



Taken By A Mafia King

Book 2 of the Mafia Series

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By Hlengiwe Mathebula

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Chapter 1

I'm lying on the couch watching my favourite series for the hundredth time when someone knocks. I look at the time it's almost midnight. Who might that be? I pause the DVD player. This is my favourite scene, I'm so annoyed.

"Who is it?" I ask looking at the watch on the wall just above the TV again.

"We're looking for the mechanic" replies a male voice.

"Come back tomorrow at 10am. It's almost midnight. I closed the workshop almost 5 hours ago" I reply. He doesn't say anything.

Who needs a car mechanic at this time of the night?

He left, I'm about to press play when there's a loud knock on the door. I asked my neighbours so many times not to direct people to my house. *Stupid neighbours.*

"Open the damn door. We need to see the mechanic" comes a very deep voice. If I wasn't this annoyed I was going to be charmed by it.

"Come back tomorrow at 10am, I'll see what I can do since regular clients have booked appointments" I reply.

"Open the damn door young lady" the voice threatens, but I'm not having it. Just because they are going to be paying me doesn't mean they have to disrespect me like that. I press play and watch my favourite scene. Just when I think they left, they continue banging the door. I'm so annoyed if I had a gun, I'd open the door shoot and kill the guy. I walk over to the door. As soon as I open the door, the atmosphere changes, wasn't I feeling hot just now? It's like it's suddenly winter right in the middle of a summer night. A very powerful tall guy is standing there looking at me. He's so annoyed if he was a cartoon character I'd see smoke coming out of his ears, but guess what? I'm also pissed.

"How can I help you Mister?" I ask him.

"I need to see the mechanic, right now" he commands.

"You're looking at the mechanic and I told you to come back tomorrow morning at 10am. Which part do you find hard to understand? You look like a very clever guy" I reply really pissed. He doesn't answer instead I hear someone laughing, he's not alone.

"I'm not here for your stupid games. I said I need to see the mechanic" he tells me still looking pissed and very handsome I must say.

"Come back tomorrow, I need to rest" I tell him closing the door, but he puts the tip of his expensive shoe to block the door. That's the problem with rich people they think they can order us around because we are not loaded like them.

"Hello. My friend here doesn't know how to speak. We are on our way to Free State. We have a very important meeting, and our car broke down. We really need your help. We have to be there by 10am, so can you kindly call the mechanic for us" he tells me smiling.

"I'm the mechanic" I reply. I get that a lot. A 24 year old female mechanic is not something common.

"Okay, can you please help us?" he asks smiling like he doesn't believe me.

"Okay let me change to my overalls. Give me 5 minutes" if he didn't ask me so nice, I wasn't going to help them.

"I'm not going to allow you to fix my car" Mr Deep Voice comments when I'm heading to my room.

I change and take the car keys, I'm not going to use their car. I don't even know why I'm going with them during the time of the night. I take my dad's Toyota Tazz and I tell them to follow me. I drive to the workshop. It's a 10 minutes' drive.

Ten minutes later, I open the roller door at the garage. They drive in. I wasn't expecting this kind of a car, I mean the guys look super wealthy and the way they carry themselves but I guess you can't judge a guy by the way he dresses or the way he carries himself. They are driving a Toyota Conquest. No wonder it's giving them problems these cars are very old. I turn to the driver, since he's the one driving he'll tell me what's up. I look at the car because the driver doesn't know what's wrong. It's the starter, they are so lucky I have new starters here because most of my clients drive this model and their most common problem is starter so to make things simple I buy a lot of starters for them.

"Here's your cheque" the driver tells me handing it over. I'm so pissed I don't even look at it I put it in my pocket. They leave I lock up and head home. As soon as I get home I head straight to my room and I fall asleep immediately.

*

I'm walking home after a long day. I was writing my last paper today. Soon I'll be working for a publication company, I can't wait. I just need to sleep as soon as I get home. I know my dad did all the chores. He came back home 3 days back. He's been helping around the house since my mom left with his best friend 20 years ago. He raised me alone with help from his family and some of our neighbours, he didn't want to remarry even after I told him to. I don't want him staying all alone in this place. He was retrenched 6 years ago while I was doing matric so I had to take a gap year after matric and get a job before I could study BA Degree in Literature. He didn't want me to take a gap year but I did anyway. This other guy hired me to assist him with the paper work or give him the tools when he couldn't reach them. Few weeks into the job his assistant decided to quit and he was desperate for a new assistant I decided to step in. He was hesitant at first but I'm a fast learner. I worked on the workshop full time for 2 years. After 2 years, I went to Varsity and I worked at the workshop when I didn't have classes and on weekends plus recess or study break. It hasn't been easy but I had to and my dad has been very supportive.

