His choice. Wise choice he makes! All the money in there is mine and if this bitch thinks she'll blow my money on drugs, she needs to think again. Not on my watch!

For someone getting a PhD, baby girl is so ignorant. I can't believe her! Throwing Chemical Engineering at me! Seriously? Now that's a big joke! The Maths she learnt at Honours, I did in my first year with my eyes closed! Then she wants to use that? Does she think I'm one of those boys in her lab drooling over her?

She looked sizzling though! That ass! Damn! Can't wait to hit that! I hope she's not thinking of going to another man because I'll fuck her up if she even thinks about it! Taking my money to spend on another man!

She's been through a lot though and she's falling apart. Was I too hard on her? I should have taken her to see a shrink maybe? But someone needs to remind her that life is not a bed of roses! All this crying and whining and nagging has to stop really. It's too much now. I can't catch a break! I have to work! And this blaming me for everything and refusing to take any responsibility for anything needs to come

to an end. Fuck that shit. She needs to grow up and do so very quickly. Otherwise we done!

Fuck Fierce! Why did you have to go and do this! Drugs? Was she taking drugs when pregnant? Is that why the baby died, maybe? No. The doctor would have told me. Dammit Fierce!

She's my baby girl though and although I'm so pissed off right now I care about her. I'll call Lemon and see if he can quickly arrange someone to tail her. I don't want anything bad to happen to her. I just need her to grow up and stop acting like a spoilt brat!

The kids are up and want attention. What do I do with them now? I don't know how Fierce does it! They need to wait a second, I'll be with them just now. I still need to track Fierce down. That smart home app on her phone will come in very handy right now. I login to my smart home app on my laptop. And there's our pretty princess headed towards town at 80km/h. I wait 20 minutes and she's at the Waterfront. Perfect! I'll send the coordinates to Lemon's guy as soon as she stops moving. I need her watched. She's stopped. Sevruga. Expensive taste we have there princess! I hope that banker has frozen the bloody accounts!

Lizzy needs to come and take the kids. I need to keep an eye on her location until Lemon's guy can get to Sevruga. Then I'll drain her phone's battery. She should never have let me migrate her old phone to the new one. She should have done it

herself. Her phone technically runs on my laptop! She chose to be with a robotics engineer all on her own, no one pointed a gun to her head!

*****FIERCE*****

The worst feeling in the whole world. Elik threw me out! He actually threw me out and didn't look remorseful or anything! I'm not even sure how I'm feeling right now. I really deserved this hot chocolate and this double chocolate fondant to appease my soul. I always loved Sevruga. I might as well check into the One&Only! Let's see how he feels footing a R14 000 per night bill!

An hour later I've calmed down. The waitress brings the bill and it's only R120. She looks very nice so let's tip her handsomely, shall we? I add a R500 tip. Not my money!

"What do you mean card declined?", I say.

"No. Try again", I say.

This card never declines. Something must be wrong with their speed point not the card! She tries the card again and again it declines. You mean to tell me within this hour, Elik blocked his card? I don't even have mine. It's fine. He thinks he's clever. I'm clever too. Let me eWallet myself. What? Why can't I access my mobile banking? What just happened to my Banking app? I swear it just disappeared right in front of my eyes! I opened it and now App does not exist? I

can't even reinstall because my Playstore is broken! What's going on with this phone today! This is bad. I don't have money! And now I owe R620. And how will I check into a hotel? Flip! How will I get out of here to anywhere without money.

Lumka! He will help. Why is my battery at 5% now! That doesn't make sense. It was on 20% right now and estimated battery life was 3 hours! Bad bad.

"Bhud Lumka", I say.

"What do you want Fierce?", he says.

Ok that's a bit off but whatever.

"I need a favour. Can you send me money, as in right now? R10 000? My cards are not working", I say.

This waitress is still standing here.

"Sorry, I can't help you. I'm boarding my flight to Zambia right now. Your man kinda messed up you know and some of us now have to do damage control!", he says and hangs up.

I'm left staring at my phone with my mouth open. Since when is Lumka so cold? And what does he mean Elik messed up? Elik never messes up when it comes to work! Mxm. I don't care! My battery is at 2%. Why is it draining so fast? It's on ultra power saving mode it shouldn't be going down this fast! I need to make it snappy. I call Kofi. I don't think he can send me money fast enough but I'm getting desperate here. He's in a very noisy place and keeps saying 'Can you hear me?'. Just great!

Shit just got real. Bunke. I'm just opening my contacts list when my phone dies. Wow. It never rains but it pours for sure! What am I supposed to do now? I feel like crying. Only Elik can save me right now. But he doesn't want me anymore.

"Can I speak to your manager please", I say to the waitress and she says cool. This is so embarrassing! I tell him my story and that I don't know why my card is declining because I have money, a lot of money in there. I say I'll bring the money tomorrow. He says no, he knows my type. Wanting to dine fancy then twisting a sob story to get out of paying. He's so rude! He says he can either call the police or I can come and wash a load of plates at the back. I'll do the plates alright or might just break them all.

My poor nails have to deal with detergent. I ask for gloves and they just laugh at me. Great. And the other people here at the back are laughing at me for looking so expensive while I can't afford mere dessert! People are such bullies! The plates won't stop coming and they keep shouting at me to hurry up. I'll be here for a long time mos. Why don't they have dishwashers here?

I feel a sadness deep inside me. When I'm done I'm allowed to leave. I was doing dishes for over 2 hours! That was thoroughly embarrassing! My phone is off still so there's no hope of an Uber. This corset is making my stomach hurt but I can't do anything about it right now.

I walk. I leave waterfront behind and walk along the ocean. By the time I'm in Green point the sun is going down. I just kept walking. My feet are killing me now

so I take off the heels and walk barefooted. Oh great there's a bench facing the seaside. I sit there listening to the ocean and wiggling my toes to bring blood back to them.

Where am I going to sleep? I can't sleep outside! Can I? I'm really nothing without Elik! Am I that dependent on him? It's getting dark fast and still no plan. I'm scared of darkness but I'm sure I'll sleep outside today. How I'll make it through the night I don't know. The tears won't stop. I guess this is how I lose weight! I cry it away! I'm down 5 kgs this week alone! Or is it because the baby is gone plus my depression?

Sitting on the bench, alone with my thoughts and washing my face with my tears, I miss Elik so much. He didn't deserve my behaviour. He didn't really. He was a godsend and took care of me even when I was being impossible. I love him with every inch of my soul. My little heart don't want to beat without him.

I need to forget Elik and look inside myself, if there's anything left in there. I'm stuck between hope and despair. Hope that I can get myself together and maybe Elik can have me back and maybe I can be a better girlfriend/fiancé. Despair because the chances of that happening appear so slim. The only thing giving me hope right now is this ring on my finger. He asked me to marry him and I said yes. So maybe that promise still stands. I promise I'll stop my nonsense.

As I sit here I look at myself. Who's this girl I've become? If 18 year old me could see me right now what would she say? She would be so disappointed. 18 year old

me was ambitious, she had big dreams, she wanted to start her own company, she wanted her PhD as soon as possible and was willing to work for it. She wanted big things and was a role model. She promised never to depend on a man for anything. 26 year old me is here judging slay queens and blessees when I dress just like them and probably think like them now.

What happened to ambitious me? Oh I remember! I fell in love and the love came with money and all my dreams died because everything I'd dreamed of buying Elik gave it to me.

He said everything is his! That stung because for the longest I've been thinking it's my house, my car and even the twins were my kids. I forgot to pursue my own dreams. How can I not have learnt from Komla?

Damn you Lemon! What kind of a man snitches like that! He could have just said no! And Elik overreacted! Or did he? I may blame Elik all I like but I did this to myself.

I thought me giving him bomb sex was enough. I thought me being a Doctor set me far apart from all the other girls and made me a goddess that he would worship endlessly. I thought my body was that one temple he would want to do his morning devotions in and pull all night vigils on for eternity! I thought I was the best he ever had because he continually told me so and his actions also told me so. I got too comfortable. Didn't I? He was right.

I thought I was the best thing that ever happened to him and he would never ever dream of letting me go. Along the way I forgot the little things like respect and being sensitive to him. Like that he too had a painful past and he was human like me. Like the child I lost was not mine but ours. I thought since I'd taken care of him so many times in the past, he had to take care of me. It seemed only fair. And he didn't seem to have a problem with it.

Who am I? I can't cry now. No. I should chastise myself harshly and tell myself the truth. I was going to hurt the twins I claim to love. I was tearing down the man I claim to love. I was breaking myself apart. I need to go back to 18 year old me. I'm 8 years too late but there might still be hope. I need to get help. I'll see a therapist. I wonder if my medical aid covers that.

His words were harsh but they were a wake up call. I hit rock bottom hard. I can almost see Komla laughing at me right now. I don't remember how not having money feels like. I don't even have R30 so I can take a taxi to Bellville tomorrow morning and ask Bunke to help me. It's cool, I'm sure I can spin a story about being robbed tomorrow and have people giving me spare change. How hard can it be? Some people do it everyday and the fact that they return day after day means business is good right? Gosh I'm going to be a beggar now. What if I'm seen by someone I know?

I'm getting Fierce back no matter the cost. And I'm keeping my thighs closed, these men confuse me with their bodies and have me feeling weak. I want to be strong. I'm going to get back to 18 year old me. I'll crawl towards her if I have to.

I just want Elik though. I can't live without him. I want to feel his arms around me. I want to feel him breathing down my neck and hear that voice telling me 'It's gonna be alright'. I miss him saying, 'that's right, choke on it'. My toes just curled at the thought. I miss him and I'm so sorry. I want to try for a baby one more time with him. But I have to get better first.

I curl up on the bench and rest my head on my arm. Gosh my stomach hurts and my breasts are on fire. I thought I was healed! I take off the corset and only wear the jacket. Wearing something as tight as a corset was very stupid of me. Elik's point made. Apart from academics, I have no clue! I squeezed my stomach and boobs and now they hurt!

I'm freezing and I won't be shocked if I wake up a dead block of ice tomorrow. Had I known I'd end up here, I'll have chosen a whole different outfit! I pray for sleep but I know I'm not going to get any. What with cars hooting on that side and the ocean raging this side.

"I'm sorry Elik", is all I wish I could say.

I never thought he would ever throw me away. Is he done done? He sounded done. I'm not though. I want him to forgive me. It would take me a lifetime to get over him. I always thought it would end with him getting some girl pregnant or me walking in on him sexing some girl. I never thought it would end like this. That I would be the reason. My heart is in pieces right now and all that attitude I had earlier is gone. I shouldn't have talked back like that.