Bra Simon the owner decided to retire last year leaving me with the workshop, every month I send him money.

When I get home I see an old car. I told my dad so many times that he shouldn't bring clients inside the house. I didn't sleep, I had to work and study I was hoping I'd go straight to bed as soon as I get home. I open the door, the house is full. I greet everyone and I look at my dad, he looks very angry.

"How was the paper?"

"I nailed it. Just wait for the results. Have you eaten?" I ask him. He shakes his head.

"I'll go make a quick meal" I tell him heading to the kitchen.

"She has grown" someone comments. I wonder where they know me from for them to make such a comment.

I cook rice, mincemeat with cabbage my dad's favourite. I dish up as soon as I'm done. I walk to the lounge I start serving my dad, then the rest of the visitors. I keep wondering who they are until I see my mom. I don't know how to feel. I don't know how I look but she smiles at me. I feel like going to my room but I don't want them to think my dad

didn't raise me well. I was so hungry but now I lost appetite and I don't want my dad to be worried so I force myself to eat. I think my dad can see that I lost my appetite because he mouths "are you okay" I just nod. I'm lying and I think he can see that by the way he's looking at me.

"*Mzukulu* (grandchild), we're here to talk to you and your dad. It's about my daughter, your mother" says an old lady.

Funny how I don't remember these people. It's like they disappeared with her. But at least I had my dad and his family. At some point I kept looking at the door thinking she'll come back apologise and things would go back to how they were. But when I turned 16 I realised she's not coming back and I accepted that. And now that I did, she comes out from nowhere and smiles at me like everything is okay? *The nerve.*

I just continue eating, I'm not going to say anything. I have many things to say and questions to ask but I'm not going to waste my time. It's pointless, it's not going to change the past.

"You must have wondered who she is because she left when you were very young" she continues talking. I look at the clock it's 12 in the afternoon, I need to go to the workshop, and I need to work on a car. The owner will fetch it first thing tomorrow morning.

"It's been a long day, I have something important to do later in the evening. I need to sleep" I tell them.

"You need to rest. Don't worry about the dishes, I'll wash them. Rest then we'll go to the workshop later" my dad tells me.

I walk to my room and I go straight to bed and fall asleep as soon as my head hits the pillow.

I wake 5 hours later. I wash my face and brush my teeth then I go to look for my dad. I find him sitting at the lounge staring at the TV. I know he's stressing about my mom. If he thinks I'd want to leave with her then he's wrong, I'm not leaving him no matter what. I don't want anything to do with my mom. She had 20 years to fix this and she didn't. Just when I complete my studies she comes back? *Some mothers we have.* I'm still tired but I have bills to pay so my dad accompanies me. He tells me that he's tired so I

need to drive, my dad and I usually talk all the way to the workshop and today he's quiet and I'm worried. But I don't say anything. When we arrive at the workshop he decides to sit in the car which is strange. He's been my assistant since I started running this place. If something happens to my dad, I'll never forgive my mom and her family because clearly they're the ones stressing him.

It's been 2 weeks since my mom and her family came by and I got all the results. I passed all my modules with distinctions so automatically I qualify for Honours. Making my dad proud has been my number one goal.

"You've made me very proud. I couldn't have asked for a better daughter" he tells me smiling and hugging me very tight like I'm going to run away. Maybe it's time I told him how I feel about my mom and her family. I open my mouth to say something but quickly close it when there's a knock on the door. My dad and I hardly have visitors and when they visit they call us. Maybe it's one of the people who need their cars fixed real quick, but I left my contact details at the workshop after that powerful guy came here. I didn't want to but I don't feel comfortable with people coming here that's why I left them. I open the door and I'm tempted to roll my eyes, it's mommy dearest and her family again. *These people are going to annoy me.* I don't know whether to let them in or tell them to fuck off. But because I don't want them saying my dad didn't raise me well I tell them to come in. I'm so annoyed I can't even fake a smile.

"You look beautiful" my mom tells me. I just ignore her and I sit with my dad on our single sofa while they occupy the 3 and 2 seater sofas. They greet us and they don't talk so my dad and I also stare at them.

"We decided to come back because we couldn't talk the last time". This woman is like the spokesperson or something. My mom is the one who left us, so she can do the talking.

"Zekhethelo is here, you can talk to her. Nonhle has nothing to say to me. She can talk to her daughter" my dad tells them. I wait for Nonhle to say something, instead of talking she starts crying. *My God.* She starts screaming saying some things I cannot hear. I just sit and wait for her to stop all the drama so they talk and leave. My dad excuses himself and he goes to the kitchen and I hear a lot clattering. He's cooking. I wait for Nonhle to

stop crying and tell me what she wants from me. After some time she stops. Her mom asks me to bring some water for her but I just ignore her, I'm just not in the mood for their stupid drama.

"Zekhethelo I made a mistake..." *hehehe* a mistake? Leaving a child behind is a mistake? Cheating on your husband with his best friend is a mistake? If she calls all of that a mistake. Then what do we call spilling milk? I still don't say anything. She continues talking and crying.

"Can I say something?" I finally talk and judging from what I can hear from the kitchen my dad has stopped chopping whatever. I wonder what he's thinking.

"I don't know why you left with Joe. What made you leave me behind. But I forgave you a long time ago. You were gone for 20 years and I learnt to live without you. I needed you then but I don't you need now. You can go back to wherever you went to 20 years ago. I'm cool" Nonhle continues crying. *This woman is going to annoy me.* We sit in silence.

After some time my dad walks in with food and he serves me first with a huge smile on his face. My dad really thought I'd choose Nonhle over him? What's with this nonsense that a girl needs her mother most and a boy needs his father most? How many woman raise their kids alone and visa verse? There were times when I needed my mom and she wasn't here my aunts, grandma and Momo our neighbour were here for me and my dad. We eat in silence. My dad is a great cook and he cooked my favourite chicken stew and pap.

"We came here because we wanted to apologise on behalf of your mother. She was wrong to leave you like that. We were also wrong to also disappear but we were ashamed of what she did" the old woman tells me.

"I understand honestly I do. I forgave my mom a long time ago. And I also forgive you but I don't want a relationship with any of you" I tell them honestly.

"Muzi, please talk to her" my mom begs my dad.

"I have nothing to say" my dad tells her and she starts crying again.

Doesn't she stop? I decide to take the plates to the kitchen to wash them. They are still sitting at the lounge when I finish washing the dishes. My dad is sitting on the sofa looking all relaxed. I honestly can't believe my dad thought I'll be out the door when my

mommy dearest decides to grace us with her presence. I look at the time it's 2pm we need to go to the workshop. I tell them my dad and I need to be somewhere and they tell us that they'll wait. Even when I tell them we'll be back late they insist. I tell my dad that he can stay behind but he doesn't want to. If these cars weren't in the garage the whole weekend then I'd go there tomorrow but I can't. So we leave them.

Today I had wealthy customers, I'm under my favourite car Audi Q5 changing the tyre when I see people walking in.

"You're a mechanic?" comes the most annoying voice in the world. She's asking the obvious clearly she's not waiting for an answer.

"*Baba* what time is it?" I ask my dad.

"It's 8pm" he replies.

"I thought you guys left."

"I couldn't believe it when Momo told me that you're a car mechanic" she tells me still shocked. Momo is our neighbour she's been a good one helping my dad where she could with me. She's the one who knew that my mom was having an affair with my dad's best friend. She's a teacher, she helped me with assignments and homework and studying. At some point I asked my dad to marry her. I can't remember what he said.

"Aren't you leaving?" I ask her. She doesn't say anything. I continue working the owner of this car will be here first thing tomorrow morning.

"We're done for the day" I tell my dad as soon as I'm done changing the tyre.

We head home, they follow us back. I turn to look for answers from my dad and I can see that he is as confused as I am. When we get home they tell us that they'll sleep at Momo's place. We decide to watch *Uzalo* my dad's favourite soapie. He looks happy, I'm glad, I hate it when he looks grumpy and tired I get worried. At 9pm we both head to our bedrooms. I take a quick shower and I head to bed, I'm very tired but I can't sleep. I have so much on my mind. I keep wondering why my mom cheated, why she left and why she's only coming back now. I forgave her a long time ago as soon as I realised she's not coming back.

“Zekhethelo, can we talk?” my dad comes into my room. It’s 5 in the morning and judging by the way he looks, he didn’t sleep. I sit up and nod.

“Don’t look so worried” he tells me faking a smile. How could I not? But I pretend as if I didn’t see him faking a smile.

“It’s about your mom. I think you should build a relationship with her” he tells me and goes mute. I think he’s waiting for me to say something but I have nothing to say right now. I kind of feel betrayed. What has the woman done to my dad, why the sudden change of heart? Wasn’t he happy I chose him? I’m confused, but I don’t say anything to him. I talk a lot I always have something to say but right I choose to say nothing.

“Can you do that?” he asks me placing his hand on top of mine. I shake my head.