When he came to me asking about the drugs he was angry yes but he wanted to talk. Instead I went crazy and now I'm here on a bench alone at night. The comforting feeling of being loved and wanted is gone before I even had the chance to realise what was happening. I was the luckiest girl in the whole world but I single handedly messed that up. Great work Fierce. Now you are broke and homeless and freezing and in pain. Is Elik thinking about me perhaps or is he warming up another girl's body right now?

CHAPTER 93

I can't sleep. Too many external and internal factors are collaborating against me and plotting my demise. Inside, it's just the silent pain and the harsh reality check. Outside, it's the scary sound of the ocean waves, the freezing breeze, the noise of music coming from bars that other side of the road and the hard bench beneath my body. This bench has that metal badge like thing stuck on it written 'Dedicated to Julia Smith, 1960 - 2016'. I wonder what this means. Like she loved this bench so much they gave it to her when she died? Or they cremated her when she died and scattered her ashes all over this bench? Or when she died they mixed her ashes with wood and made a bench? Like what does this mean? For all I know right now I'm chilling with a 56 year old ghost! All I'm curious about is how she was when she was alive. If she was a serial killer or stuff like that, I need to know so I can change benches you know.

To think I once owned a penthouse in this side of town. Or I thought I owned it at least. That thought alone is killing me! I think I'll just lie here and die. Dying sounds

like a good idea right now. I could go and be with my lost children. But before I die it might be a good idea for me to decide what I believe happens after death. It just makes sense. Right now I believe in reincarnation and I don't want to come back a rat or a cockroach or a donkey, goodness no! I want to come back as a small white dog owned by a rich mistress in Sandton, wearing pink ribbons and carried in handbags. In my past life, I'm convinced I was a jellyfish, because they don't have as much as a single brain cell! Dumb as hell and incapable of thinking. Sounds too familiar.

I also believe in heaven and hell. And if the Catholic Church has taught me anything it's that St. Michael the archangel is the patron of death. Can I like invoke him and ask him a couple of questions about the afterlife? Or once you call him it's life-over for you? Let me rather not call him. Can't take chances.

I also believe in ancestors. Like you die and you join those gone before you. I don't quite get it though. Like who exactly qualifies to be an ancestor? Everyone who dies or there's a criteria? It can't be everyone though right because that means my children that died are now ancestors. That doesn't sound right at all. And that would mean when my mother dies she will become an ancestor and will be expected to look out for me and my future children! I wonder how that will go! Or maybe hating someone stops the moment you die? This ancestorland is confusing. Let's shelf it.

I also believe in that whole dust to dust, ashes to ashes, no afterlife theory. You die, you die. Game over. You just cease to exist and your body becomes manure and that's it. I believe in too many things so until I make up my mind I can't die.

I am so screwed it's not even funny. I feel like laughing at myself. This can't be me? Me, I'm a princess and Elik worships the ground I walk on. Isn't that just the mentality that got me kicked out in the first place!

I know I should be upset at him but all selfishness aside, I made him do it. I pushed him to his limits. I behaved like a 2 year old. I can't believe I really wanted drugs! My head needs to be checked, a wire is loose up there.

I miss Elik so much though. It's unnatural. I'm not mad at him at all, if anything, I'm mad at this stupid stupid girl that lives inside me! No matter where my thoughts go they keep returning to Elik! My fine dark prince. I want to apologise. I want to ask for another chance. I want to be the girl he deserves. I want us to be the power couple not this Superman-Victim relationship we are having right now.

How did I even get there? I don't remember. I think I blame it on poverty! I grew up with nothing so when all this money fell on me I didn't know what to do with it. It seemed endless, I could swipe and swipe and swipe and the bank account never dried! And since I grew up poor, all I wanted was to be superwoman and make money one day and take care of everyone. But now I had the money so I lost my purpose! Damn you poverty! You messed up my head and now I'm back to you!

Elik did me rough though tjo! The bastard left me homeless, carless, moneyless, clothesless. Kanjalo nje! I always knew he was savage but I never thought I'd also be on the receiving end one day. I kinda thought I was super special to him and funny enough I still think so. I laughed at Komla when Elik left her with nothing but I bet she's having the last laugh now. I could steal Peter and Paul and ask him for ransom. Except Elik will kill me and besides I need money to get to them, something which is a scarce commodity in Fierceville right now. He's such a dashing handsome, arrogant, selfish, gorgeous fool! But despite all that, I keep seeing his body crushing down on me in my head. I need help.

It's all good. I'll be just fine. I'll make a plan. I thought I said I wanted to die and dead Man make no plans! As always, I don't know what I want. Can't even make a simple decision like to live or not to live! Make up your mind Fierce! Get it together!

Like where am I going to start rebuilding myself? I'm at zero! Actually I'm at the minus side of the number line. And I have zero money. I did a 180 degrees without warning. I honestly didn't see this one coming, I must say. I need to pick myself up, and hurt as it may, accept that my son is gone and I need to grieve like I've got some sense not like a mad woman. Geez I'm 26! Soon to be 27! 30 is coming for me fast and I need to get it together.

Sigh.

How the mighty have fallen! From hero to zero. From Newlands to a park. From Jeep Grand Cherokee to Two Feet. From Egyptian cotton to old wooden bench. From Persian rug to grass.
Fallen. Head first.

I wonder what time it is! I can't stay lying down because my thoughts always seem to intensify this way. And now I'm thinking of Elik junior and I can feel my brain preparing to go crazy. I sit up and bring my knees to my chest, then hug my legs with my arms to keep the cold out. And since I have no phone to play music from, I'll sing a song to calm myself. Akon always did have my back and he always has a song for my every situation and I'm sure if he knew I existed he would fly down here on a private jet and take me to Senegal with him so we can light up Africa together. Let's see how Elik would like that! Discord or not, it's not like I'm singing to anyone!

The first song that jumps into my mind is Mandela by Akon. He sings about missing Mandela but I sing about missing Elik and every word fits my situation and my life like a glove. I was born and raised in shackles and Elik gave me my freedom and he always lifted me up when I was down, he protected my soul, he illuminated my dark days, he blessed me. All that and more he did with a warm arm around me. And for that reason, I will never surrender and I will never give up on us and I will fight and fight and fight until I can't no more, then I'll fight some more. Because we deserve to be together! Am I fooling myself again? As Akon sang this as a tribute to Nelson Mandela, I sing it as a tribute to my heartbeat, Elik.

So with my non-angelic voice I close my eyes and start singing.

Mandela - Akon

My knuckles all bruised up from knocking on heaven's door

My body still aching from sleeping on cement floors

I was taught to be non-violent when I'm at war

But it's so hard to move in silence where the lions roar

Cause I was born in shackles

You protected my soul, you left me

All alone in shackles

Oooh, went through it all, you blessed me

You lift me up when I was down, no hope, no vision

Lift me up when all the odds were against me, were against me

Now look up at the sky loss, the dark days

They now illuminate, yeah

We miss you, Mandela. We miss you, Mandela.

Suffering no more,

Oh yes

A fighting and I'm fighting and I fight until I can't no more

You see these whips and these chains 'round my neck just might be my flaw

But these whips on my back represent what I endured

Freedom, freedom, freedom, freedom
You gave me my freedom
Freedom, freedom, freedom
And I will never surrender, I won't surrender
No surrender, no no
And I will never surrender, I won't surrender
No surrender, no no"

You know when you sing alone you sometimes start thinking you can sing. I guess that's how some people end up embarrassing themselves on Idols and X-Factor! I personally think I killed that song! I even hit the high notes with ease. Damn I can sing! I should ask Father Francis about joining the church choir.

Who am I kidding!

I'm still stunned by my singing capabilities when my peace is disturbed. A man in black sits next to me. He just came from nowhere! I didn't even see him or hear him approach. He gave me such a fright! I fall off the bench in my attempt to run away. My life is becoming a movie stru!

I want to scream because I'm sure this person had no good intentions. A person in all black at night. Can't be good at all. He sits on the bench and I'm on the ground!

"You butchered those lyrics ma! It doesn't say "These whips on my back represent what I CAN DO", it's "These whips on my back represent what I ENDURED".

It takes me a minute. I can't even see clearly. My poor eyes have been crying.

"Hey. I didn't mean to scare you", he says.

“And you really miss Mandela that much?”, he says and laughs.

My goodness. Did I really sing so well the angels kidnapped me to heaven so I can join the cherubims and seraphims? But why is this one wearing all black then? The dress code for heaven is all white right? So what's this all blackness here?

Shit! Maybe I'm in hell. I have to run. They do say the devil was like singer of the year in heaven at some point before he started acting up and got kicked out. Maybe he recruited me for his choir down in the pits of sulphur and fire. I don't want that! I don't like heat that much. Or maybe it's Mandela himself. Like he misunderstood my sing and thought I was calling out for him? Or it's that Julia woman who owns this bench? But wait, I know that voice!

I hallucinate well enough without drugs I don't even know what I wanted them for!

“Let's go home baby”, he says.

Elik!

“Elik?”, I half say, half ask.

“In the flesh”, he says.

Am I dreaming? Am I dead? I am in half, one wants to scream out in joy and another wants to say a prayer that whatever reason he is here, I get to sleep on a bed today not this hard bench. I'm sure he must have noticed the internal conflict in me and sought to shed some light.

“Let's go home baby. Come”, he says and offers me a hand.

I take his hand, barely conscious of the action I'm taking. It hits me as I stumble to my feet, how ridiculous I must have looked on the ground! And why is this body of mine betraying me? Shouldn't I probably maybe be upset with him? Why am I like this mara? Ok we will solve this mystery of why I'm like this on another day. For now, I'm relieved. I'm ecstatic. I'm happy and most of all hopeful.

Let's be honest, this was my fault. I can be forgiven if I show how sorry I am. Heee, I told a full grown man to fuck off in his own house! Such disrespect! I got too comfortable and overstepped.

I'm just thankful he's here though, somewhere underneath the monster I saw today, lies the love of my life. Him throwing me out was a blessing in disguise. It gave me the opportunity to reevaluate my thoughts and make sound decisions.

"How am I supposed to see you in the dark though when you wearing black? You blend perfectly with the night!", I say. And I'm not kidding.

He laughs. Yes, I still have my 'laughing in difficult and unfunny situations' and jokes about his blackness never get old.

He pulls me into his arms, his embrace is warm, goodness do I need warmth! His heart is beating fast, he takes a deep breath in and then out. He doesn't say anything but just holds me. I don't hug back. I just stand like a statue. He threw me out! Why would I hug him? I want to laugh though and give him a handshake. He really got me shame!

"Let's go home", he says and takes my hand.

I grab my corset on the bench. He begins to walk us towards the road but his steps are wider than mine and my feet hurt and I'm trying to keep up so it seems like I'm limping behind him. I'm kinda barefooted here! But I don't mind because he's taking us home. Home, the thought feels so good. He notices my limp but doesn't say anything. We stop at a once red Toyota Tazz that has obviously seen better days. The guy rolls down the window. Another face that looks like it should be in prison! Elik hands him an envelope, shakes his hand and says, "Thanks. Got her. Tell Lemon I'll call him".

The guy drives off and Elik goes down to a squat. I'm confused at what is happening and before I ask,

"Are you going to hop on or are you going to stand there and look at me like the rest of these people?" he says.

A piggy bag?? Hell yeah you should have said so though Mr grumpy pants! I get on his back, I need not be told twice.

"I noticed you limping earlier, did you get hurt? We can call the doctor to come over and check you out", he says.

"No, a doctor is not necessary, my feet hurt and I couldn't keep up with your long legs that's all," I reply. Shucks I forgot my heels under that bench! Whatever! Someone lucky will find them.

He laughs. This is good, being on his back like this, I like it. It's like old times. He better not call me fat or heavy or nonsense like that! I'm barely 60 kgs!

When we get to his car, he opens the door for me. Such a gentleman! He turns the heat on and I say a silent 'thank you'. I'm freezing, I miss his back already. He drives in silence and we make it home. It looks clean! Lizzy did a good job cleaning after me as always. He looks too chilled for my liking, like I just left and now I'm back. Nothing major.

"Come let's clean you up", he says.

I just stand there. He leads me to the bedroom and helps me out of my clothes and he gets out of his. Why is he so quiet? I'm not going to be the first to speak! We get into the shower and I'm still not doing anything. He washes me. I always love it when he bathes me. He does that a lot when I'm distressed and I refuse to bath or do anything for that matter. It always makes me feel so loved and taken care of.

"Which T-shirt of mine are you stealing today?", he says.

I smile a little. I couldn't help it. He's so adorable. He hands me my tiny pyjama shorts and that T-shirt he said I could have in the Karoo. It's past 10 pm and I'm sure the kids are sleeping. I just want to kiss them goodnight, not mine as they may be. He stands by the door and watches me kissing them and covering them up and telling them I love them no matter WHO says what. I hope he gets my point!

"You hungry? I can't dish up for you because we don't have any plates left. Someone broke them all!", he says.

I just look at him. Mxm! He's not funny.

I'm not hungry though and if I was I know where the food is!

He makes me a hot water bottle. So chilled! This man of mine! You'd swear nothing happened!

He sits on the couch and makes me snuggle in between his legs with my back leaning on him.

"Let's get this T-shirt off you so I can hold this bottle to your stomach", he says.

I don't resist. I don't know what he ever did to me but I just love him and I'm putty in his hands. Maybe he was right when he said he owns me. We sit there in silence under a fleece blanket, with the back of my head on his neck, his breath on my neck, his one hand on the water bottle on my stomach and his other hand cupping my boob.

I'm back home.

"Cybertron", he says.

"Cybertron", I agree.

"Let's start by setting some things straight baby girl. I love you more than anything and what happened in the afternoon, that doesn't mean I don't love you. It doesn't change anything at all", he says.

"There could be many reasons to justify the way I acted today, even though some of the stuff I said was true, I don't think you deserved to have been told that way", he says.

I just stay quiet.

"I love you Fierce. More than anything and this afternoon, that should never have happened", he says and squeezes my boob. Like seriously? That's how he says sorry? By molesting me? I'll push that aside though for now.

"I love you too. More than anything", I say.

And that's the honest truth!

He sighs, with relief I think and kisses my neck.

"Baby you, the twins and our future babies are the reason I work so hard. I have no right to claim all of this because you are my drive. I don't see myself having most of it if I didn't have you, the one person that's always believed in me", he says.

He takes a deep breath. I don't speak, I want to listen, so I wait for him to go on.

"I got scared and I projected it on you, all my inadequacies were screaming at me, I thought I was being here for you but hearing that you wanted drugs made me feel not good enough, like I wasn't enough for you, so I did what most guys do, deflected and highlighted your weaknesses. I was a coward Fierce, it's a shame I have to live with, and I have the rest of my life to atone for it, if you will let me", he says.

Is this man good or what? How does one say no to such? I want to scream 'I love you' but I hold myself back.

"You forgive me?", he says.

I stay quiet.

"Please sweet thing? Should I beg? Get on my knees?", he says.

"Yes", I say under my breath.

I'm thinking he won't do it! He shifts me out of the way and straightens me to sit looking forward and he kneels in front of me. He actually got on his knees. He's so precious.

"Let's talk baby", he says and takes my hands. At that level he looks like he's talking to my boobs cause him and them are just staring at each other.

"Ummm. Aaa. What was I saying again?", he says.

"Don't you want to umm, put this jacket, I mean this T-shirt back on, umm, I kind of, I can't focus", he says.

I laugh this time. Nope no T-shirt! That's his punishment.

He clears his throat and focuses on looking into my eyes.

"Alright, baby I just want you to listen. I know I said what I said but I was bluffing. Whatever is in your name here is yours. I gave it to you and so it's yours! I swear I would never take it from you", he says.

I raise an eyebrow and my look says 'but you did!'.

"I swear. We can call Clive (his lawyer) right now and he will tell you. I can't ever take away anything that's in your name baby. In fact half of everything I own is yours. It's ours", he says. He looks so desperate to be believed with those eyes of his.

"I know I was harsh about this earlier and it could have been said better but baby I just, I need my girl back man. I need that girl full of life and love. I need that ambitious girl of mine. We've lost Junior and I was losing you at an alarming rate. Do you know how scary that was? I want my girl back", he says.

I look down. I know he's right. I want that girl back too.

“And come on. You've been so lazy baby and you haven't done much for yourself lately”, he says.

Lazy?

Unfortunately for me he doesn't see any thing wrong with that statement.

“And I know you. 5 years from now you going to look back and blame me for standing in the way of your dreams and for stopping you from being the amazing woman you were always meant to be”, he looks at me.

Sometimes I think he blinks like that on purpose just so I can see those hypnotising lashes of his!

I'm listening.

“I know you want to be a professor one day. Your dream was always to get that professorship at a younger age than I did. But at the rate you are going you will never accomplish that. It will be miracle if you even become a professor at all!

Baby, I didn't just wake up a professor and I didn't just miraculously have millions of Rands in my name! I worked baby girl, hard! I set my goal when I started my Masters and I followed through. I got that professorship because I deserved it. I university hopped, I had over 30 publications in accredited journals, I put in teaching hours, I supervised Masters and PhD students, I presented at numerous conferences, I have patents in my name, I have collaborations with renowned researchers, I did my hours of community service. I did everything. Remember how long I'd stay up in the office back then?”, he says.

I nod. I remember. I also remember that those long days of his usually ended up with me on his desk with my dress up. I was his warm down.

Saying all that just made him look sexy as hell right now! His brain is so attractive! I've even forgotten I was sleeping on a bench not so long ago. I'm just looking at him and thinking of things I shouldn't be thinking of.

"You need that baby. You need to make your mark and I know you can do it. You one hell of a smart engineer!", he says.

I laugh a little. Smart?

"But you said I'm a dumb engineer", I remind him and look down.

"No man. You know that's not true. I didn't mean it that way. Well, you doing Chemical and one (him) could argue that it's technically the easiest engineering field but that doesn't make you any less of an engineer", he says.

Wow! There's the man I know. Dissing me with a smile on his face!

"On a serious note baby. When was the last time you went to a conference? Published anything? Built a prototype? Did anything to progress your research? You have to work hard. Tell me what I can do to give you back that boost you had when we first met? I want you to be the best you can be. And whatever you need for that to happen just tell me and I'll hook you up. You need funding? I know someone high up in NRF. You need a collaboration? All I have to do is send an email to a few profs. You want to publish and so need time in the lab? Go. Isn't that why we got a helper to stay with the kids? We can get another one if you want. You want to start your own company? Bring me a business proposal and I'll help you. I'll fund you even. You want to consult with Lumka and I? Just say the

word. Whatever you need, you know I'll do it for you. You just need to want it and to tell me what it is and I'll make it happen for you", he says.

He looks so desperate on my behalf. So serious and I know he means it. I've always known he can do all that for me but I got lazy and got carried away with going to spas and shopping in Cavendish Square.

A tear falls out of my eye and he pulls me towards him. I think he just wants my boobs in his face and not necessarily a hug! I'm not crying. I'm just touched. I have it good, don't I? How many people have it so easy in life? I need to stop being ungrateful!

"You said you own everything here and you even own me!", I say.

"Well, technically that's true isn't it? I kind of bought everything", he says.

I push him back to look at him.

"No baby wait. I'm kidding! Everything that's yours is yours. And when you finally decide to marry me we'll share everything. On that note. When are you marrying me?", he says.

Gosh! I can't take him serious.

"Forget marrying you. You said you own me!", I say.

"I do, don't I?", he bites his lip in that 'I wanna smash that' type of way.

"If you were not sick right now, I'd show you exactly how I OWN you!", he says.

I don't know why I'm smiling like an idiot right now.

I get back to seriousness. "But when you said Peter and Paul are not mine. That hurt deeply. You know I've been struggling with the loss of Junior so for you to say that", I say.

He looks down and squeezes my hands.

"I was out of line there. You've done a lot for them and I had no right. I'm truly sorry for that. And I know how hard this has been on you. I just need us to face it together and do it in a sensible manner. We have kids in the house baby, somethings we just can't tolerate. I'm sorry I said that to you. I'm sorry for everything I said. I promise I didn't mean it. I was so angry", he says.

"I'm sorry too. For the way I've been acting lately and for disrespecting you", I say. "It's ok baby. As long as we have each other", he says and gives me another boob to face hug.

So they do make perfect man after all! Because this for me is perfection.

"I want to try for another baby. Not now though and maybe not anytime soon. But one day when I've healed from this", I say.

"You know I'd love that more than anything. We will get over this, together. We always get over things. Together. For now let's get you that implant you want and we take a break alright? Then one day when we both ready we will make a beautiful baby", he says.

I smile a little. More like blush.

He buries his face in my chest.

I push his face away. We are on Cybertron mode here! He needs to focus!

"So how did you find me?", I ask.

He laughs.

"Promise not to be mad at me", he says.

He doesn't tell until I promise.

"I had you tailed and that smart home app gave me your location earlier. Oh and I kind of hacked your phone", he says.

"You hacked my phone? How?", I say.

He laughs!

"Tell me. How? When I tried to hack your phone last time, you had a security system up and I couldn't get through", I say.

I quickly cover my mouth. That was never supposed to come out. Things like hacking are kind of deal breakers. No one likes being hacked and it breaks trust. Thankfully he laughs. Phew! Might have found myself back on a bench!

"So you tried to hack my phone? Which software did you use?", he asks.

"You first! How did you hack me?", I say.

I should have known! It was obvious that someone was manipulating my phone!

"I didn't hack it hack it per se. I kind of planted a real time cloning system on your phone that time I migrated your data. I'm sorry", he says. He doesn't look sorry though.

Wow! He needs to show me how to do that! That's some mad skills there! I know it's just wrong but come on you gotta admit it's impressive!

"And you cupcake? How did you fail to hack my phone?", he says.

I'm not an expert in these things. I was just trying but I'm not that good. I use the simplest softwares. I started doing these kind of things to impress him vele.

“Well. I used Midnight Raid but when I pushed the response invoked, the data I received wouldn't translate your phone's IMEI. Your security was too tight”, I say. He looks impressed. And has that smug look on his face.

“I'm proud of you! You are learning! But that would never work on my phone. You can't bypass my firewall program babe. I kind of had to get the best security system for my devices. I have sensitive information on my phone you know, like those pictures I took of you that time. Imagine if those found themselves on the internet!”, he says.

I refuse to imagine such horror. I looked good though, if I do say so myself, so it will be horror but a beautiful horror.

I know by sensitive he means his business info and things like what he discusses with the likes of Lemon! My nudes are just secondary.

“Why did you need to hack me though? You know my passwords”, he says.

“Where's the fun in accessing someone's phone using a password?”, I raise an eyebrow.

He knows I've got a point.

“Wait a second! You drained my battery didn't you!”, I say.

Flip I'm so impressed right now I can't even be upset!

This sly fox!

I love his brain!

“Yup”, he says. No shame at all!

“Wow! Will you teach me?”, I ask.

“If you ask nicely I can teach you a lot of things”, he says and kisses my boobs.

I push him away. He needs to focus!

We are a total fuckery. The both of us. We are so lost and are beyond saving. We just fought like we were done this afternoon. I got kicked out and cut off. And now we confessed to invading each other's privacy, or failure thereof on my part, and we are impressed! We are not mad about that! How messed up.

"I saw you were at Sevruga. So how did that go?", he says and laughs!

He actually laughs! This idiot of mine. I laugh too but it's too soon though. Why is he laughing at me? So soon nogal!

"Dude! You have no idea! I washed like 500 plates in there!", I say and we laugh.

Good times.

"Can I come sit now? Am I forgiven?", he says.

"I love you, you know that?", I say.

I hold the stare and I can't resist kissing him. I meant to kiss him but he's doing the kissing now. He makes me lie down on the couch and is on top of me, careful not to crush my poor stomach. Gosh love is something else.

I'm just moaning softly in his mouth and hoping those kids stay asleep.

He's so hard in those sweatpants and busy poking my thigh. I'm not feeling sorry for him. It's his punishment!

"I love you", he keeps saying.

He stops and holds the back of my neck with his hand and looks at me.

"Please marry me already. Please baby. I can't wait any longer. Please", he says.

"I promise. I'll think of a date and I'll tell you soon. I can't wait to marry you too", I say.

Weddings are not my thing though and I've been avoiding thinking about it. Let's just focus on kissing and leave big things like weddings alone.

Who knew you could cross the finish line just by someone kissing you and loving your boobs. Well I knew but it's always good to be reminded. He has to put his hand on my mouth when I want to scream out his name.

"We probably must go to sleep now. You need to be up early so you can pack. We going to Victoria Falls tomorrow", he says.

I sit up. What now? He thinks because he just finished pleasuring my flesh, I will accept whatever he says!

"We both need it baby. You are a mess and I can't focus, so let's do what we know best. Let's travel!", he says.

That's not what we do best though.

He could have asked me you know!

"Come on. We will do a 2 week road trip from here to Vic Falls. We'll stop in Joburg first and spend a night, then on to Botswana and spend two nights, then to Zim and spend two nights at your aunt's. I already called her and she can't wait to see Ghana man, whoever that is!", he says.

He went and made all these plans all by himself! When? When I was on a bench out in the cold? Some things never change! At least I'll get to see Lumka in Joburg so I can ask him why he was so mean to me. I just wanted R10 000 nothing much! I know why he was mean but I know his response will be classic so I'll ask anyway.

"Are the kids coming?", I say.

"No. You'll be ready for me in a few days so how am I supposed to get all up in you and OWN you with those two around? They are staying!", he says.

"But..", I start.

"No babe. I need us to take time out alone you know and reconnect you know. Just the two of us. No phones. No Facebook. Nothing. Just us", he says.

I'm happy. No complaints. I'll miss Facebook though. But well I'm happy. And I'm planning and forgetting my minor (major) fight with Elik. I'm already thinking up everything I want to do in Vic Falls and what I'll wear.

"The doctor didn't say your mouth is also out of service though, did he? Don't you wanna maybe you know, help me over here", he says.

"If you beg me nicely", I say and giggle.

He begs and asks and begs and pleads and promises all sorts of heavens on earth if I do. How can I say no?

It's now me on my knees, bowing down and giving head like I'm under evaluation. Only me would blow a man who kicked me out hours ago! Only me would forgive and forget that easily. That part of me I love.

I didn't even shout at him! I'm sure the entire female race is mad at me right now for misrepresenting. But it is what it is. I'm not one of those women who don't need a man. I need a man. This one in my mouth right now! I need him. Some of us have to be stupid so the clever ones can shine. We can't all be clever!

And when I almost gag and he says “That's right, choke on it”, I want to marry him already. That's right, he may think he owns me but right now I own him!

So destination>>>>> Victoria Falls

CHAPTER 94

So bags were packed and I spent sometime hugging the twins and telling I would call everyday. Then we got in the car and drove. I'm now used to the no-planning part of Elik. He just tells you to up and leave and you do just that. It's been like that from the beginning. I mean I used to wake up to a flight ticket on my phone and I had to run around like a headless chicken getting myself ready for Joburg. I'd complain and complain but I would board that flight!

For this road trip, I didn't even complain. I mean, a car seat feels so much better than a cold bench. From Cape Town we drove past the no girls-allowed cabin in the Karoo and spent a night there. Elik says it's his safe hideaway. I guess I should feel special considering it's a strictly girl-free zone. We had proper food this time (If cold pizza qualifies as proper) and got to sit by the bank of the stream and talk about everything and what the future holds for us.

Then next day we drove on to Joburg where Lumka was waiting for us. Lumka! He is one of the most chilled and charming beings walking! You just can't hate him! You can try but you'll fail! He has that smile when he says ‘sorry’ that you just can't resist. All I did was look at him and he started explaining.

He was like, "Sisi, you know I was going to send you the money but Elik threatened to kill me if I helped you in anyway. And we both know he doesn't make empty threats!", he said.

Elik doesn't kill people! And Lumka. Elik would never do anything to him.

Sometimes I think if it came down to me and Lumka, he would pick Lumka. They have that thing that I admire and wish I had with some girl. He's just like Elik in so many ways. I get why they are BFFs. They can pull on that innocent face that you can't help but forgive. I folded my arms and kept looking at him and he kept talking.

"I can send you that 10 grand right now. Do you want it?", he said.

He's an idiot. I don't need his 10 grand now! I needed it then. I had to give him a big hug to let him know we are cool and decline his offer. I truly appreciate him being in our life.

I then had to narrate to him (with so much exaggeration) that fateful afternoon. I thought it would make Elik feel bad but nope. Baby boy didn't feel a thing. He actually said it was a necessary evil! Seriously! It stopped being funny to me when they wouldn't stop laughing at me for doing dishes at a restaurant because Prof Elik had gone and frozen all the accounts. How is that funny though?

As if that wasn't enough. Kofi had been told and so when I called to tell him we were heading down to Victoria Falls, he also laughed at me!

He was like, "I respect Elik. Dude! He put you out then came and got you when he felt like it and then told you to pack a bag for a trip and you did! Now those are goals. Big bro needs to teach me these type of skills!", he said laughing at me. How that was funny, I don't know.

I realised Elik didn't tell them about my ambition of being a drug addict that's why they thought he just put me out over a small thing. But these (Lumka, Kofi) are two out of five of the most important boys in my life and I forgive them for they know not what they laugh at!

Then the weirdest thing happened. I'm still struggling to wrap my head around it. Let me back up a bit. To celebrate our home leaving, Elik, Lumka, Thando and I decided to turn up at home. We had the likes of Clive and a few other guys who I only know as Elik's people come by. Funny enough, no one brought their wife/girlfriend. It wasn't a party, just a small braai thing. It went great, no hassles just fun. Elik was with his friends and me because I like things I found Lumka so I can ask about Thando. I always have to be strategic so it doesn't come out as I'm gossiping but more like I'm concerned so much I need to know what's going on.

Ok so we at the party or braai or whatever this is. I find Lumka to pry but I don't even get the chance to ask anything because from the time we get past our hellos he takes control of the conversation and interrogates me instead!

"Elik says you stalling the wedding. He's worried you don't want to marry him", he says.

"What? No. I'm not stalling, I just have a lot on my plate right now but I'll look at the calendar and pick a date", I say.

"So you really want to marry him?", he says, putting his beer down and bringing his palms together and looking at me.

"How could you even ask. You know I want to marry him", I say.

"Just making sure", he says.

"Why though Fierce?", he says.

"Why? Why what? What do you mean why?" I'm legit confused.

"Why would you want to marry Elik? You know that putting a ring on his finger won't magically stop him from sleeping around or treating you the way he does sometimes", he says.

I stop for a second and look at this man. He has a serious face on so I'm confused. What is this? Is he protecting me or Elik? He doesn't want us to be together or what? But that can't be because he's supported us through everything.

"What exactly are you saying bhudi? Is there something I need to know?", I say.

"No. Nothing you don't know yet. I'm just saying Elik is going to keep breaking your heart and he's going to keep fucking around. Like how are you so ok with that?", he says.

I'm lost. Why would Lumka say things like this to me. Dear universe, help me understand.

"Bhudi, I appreciate your concern but with everything Elik and I been through I have no second thoughts about marrying him. I get that you are concerned but

trust me, I know who I'm sleeping with. He's not perfect but he's perfect for me. I wouldn't trade him for anyone else", I say.

He looks at me like I've lost my senses then relaxes his face with a satisfied look on his face.

Was this a test?

"Wow. I need that kind of loyalty in my life you know", he says.

"One day you'll find someone who will be that to you. I promise. You just need to keep it zipped up nawe for a while", I laugh but not truly laugh. I'm still not done processing what he just asked me.

"I hope so. But I still think Elik doesn't deserve you", he says.

Ok that statement coming from him is worrying. It takes me by surprise and I look at him with 'Explain!' eyes.

"Fierce. You are gorgeous and you love hard. Anyone looking at you around Elik can just tell that you are smitten and you look at him like he's the king of the world or something. The nigga even wanted to make you a second wife and you agreed to that and still stayed with him. You chose him over your own family and everytime he says jump you don't question but you ask how high. He cheated on you numerous times and even got that Mbali chick pregnant. And you stayed!", he says.

All he just said are reasons I should stay with his friend right? Not leave him! The weed he was smoking today is too strong. I told them not to smoke skunk but get a cleaner grade but they didn't listen. Look what it has done to Lumka's head now. But wait, what's that about Mbali?

"Mbali is pregnant?", I say. I can't even hide my shock and that wave of pain that swept through me.

"Well, she had an abortion but still", he says.

My eyes are blinking so fast right now I'm sure they are about to roll out of my eyes.

What?

"Elik got Mbali pregnant? When? And abortion? When?", I say.

Can he talk fast please, I need these details as soon as yesterday!

"I thought you knew. Elik tells you everything right?", he says.

Why is Lumka doing this to me though. And why didn't Elik tell me this? When did this happen? When I was pregnant? This trip to Victoria Falls is not happening. I'm done with Elik!

"You realise if you didn't tell me this I would have never known right? I was having a great time and I was excited about my upcoming trip. Why did you have to go and spoil it? Why did you tell me this?", I say.

"Ey, sorry. I thought you knew!", he says.

I don't think he looks sorry though but I don't read his face as well as I do Elik's.

I get up and leave. I need to find that man-whore of mine! I'm going to kill someone today.

He's with Clive talking work! Seriously? At a party?

"Hi Clive. Can I borrow my man for a second. Please", I say with a plastic smile.

"One moment baby. I need to finish this talk real quick. Can I find you when I'm done?", Elik says.

"Cool. I'll be next to the poolhouse", I say and walk away.

I need to collect my thoughts and calm my breath before I speak to him.

He only shows up some 25 minutes later!

"What's up?", he says, giving me a kiss on the forehead and playfully pulling my hair.

"When were you going to tell me?", I say.

I. Will. Not. Get. Angry. Actually I think I'm going to faint.

"Tell you what my angel?", he says.

He sits on the bench there and pulls me towards him and makes me sit on his lap.

Gosh he's so irresistible. I hate him.

"Promise not to lie!", I say.

He nods.

"Mbali and her abortion. When did you get her pregnant? When did this happen?

Everything. Spill!", I say.

My heart is beating hard because what if he says last month? I don't know how I'll proceed.

"What? Where's that coming from?", he says.

"It doesn't matter where it's coming from. All that matters is that it's here now! So speak Elikplim!", I say.

I'm not joking here.

"Baby, that was that time you found us at the hotel and you threw her out. Remember? We met because she claimed to be pregnant and said she had an abortion and was going to tell Komla and all that shit. Who told you this? Lumka? Thando? Who?", he says.

I stay quiet. Why then did Lumka tell me this if it was back back then? Maybe he's drunk? Or stupid high as I suspect?

"So you like had raw sex with her?", I ask.

I always thought he protected. That made me sleep better at night.

"No. I used a condom. That bitch was lying!", he says.

"No one gets pregnant through a condom Elikplim. Come on", I say.

"She was lying baby", he says.

"Did the condom break or something?", I say.

I can't believe I'm here with my man, talking about him and another girl. It's just messed up but I need the truth.

"Look at me Fierce", he says and cups my cheeks to make my face face him.

"I don't know where you got this from but this is what happened. I used a condom with Mbali. She was never pregnant. She lied about everything. I never got with her after that day at the hotel. That's the truth", he says.

And of course, I believe him.

He gets me off his lap and makes me sit facing him. I righten myself and sit on him with my legs around his waist.

I just stay there, straddling him, my arms around his neck and just taking in his scent. And hoping this bench doesn't fall.

The trip is back on.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you. I never got with Mbali ever again baby. I swear. I'm not going down that path again. You know I've been trying hard baby. After Ghana I didn't sleep with anyone else, I swear. I've been trying to be the man you deserve", he says.

He really has been trying shame. I won't dispute that.

"I love you and you have nothing to worry about. I'm all yours and I'm never going anywhere. You are my girl. My only girl. Anyway, who's feeding you this nonsense?", he says.

I leave my head on his neck and don't respond. He pulls my head back so I look at him and brings his lips to mine. It's like I'm kissing a bottle of Hennessy!

He's just confusing me with his lips but I don't stop him. I'm enjoying this.

"Why you like this baby? You not mad? Not even a bit? Why do you forgive me so easily?", he says and looks at me.

"I don't know. Maybe it's because I love you. Unconditionally. All I need from you is the truth, everytime", I say.

He plants a kiss on my lips.

"I know you haven't been sleeping around and I appreciate that. And you've been there for me. I wouldn't make it through life without you", I say.

Such confessions are the type that have me being cheated on because he knows I'm not going anyway.

"Baby. I don't care about all those 500 or so girls you've slept with in the past. All that matters to me now is what happens in the right now", I say.

He laughs and looks down.

This Jucifer of mine!

I put my hands back around his neck and just rest my head on his shoulder.

"Elik", Lumka's voice.

I swing my neck backwards and look at him.

He looks legit shocked to see me. I don't know why. I smile and excuse them. I need to find Thando and leave these two alone. Mayne Lumka can explain to Elik what he hoped to achieve by telling me that whole Mbali situation. But before I leave, I give Elik a long passionate kiss. The type you give a guy when you are undressed and have him on top of you. It's just to let Lumka know that I truly love his friend no matter WHO says what!

"Get a room you two", he says.

"No need. We have all night. Ne baby?", I say and get up and walk away. I can feel eyes boring into my back. I'm sure it's Elik's.

By 12 midnight it's just the 4 of us left and Elik says he has to sleep and because shame my poor baby has a long drive ahead of him. And he's been drinking so he needs to sleep it off and wake up de-alcoholised. So he says he's going to bed and I say I'll just go to bed with him and be on my phone, since I'm not sleepy.

I just stay on my phone doing nothing really and going through my timeline and looking at people's pictures on Insta. I feel so thirsty and decide to go to the kitchen for a glass of water. It's like 2 am. I put on Elik's T-shirt with nothing else underneath and leave the bedroom. I'm pretty sure Thando and Lumka are sleeping now. I get to the kitchen and have my glass then when I turn around to go back to bed, there's Lumka staring at me. I swear he is staring! I pull down my T-shirt and apologise and ask what he's doing up so late. He says he was finishing up some work stuff in the living area when he heard the tap running so he came to check. His eyes never leave my body and I'm starting to feel uncomfortable. My cue to run back to bed. He's seen me in just a T-shirt before though, more than once. He'll he's seen me naked even although I try as hard as I can to forget that.

"Hug?", he says opening his arms.

I find the request weird so I said no and tell him Elik is waiting for me and laugh and said goodnight. I feel so naked! As I pass him to run back to bed, he unexpectedly grabs me by the waist and I find myself facing him. But now he's tall so when he bent down to hug me, my T-shirt went up.

I'm looking up at him like was "What's up?". He lets me go and says goodnight. I straighten the T-shirt and walk quickly away. I'm traumatised and scared and everything all at once. I'm shook. He stank of alcohol so maybe he was drunk shame and won't remember a thing. But he wasn't drunk earlier and if he was doing work then he must have been sober enough. Or did he maybe mistake me for Thando? But no, I'm sure he knows his girl. But it was just an innocent hug

right? I don't think I liked the look in his eyes though. I'm sure I'm imagining things. It was just a hug and we hug all the time! It was nothing.

I run back to bed and stayed there breathing and feeling traumatised by the whole ordeal. What am I supposed to do now? Do I tell Elik or not? If I tell him, what exactly do I tell him? Now that's just dumb. As Elik groans and throws his leg on me I feel like waking him up and saying 'Your best friend hugged me!'. My imagination is too active. I'll sleep.

I wake up later than everyone and by the time I drag my bum short clad self into the kitchen, Thando, Lumka and Elik are already having breakfast.

"You shouldn't have woken up baby girl. I meant to bring you breakfast in bed in the hope that you'll thank me back in kind", Elik says.

I blush and he gives me a hug and a forehead kiss.

My personal person.

"You guys are like rabbits!", Lumka says and I turn to look at him.

Nothing. Nothing on his face says anything about last night. I guess it was just a hug then.

He looks just the way he always does. Chilled and too good looking for his own good!

"No. Rabbits? I wish man. I ain't getting none still", Elik says.

I look at him like what the hell!

"What? It's true baby. I'm in starvation mode!", he says.

I can't help but laugh. It's too hard to be mad at him really. Half the time I'm convinced he doesn't hear himself.

Breakfast goes and ends and then I ask Thando to give me a hand with checking if I packed everything. She's still with Lumka so might as well make friends with her. We go through my suitcase to see if I have enough clothes.

"What are these?", she says.

"Give me that", I grab it from her and throw it back in my suitcase.

"What is it?", she says.

"It's nothing!", I say and quickly change the subject.

Me and her are not there yet. I won't explain my sex toys to her. She should go to Adult World they explain these things nicely for you.

"So Fierce. Have you ever had a thing with Lumka?", she says.

I drop the jeans I was folding and my heart races.

"What? Hell no! He's Elik's best friend. How could you even ask me that! Geez! He's like a brother to me. No. I've never even thought of it. Eeewww!", I say.

I realise now that a simple no would have sounded less defensive and much better.

"Why?", I ask her.

"It's just, there's a day he was so drunk he kept asking me why I wasn't Fierce!", she says.

I give an awkward laugh. This is so messed up! Lumka? No ways. He always says he wants a girl as loyal as me so I guess he was just asking her why she wasn't loyal.

“No man. Remember my name is a word! He probably was telling you to bring your A-game on and be fierce. Get it?”, I say.

She looks at me. She doesn't get it. I'm not sure I get it as well, I just had to.

“Fierce the word babes! Not me. Like fierce you know!”, I attempt to explain further.

She doesn't get it still but she nods and accepts my explanation.

Lumka! What the hell big bro!

CHAPTER 95

We were meant to leave soon after breakfast but as always, Elik happened! He went with Lumka to do 'something small' and that something small lasted till 3 pm! Like the hell? I'd been ready all day and I'd long run out of things to talk about with Thando! It had gotten so bad we ended up talking about which lingerie was better, LaSenza or Victoria's Secret. Bad. We have nothing in common at all.

When our men got back at 3 they were hungry. Seriously? Wasn't there food wherever they were? I grumbled and showed that I was annoyed but we cooked anyway. And they love their meat so we had to start from defrosting! I tried to offer to go and buy something to eat but Elik insisted that he wanted food cooked by me. So I cooked. I didn't want a grumpy man on my trip. Then there kept being something delaying us, a phone call to make, documents to peruse through, instructions from Elik to Lumka, reassurance that everything will be just fine from Lumka to Elik. It just wouldn't end! We only left at 9 pm, 12 hours later. Why we left Thando and Lumka in that house, I don't know. He has his own house!

Before we left we exchanged hugs as normal. Hugging Lumka was awkward for me but I'm beginning to think that maybe I'm imagining things. He was chilled and normal to me all day and nothing was out of the ordinary. He even said the 'Take care of Elik, Fierce' as he always does before we go on a trip. So maybe, just maybe it was just a hug he wanted.

We leave Joburg at 9 pm! So that means we have to do a 4 hour drive in under 3 hours because the Pioneer border in Zeerust closes at midnight. I'm scared for my life as Elik does 200 on a 120 zone! He is flying but because it's a big car I couldn't really feel it. I thought we were doing 140 maybe. But the speedometer doesn't lie. When I see the speed my heart skips several beats. 200 km per hour!

"Baby slow down!", I say.

Cause I'd rather we get to the border after its closed and wait till morning but still be alive.

"Do you want to drive?", he says.

That's always my cue to shoosh. He hates passenger seat driving. I just recline my seat and close my eyes. I will not sit and watch myself die from a car crash. I'd rather exit life with my eyes closed. Needless to say we make it to the border at 11:30 pm. He needs a job in the taxi industry. He will do well.

Botswana. We just drive through. Sleep in Gaborone and then drive through the next day. Botswana: Vast untouched nature which reminds me of the Serengeti, taking our 4x4 through rough off roads, a beautiful sunrise. It was perfect. Well

except for the animals on the road! You can't drive 10 km without meeting a donkey or a cow or a warthog or an elephant or impalas doing a young jog across the road! So many animals. Oh and speed traps! Everywhere. I was driving at 100 km and the police just jump in front of me around a bend from nowhere! Then boom 600 Pula! We paid like 3 speeding fines. Although 100 km/h is hardly speeding. I hope they take that money and fix the potholes before it gets as bad as Zimbabwe.

Then it's on to motherland. Getting into and out of Botswana was easy peasy but getting into Zimbabwe now, now this is about to become a living nightmare. The queues! Like how though? There's no queue on the Botswana side so what's taking so long this side?

Elik is grumpy and I know he's not going to stand in the scorching sun and queue! He doesn't even want to leave the car. I can't with him. And had he had some sense and we planned this trip in advance, we would have gotten VIP status but no, we just had to up and leave without notice!

I have to pay someone or else we will be here all day. Elik has rubbed off me, I'm starting to pay my way through situations. It's actually that easy. Find someone in a lime reflective vest working for customs, tell them you need help skipping the queue, they say no you have to queue like everyone else, you say if I give you \$100 will you help me and they look at you and say of course of course ma'am. Then you give them your passport with the \$100 note inside and they take it

strategically and give you back your passport. I'm sure \$10 would have worked just as well but I'm in no mood for negotiations.

So that's how that goes and I go back and take my grumpy man by hand to the front of the queue. The reflective vest guy speaks to a guy behind the counter and we get our stamps. He even gets us the TIP for our car and a free pass from the Zimra officials. So we get to spend less than 30 minutes and he gets to make \$100. Then you tell me corruption is bad when everyone wins! How?

The plan is to go around Plumtree and see if 4Jays still serves that nice pap and meat because my man gets Hangry (When hungry he gets angry). So I know when his grumpiness levels start increasing, I have to feed him fast or else I'll have the Hulk sitting next to me. But it starts raining hard as soon as we leave the border and we just have to go on.

There's no roadblock on the road all the way to Bulawayo. Not even one! This is impressive. I'm loving this new Zimbabwe. Those cops used to harrass us. I had \$10 ready for each of the 5 roadblocks I was expecting. So shame, their absence, their loss!

Then we make it to my aunt's house in Nkulumane. Elik went and made plans with my aunt without even telling me. That's just I don't know. She is over the moon to see us! I think she likes Elik more than me and that's worrying me. I'm her favourite why is he stealing my shine now?

Either my aunt is too free or Elik is quite low on respect but he sits there, with a beer in his hand and his feet on my aunt's coffee table with his dirty shoes! When I hit his legs so he can take them off, aunt dearest says I must stop harassing her mkhwenyana! Ye bakithi!

She serves us rice with all sorts of salads! She must really love Elik shame. To go and find beetroot! She hates beetroot! Then they start talking and I'm ignored completely! Gosh, Elik can talk! My goodness! Then match him with my aunt and you have a full blown talk show. They talk everything from the economy to politics to life in general to traffic lights not working to water and electricity always going and right down to me. They talk about me like I'm not there!

He tells my aunt how I always give him a hard time and how I don't take nonsense from him. He says I'm a bully! He says it so sweetly though I'm blushing over here.

Then when he says.

"I can't lose her aunty. She's my whole world. I want to marry her but she just won't pick the date", I just melt.

My aunt looks at me then at him then tells me to go sit next to him. I do. There comes the pre-marital counselling.

"I know you two have gone through the worst and honestly I don't know how you have survived every blow and are still this happy and this silly together", she says. I take Elik's hand and intertwine our fingers.

"I'm sorry about the miscarriage. It's neither of you's fault. Don't punish each other for it and keep loving each other and talk to each other. I know you will be fine. You always are", she says.

"And Ghana man, I don't know how I can ever thank you for taking care of her. We know she's hot headed and can be a cry baby sometimes. Thank you for loving her through everything and it makes me so happy each time I see how you look at her", she says.

He looks at me and I blush. All these years later and I'm still blushing! His eyes!

"Fifi you need to respect your man and care for him and make sure he's happy all the time", she says.

Elik shoots me that 'did you get that?' look.

"And you, you don't have to do anything. You already doing everything. Look how she's blushing there next to you!", she says.

I blush even more, validating her point.

I think I've lost my aunt to Elik. He's won her. She's right though. He's my perfect half.

She asks me about the miscarriage and what happened and how I'm dealing with it. I wish she hadn't asked in front of Elik but I'm sure she has a reason for it. I tell her everything and the tears come when I relive that night. I intentionally forget to mention how he put me out. As much as I hate that he's stolen her from me, I don't wish for her to hate him or think he mistreats me. Elik puts his arm around me. When I tell her I'm scared of losing Elik and that I'm scared that because I'm not giving him a child he might leave me, he tightens the hold.

She listens and says I need to forgive myself first and foremost. Then allow Elik to help me. Which is exactly what I'm doing right now. I'm allowing him to help me. As for forgiving myself, I've done that. I know it wasn't my fault. I did everything. I'm pretty sure Komla bewitched me and sent me lightning from Ghana. Mxm.

“Hey. Don't cry. I'll never leave you. I'm not with you to get a child out of you. I'm with you because I love you and you are my life. How can you not see that?”, he says and wipes away my tears.

My aunt just looks at us smiling. She's such a sucker for love shame. Why is she smiling when I'm crying over here. That wave passes and we get to talking about Elik's businesses and how everything is going. I didn't know he was planning on starting a new company! Now I know. Thank you aunty.

After tears, back to smiles. When Elik goes to the bathroom I quickly tell her I have the implant now and I'm not planning on getting pregnant anytime soon. I don't know why I just told her that. Then I ask the most embarrassing question.

“How long before I can start having sex again?”, I say.

I look down immediately. That's embarrassing. “What did the doctor say”, she says.

I tell her. She says then I should be giving it up already then! I guess I'm ready then. I suggest that I'll sleep with her for the two nights we are here. I really can't have her hear Elik and I fucking. Please no. She says no, he's my man and I'll share a room with him. Good gracious! I wonder how soundproof these walls are exactly.

Elik returns just as I ask about my mother. She says she's fine and doing alright. That hurts. She's fine without me? We can't exactly tour Bulawayo because I've been here way too many times. So Elik and my aunt go back to ignoring me and by the time they are done, I think Elik just promised to extend my aunt's house and re-furnish it! I'm staying out of this one.

He asks her why she doesn't drive if she has a licence. She says she kind of can't afford a car with the current economic situation in Zimbabwe. He seems shocked. And I'm thinking 'Yes Elik! Not everyone affords things like you!'

"That's not right at all. I can't have my aunt walking. No. Let's get you something. I'll call Lumka to organise something for you. You can't walk aunty in this heat! You'll get dark and look like some people from Ghana if you keep walking", he says and they both laugh.

I sit there looking at them.

Did he just call her 'my aunt'? Is he really taking her away from me? I think I'm a little jealous. She's my aunt. Mine! He can't have her.

But he's right, she deserves a car. She's been there for us from day one. She's over the moon and can't stop thanking us. I don't know why I'm being thanked, I'm not buying her the car! I'm just over here on my phone. She says she wants a Honda Fit. I know it's a popular car in Zimbabwe but she needs to up her standards! I'll have that talk with her when it's just the two of us.

I help her cook up a storm for supper while Elik is watching news. At least ZESA (electricity) is back now. He's so chilled in this house! I serve him and my aunt insists I wash his hands. She says I may be modern and hoity toity and all that, but I should do some simple things such as washing his hands and thanking him for small things and cooking for him sometimes even though we have a helper. She says it shows that I have respect for him and men love that. I'll try but no promises.

My aunt says she's going to bed and I go with her and change into my tiny sleeping shorts and a vest and tell her I'll quickly check on Elik then come to bed. She says,

"You not sleeping with me. Go and sleep with your man".

This woman. Chasing me into the lion's den!

I find him sitting on the couch, on his laptop. He says he needs to look at some documents that Lumka needs for a meeting tomorrow. He asks that I wait for him a bit because he needs to talk to me about something real quick. I say ok then lie down on the couch stomach down over his lap. He puts the laptop on my bum and continues working.

I must have dozed off because it's late at night when I wake up and Elik has his arm around me and he's fast asleep. I go back to sleep.

Morning. We wake up when we hear some noise coming from the kitchen. My aunt dropped a cup! She quickly comes to the sitting room and finds us waking up. She says sorry for the noise and says she couldn't wake us up because Elik was holding me like he was scared I would wake up and run away. I'm a bit embarrassed because well I'm in tiny shorts and a vest and I was spooning on my aunt's couch. Embarrassing! She thinks it's cute though! She's a lot of work!

"Now that you up. Come baby I want to talk to you", she says.

I get Elik's hand off me and follow my aunt to the kitchen.

"Ya, so there's this girl from church who had asked me to help her with her wedding. She disappeared on me so I thought the wedding was off. But she called me this morning asking me to help her", she says.

Ooo kay! I don't see why that's my concern though.

"When is the wedding?", I ask.

"It's starting at 12 today", she says and starts laughing.

"What? It's 7:30 now! How are you to prepare a whole wedding in 4 hours?", I'm shocked.

"I don't know. Let me just go and see what can be done. You can follow later. You know the hall right?", she says.

"Yes. Let me go and bath and I'll come through", I say.

I can't believe this really. How can someone be this not serious about their wedding!

I wake Elik up when my aunt leaves and tell him I'll be getting ready and going to help my aunt help an unserious bride. He says he's coming too. He could have

joined me for the bath except it's kinda hard to share a bucket when bathing. I go first because he says I need more time to get ready than him. Very true.

We only make it to the hall at 9:07 am. As soon as we get there my aunt is busy shame, walking up and down and giving instructions. She managed to get those plastic chairs from her church and there's plastic tables being arranged. I help with the decor and dressing up chairs and putting glasses on the table and all that nonsense. It looks ugly shame, especially the ones I did, but that's what they get for last minute planning.

Elik finds a corner, pulls a chair and sits there and goes on his phone. I don't know why he came! By 11 we are done and my aunt has straightened things up and it looks pretty decent. She says I should go and check on the people cooking. Elik says he'll tag along because he's bored. We get there and I can't help but laugh. Not laugh at the people but at the situation in front of me. For 150 guests, there's only 1 big cabbage and 1 small cabbage, a 750 ml bottle of mayonnaise, 4 kg of meat, 10 kg of rice, 2 kg of charhon biscuits and 2 L of cooking oil. At first I think it's a joke but the cooking women say that's all they were given.

This is a big joke! There's not even drinks or water, so why did we put those glasses on the tables again? I take Elik and go and tell my aunt. I can't stop laughing. This is a big joke. She's pissed and says we must find the bride! We find her in a back room and she's dressed in a beautiful white gown!

"You think I'm a joke? You think I'm a fool? Why did you invite people to this sorry excuse of a wedding of yours? 4 kgs of meat? Are you ok upstairs? What must happen now? People are sitting in the hall waiting for you! What will they eat?", my aunt shouts at the bride.

"Aa Sisi it's just that money was a problem", she says.

"If money is a problem you either ask for help from your relatives or you don't have a wedding. Finish and klaar! Why didn't you ask for money? Donations from church? I spoke to some teachers you work with and they said they offered to help you but you refused and said you were fine. You call this fine?", my aunt goes off.

"Aa they only wanted to help so they can laugh at me later", she says looking down.

"Laugh at you later? Why would they laugh at you? Now they will laugh at you! Everyone will laugh at you!", my aunt says.

The bride starts crying!

"Ha a! You can't cry. Now is not the time for crying! You can cry later when we are done talking. You have a huge problem here! You think a wedding is something that just happens? You think manna is going to fall from heaven for people to eat? You know what you should have done? You should have called the pastor, gone home and married your husband behind closed doors not this disaster here", my aunt says.

"The bridesmaids don't have dresses", another woman in the room says. Talk about adding fuel to a fire.

I almost laugh at my aunt's reaction but I stop myself.

“Hayi ngeke! I'm out of here. Come baby, let's go”, my aunt takes my hand and drags me behind her.

“Aunty, I could hear you shouting all the way from here. What's wrong?”, Elik says when we get out of that room.

I laugh as my aunt narrates everything wrong with the wedding in the funniest way ever.

“She says people see weddings on TV and think the bride and groom just showed up and everything was there for free and waiting for them!”, she's so annoyed!

“No ways! 4 kg of meat for 150 people! Damn that's a bummer! Me and my baby can finish that meat, just the two of us”, he says.

He's right. We can. In one day.

“What can we do to help? Buy the food at least? Cake? Drinks?”, Elik says.

Awww my good samaritan. My aunt looks at him with disbelief. Elik misreads the look though. He thinks he offered to buy too little.

“We can buy everything, it's not a problem at all!”, he says and pulls me towards him and drapes his arm over my shoulder.

“You'd do that for people you don't know?”, my aunt says.

“You know them. That's enough. If you say we can help then we will”, he says.

My aunt gives him a big hug and tells him his kind is rare.

We drive to Makro near Railways. We need things in bulk. We buy everything that will leave a plate with 7 colours. And we buy so many drinks, Delta needs to call us and thank us! We then have to manoeuvre potholes until we get to Joshua

Mqabuko Nkomo, then past Bulawayo Centre and turn into 12th avenue then all the way down to Douglasdale.

I didn't know there were farms so close to town! We eventually find the farm/plot my aunt told us about. We get 2 live goats and 10 chickens. They tie their legs up and we pack them up in the boot. It's a farm-house and I hate the smell but Elik thinks it's cool. He says he wishes the police can stop us so he can tell then we going to pay lobola. Lobola with chickens?

We make it back after 2. Apparently the bride and her team went to take pictures in the park and are still not back. Only now do the men start killing the goat and the women cooking. Lunch will be served at 6 pm shame. At least now there's drinks going around and enough biscuits and sweets, to keep people's stomachs entertained. My aunt can't stop thanking us. She should be thanking Elik though, none of my money was touched in this 'save-a-wedding' project. She says the blessings coming our way will shock us! I can't wait.

We have to leave and go get ourselves something to eat. It's so hot but it's too late to start caring now. We walk and find a place at the local shops. I get pap and spinach and beef and Elik gets pap and hooves. Hunger was killing us over here. We didn't even eat breakfast. And the last thing Elik ate was a pork pie we got at Baker's Inn.

We get back to the wedding. We were not invited anyway to this wedding! That's why we are dressed in jeans like we are going for a walk. We just showed up and

Elik saved the day. I think giving and doing things for people fulfils him. I don't know how. People are asking about food and there's children everywhere (Mental note: No children at my wedding) and the wedding people are not back. My aunt says she thinks they are chilling in the park hoping that people will be gone when they get back so they won't be embarrassed by failing to provide food. Manje we are not going anyway! They will find us right here.

CHAPTER 96

Good heavens! What are the bridesmaids wearing? Apparently they were all asked to go back home and wear their best outfits because there were no bridesmaid dresses! So now we have all sorts of outfits here. One is in a green Jean and red AllStars and a pink T-shirt. Ayaya! And another is in a blue I'm not sure if it's a jumpsuit or an overall. Then one is in a white hipster. They still make hipsters? I didn't know.

I wonder how the bride will feel when she looks at her wedding pictures one day! As if that's not enough, they took pictures with a phone! A phone! Wedding pictures and videos with a phone? I give up. They are not serious! And then the bride has the audacity to walk in smiling! Why is she smiling like this when there's so much wrong here?

The wedding gets better when food is served. I don't know what type of wedding I want but today I know what type I don't want. Things normalise a bit and the bride and groom have their first dance. Disaster, mkhwenyana, disaster! He's dancing so fast and leaving the song behind, my gosh! He has no rhythm but has so much

energy and is even sweating! Someone make him stop please. Elik and I are laughing our lungs out.

And wives hate their husbands ne? Like why on earth would you allow your short person to wear a silver oversized shiny suit with a pink viscose shirt, a huge ass tie and pointed shoes! Why? He looks like those knock off pastors. It's not even funny!

The dance ends and for about an hour we sit listening to old people giving the history of the bride and groom. From where and when they were born to which primary school they went to to which high school, to their ancestry and bloodline and so forth Don't they know that no one cares? Elik almost laughs when they go on to say how their child has always been respectful and doesn't do earthly things. The way they go on about her you'd swear she has never seen a naked man before! And can this old man stop with this 'she doesn't do earthly things!'. We are on earth so everything we do is earthly! No one lives in heaven here. He should get over himself.

"Like that time your family tried to pass you off as a virgin when I'd been fucking you for 4 years!", he whispers.

I giggle. That was funny. But fucking though? Couldn't he find a better word? Only Elik would find it ok to use such words.

He then dares me to dance when the long speeches stop and the floor is open to everyone. I say no, he says yes, I say no, I say he must dance with his two left feet if he wants to! He says no, he doesn't want people to feel bad for not being able to dance as good as he does. So neither of us wants to dance and so we settle it the best way we know how. We do rock, paper, scissors, but he keeps losing and then

accusing me of cheating so we decide to quiz each other rather. The rules are simple. If you get it wrong, you dance!

I go first.

"Ok. Tell me. If a car carrying helium balloons suddenly stops. What would happen to the balloons?", I say.

"Seriously? Is that the best you can do?", he says.

He's right. That's too easy.

"Helium is lighter than air so obviously the balloons will go backwards. Or do you want me to go all scientific on you? Must I explain it using Einstein's theory of general relativity? You know, the Equivalence principle?", he says.

"No it's fine. I get that you know", I sulk.

I just had to ask the easiest question ever! I'm sure he will ask me things I've never heard of.

"What's the main difference between an Intel processor and an AMD Processor?", he says.

Shucks. I think I know.

"Ummm. They are both CPUs right? Ok, so almost all phones and laptops use Intel right? As for AMD I'm not quite sure. Isn't it that CPU used for video games and movie graphics and all that powerful stuff?", I say. I think I'm right.

He laughs.

"You are in the right direction but that's not the answer I'm looking for. I didn't ask what they are. I asked the difference", he says.

"But Elik...", I say. I gave him the difference didn't I?

"No baby. You lose! The difference is they are made by different companies, simple!", he says.

"I know that!", I say.

"Well Cupcake, you didn't answer the question! You like the students I used to teach. I would ask them about a goat and they would go and plant a tree then pull the goat and tie it on the tree then start answering about the tree!", he says.

Mxm. He's not funny. I don't even know why I'm laughing!

So I lose the bet, unfairly so, and now I have to hit the dance floor. It's house music so this is the perfect time to show off my gwara gwara skills. I actually enjoy dancing in front of Elik. Truth be told, I'm dancing for him because why would I be putting some subtle twerking and some whining to it?

I'm feeling hot when done and I need fresh air so we go outside.

"You turned me on", he says randomly as we sit down.

I look at him like what?

"I mean watching you dance. You so perfect for me, you know that? Think we can go to your aunt's house and squeeze in a quickie?", he says throwing his arm around me.

"No ways baby. Remember when mother walked in on us? Then that guy in the lab? Now you want to traumatise my aunt as well?", I say giggling.

"Look at me baby", he says and I do as asked.

"Tell me the truth. What's going on? The Fierce I know would have jumped me already wanting some. I used to wake up to you on top of me. You used to text me all day telling me the things you would do to me when I get home. But it's like you suddenly not interested in sex anymore. Is it me? What's going on?", he says.

"You imagining things wena. Of course I want you!", I say and give an awkward laugh. The truth is I've been holding back on the cookie. I don't know why but I

cringe at the thought of a D going inside me. And that's very strange because I've always been addicted. I can't explain it.

“Come on baby. In Botswana you said you were tired. Then the other time you pretended to be sleeping. Then that day you said you were scared your aunt would hear us. Then you said we can't do it in the car that time because you were scared cops would find us. And now you using your aunt as an excuse again.

What's going on?”, he says.

“It's nothing baby”, I say and look down.

“Come on ma. Talk to me, please. Did I do something? Tell me so I can fix it”, he says.

Gosh why are we talking about this right now.

“Baby. I need something in the car”, I say and get up and walk fast to the car. I need to run away from this conversation.

He follows.

“I've got the keys”, he says and turns me around and pins me against the car. Now I'm cleaning this dirty car with my T-shirt! Just great!

“Talk to me Fierce!”, he says.

It's not dark yet and people can see this man pinning me against the car and his body too close to mine. This is not Sandton, where we could pretty much almost make out outside. People talk over here and soon my aunt will be the headline of gossip. Like ‘Did you see what her niece was doing with that man? Outside? In broad daylight?’. I can't have that. She might just run people over with her coming car and end up in jail.

"Move baby. People are watching", I say and try to push him.

He doesn't budge.

"Why do you always care so much what people say?", he says.

"Well, I don't know! Maybe because we live in a society", I say.

"Oh well. Fuck society! Now tell. Why don't you want to have sex with me?", he says.

"Ok. Fine. Let's get into the car and I'll tell you", I say.

"No. Tell me now baby. Or else I'm not moving", he says.

He's such a bully!

I take a deep breath and sigh.

"Honestly baby. I don't know. I'm just scared and I don't know why but the thought of it just terrifies me", I say.

I know it doesn't make sense. I don't get it as well. I just know I'm scared.

"Is it because of losing the baby? Are you scared of being pregnant again? You are on birth control though now baby, so I won't get you pregnant", he says.

I know.

"I really miss you. It's torture having to hold your body in my arms every night but not be able to do anything. I miss you", he says.

"There's this mini scream you let out everytime I enter you and fuck I miss that shit. I'm getting a hard on just thinking about it", he says.

I half giggle, half blush.

"I miss you too baby. It's just, I don't know", I say.

"You know I love you right?", he says and I nod.

"I love sex, you know that and we love it together. So you not loving it anymore is scaring me. You are my girl and I enjoy you. You know that, right? You know you

drive me crazy, right?", he says.

I know.

"Please be a little patient with me baby. I don't know what's wrong with me but I'm working on it", I say.

He reaches his head down towards mine and lifts my chin up with his index finger.

I feel butterflies in my stomach as he kisses me and pins me even closer to the car. Damn he kisses so good!

"I give up on the two of you", a voice says.

Elik steps away from me and looks down. He looks so guilty like he was caught stealing. I told him people are watching! I look at my aunt then look down. I don't think she minds though. She says she came to fetch us because the bride and groom want to thank us for rescuing their wedding.

By the time we get home, I'm exhausted. I worked so hard today for a wedding I wasn't even invited to. My aunt goes to bed and I go and boil water so I can bath. Just a quick half bucket so I can sleep fresh. I kind of sleep with a man so being fresh is priority. I get back and as I'm looking for something to put on for bed in my suitcase, Elik is behind me. He makes me stand upright and turns me around to face him and just holds me there. I don't know why he feels the need to hold me now when we should be sleeping but I hug him back anyways. Sometimes all he needs is long, silent hug.

"I want you", he says eventually.

I stay quiet. I thought I asked him to be patient with me earlier. Why are we still talking about this now.

He kisses me and I kiss back. I have no problem with kissing, it's the big job that has me cringing these days. We just keep kissing and he keeps telling me how much he wants me. I help him out of his clothes and we make out strong. Maybe I can do this. If I just relax and clear my mind. Maybe I can do this. Then when it comes down to doing it, I just tense up and freeze. I can't. I don't know why but I just can't.

I'm lying on my back with my thighs locked shut and Elik lying on top of me, failing to move them apart. He's not using force because I'm sure if he really wanted to they would be apart in one second and he could just take what he wants. But I think that's called rape.

"Please allow me baby", he says.

I can't.

I stay quiet. How do I begin to explain to him when I don't even know the reason myself?

"Please. Let me in. I need you just as you need me. Don't shut me out baby girl, please", he says

I'm not sure if he's saying I shouldn't shut him out of my body or of my life. I don't know. He's free to enter my life and do as he pleases but into my body right now I can't grant him that access. He has to wait.

"Please Fierce. I know it's been hard on you but I need this with you. I need my girl back. I need you here with me", he says.

He goes on begging and telling me how beautiful I am and how he misses my body. Is he really begging for sex or is it that connection we have when our bodies join that he yearns for? He keeps begging. He's got a lot of patience shame!

"I love you baby. Please let me in. I need you", he says.

A tear rolls out the side of my eye. This is bad and what sucks is I can't explain it.

He wipes off my tear and plants a kiss on my lips.

"I'm sorry for everything you are going through. Please let me be there for you.

Allow me to love you. Let me in", he says.

Another tear rolls down and he wipes it off too with his hand.

He gets off me and lies on his side and pulls me closer to him. His one hand goes around me and his other rubs my thigh up and down.

"It's ok baby. I'll wait for you. Whenever you are ready, you know I'll be right here. I love you. Don't ever forget that", he says.

"I love you too", I whisper thinly.

Progress. My sense of speech has returned.

I take a deep breathe and make a decision. Why am I scared so much of him? He's never hurt me? Well he has but I would rather not think of that right now. I give myself a pep talk in my head. "Stay positive Fierce. This is your man and come on, you love how he puts it down! Do it".

I pull him to come on top of me. He doesn't resist. There will be no gymnastics today, we will do things the old fashioned way. I don't have the energy. All my energy is directed towards fighting my sudden unexplainable fear of sex. He looks down at me for a while and I hold the stare. I just love his eyes. My eyes are glassy though with the tears and when I blink and a tear rolls out, he wipes it away.

"Are you sure?", he whispers in my ear.

Like with that voice I'd say no! When he starts kissing me, I kiss back. I close my eyes and relax my muscles and let him take control. He pushes one thigh away

with his knee and keeps kissing me. As he finds his way to internal me, I involuntarily let out that mini scream he says turns him on. I think this is the gentlest he's ever been with me. He keeps checking if I'm ok and telling me he loves me and kissing me.

Him breathing down my neck makes my body respond to what he's feeding me right now. I don't even know why I was scared! How could I have stayed away from this!

"I love you", he whispers.

"I love you", I say.

I knew gentle wouldn't last forever. He grabs my hips so he can lift me up to meet him. Then he starts driving me like a Land Cruiser and my moans just keep getting louder. I can't believe I'd almost forgotten how good he does this thing. All my fear moved out when he moved in.

"Don't shut me out baby", he says.

I'm a bit confused because he's driving me so what does he mean. I'm doing the opposite of shutting him out right now! I realise I'm still a bit tense.

I relax and throw my hands around his back and open wider and that 'yes baby' he whispers tells me he approves. I grab the pillow and bite hard to shut down the screaming. My fear and anxiety is long gone. All that's left is my body melting into Elik's for a pure, sweaty, unfiltered joyride that sends ecstatic electricity through every cell and vein and nerve in my body. I feel an urgency to rush this so I can feel more and more of him but I also know I have all the time in the world to have him and should just follow his lead. It's just our hands, mouths and bodies putting the work in. It's pure paradise. One that I never walk away from. I'm holding on for dear life and professing my undying love for him and for this and have even let

the pillow that's meant to quieten me slide off the bed. Time and space have long stopped and I don't give a care in the world.

I feel so safe with him, I just surrender myself so deeply I'm melting away into nothingness. There's something about him that allows me to open up unconditionally and let him in and allow him to blow my mind and to own me. He delivers and that just bonds us in a way nothing else does. I was done a while ago. Even started again and got done again before he finally got done. He's such a selfless lover!

"Thank you", he says when he gets off me and pulls me into his arm.

Thank you? The first time, all those years ago, he said thank you after getting some love, left me not knowing how to respond. Do I say you are welcome? Do I say not a problem or with pleasure? How do I respond to that?

"No baby, thank you", I decide to say.

He just liberated me from an unnecessary fear that could have grown and gone out of control.

As I lay down to sleep and fit my body into his and feel his little kisses on the back of my head and his arms around me, I feel like he just gave me back to myself. Like I came back home, into my own body. Like I'm back to being confident and to feeling loved and to knowing I have him.

Shucks! My aunt is in the next room. I really hope she didn't hear anything. I'm tired of everyone around me knowing how I scream when I'm getting done! It's just uncomfortable.

We have to leave for Hwange this morning. I woke up late. I kind of didn't get enough sleep because I woke up at night wanting some more and had to wake Elik up and thankfully he wasn't grumpy but worked with me and put me back to sleep in no time.

So when I got to the sitting room and said my good mornings, Elik stood, gave me a hug and went to the kitchen and brought me a cup. All he needs is some steamy loving and he's the nicest and happiest person in the whole world! He's that easy to please.

"Aunty don't you have lemons or lemon juice?", he says.

"What for?", she says.

"I need to make my baby her warm water with lemon. She drinks that every morning before she eats", he says.

I just fall head over heels in love with him all over again.

"Really? Why?", she asks.

He goes on to explain how I say it kick starts my metabolism. She is all smiles. I guess she never met a man who's half as attentive and would actually want to do these little things for his girl. I get a lemon from the tree outside. The tree grows next door but it's leaning over to my aunt's house so technically she has shares on the tree therefore I'm not stealing!