“I know I’ve been selfish, for the past 20 years I dreamt of her coming back and you not wanting anything to do with her. But now I think it’s not fair, you needed your mother and I can’t be the reason you didn’t build a relationship with her. If you want to leave with her then that’s okay with me”

Is my dad being serious? He really thinks I want a relationship with my mom? I’m so mad right now did he really wake me up at 5am to talk about my mom. I’m too mad to say anything so I just go back to sleep. I slept an hour back because I’ve been busy at the workshop since yesterday at 7pm.

I wake up 3 hours later, I take a quick shower and eat breakfast. My dad is sitting at the lounge, I just ignore him I’m too mad. I know I’m not being fair. I wash the bowl after eating cornflakes and I leave I know he was waiting for me but I leave. I’ll walk I need to clear my head. As soon as I close the gate. A familiar voice shouts

“Surprise” it’s Bonga my boyfriend. I’m so happy to see him, I last saw him 2 months back. I didn’t realise how much I missed him until now.

“Not here my dad will kill you when he sees you here” I tell him smiling. At least we’ll walk together to the workshop and he’ll probably assist me if he has time.

“Are you not happy to see me?” he asks smiling.

“Of course I am” I tell him and we walk to the workshop it usually takes me 30 minutes to walk there but with Bonga it’s going to take more than an hour. We walk and talk about everything. I didn’t tell him about my mom during our daily calls and chats. Bonga and I have known each other since I was 5 and we’ve been dating for 4 years. He’s 7

years older, a UCT computer science graduate. He works and stays in Cape Town. We see each other every 2 months and we talk daily. I will tell him about my mom later, he knows she left 20 years ago.

After an hour we are at the workshop and some of my regular clients are here waiting. I greet them and I open the roller door. We get inside and I do all the administrative work before I can start working on the cars. I work the whole day with Bonga helping me, I decide to tell him about my mom. Like I expected he's hurt I didn't tell him sooner but he thinks my father is right I should try and build a relationship with my mom.

"I've seen how this affected you remember I've known you since you were little" I shake my head. It's true we've known each other since we were little and his mom used to joke about us getting married someday.

"I love you and I value your opinions but right now you're talking *shit*" I tell him feeling betrayed. *How dare he?* I know I'm being childish, but he's my bf he should take my side not my mom's side. So I take out all my frustration on the car I'm working on.

Chapter 2

I wipe beads of sweat from my forehead using my arm. I've been working from 4am to 4pm for the past 2 weeks. Bonga left a week ago, it's always sad seeing him leave but he's coming back early January. I'm under one of my favourite cars Audi Q5 when the atmosphere changes and we all know who that is. I continue fixing the car. Three pairs of expensive shoes walk towards me.

"Why haven't you changed the cheque" the deep voice asks. *The cheque.* OMW I forgot to change the cheque things have been crazy for the past 4 weeks. My granddad being sick, Nonhle appearing out of the blue, my dad and Bonga telling me to forgive and forget (I still haven't forgiven my dad) and Bonga visiting I haven't had time to change the cheque.

"I haven't had time" I reply. He pulls me out of the car using the stretcher. When I look up I see the most handsome guy ever. Even Maps Maponyana isn't this handsome. I must've been drooling over him.

"Close that mouth" he commands. And I comply instantly.

"You're here because I didn't change the cheque?" I ask him. He doesn't say anything, instead he's staring at me. It feels uncomfortable.

"No" he replies not expanding.

"What do you want?" I ask

"You" he replies. I let out a nervous chuckle. He's joking right? Why would he want me? I'm way out of his league and I have a boyfriend I love very much thank you. I look back at him and he's not laughing.

"I have a bf and I don't want you" I tell him. He says we'll see and he walks out. The driver or bodyguard walks towards me. He tells me that what his boss wants he gets. I got the same impression about him but he won't get me. I look at the time it's 2 in the afternoon. Two more hours to go. I'm not in the mood to see my dad, but I have to go home. I keep working and before I know it it's 6PM. I close the workshop, I'll have to walk home. I check my phone there are no missed calls or messages, is Bonga dead? I know I've been ignoring my dad but the fact that I should be home by now and I'm not and he doesn't call to check up on me doesn't sit well with me. When I turn to the road he's waiting for me. Now that he's waiting I'm mad at him and I pass the car and I walk home. He drives behind me, I'm grateful. As soon as I get home, I shower and head to bed not without locking the door. I've been sleeping for like what 5 seconds when my phone vibrates under my pillow. Who'd text me at 11PM? Maybe it's Bonga. I have an MMS from an unsaved number. Who'd text me during this time? Because I'm curious I open the message. There are photos with the following caption: *If you say no one more time your dad is next. And you'll be watching.*

Watching what? I download the 2 pictures. What I see next has me screaming my lungs out. Bonga is cut into pieces his head is placed in his chest. I hear my dad yelling telling me to open the door. I'm too numb to even walk to the door. This is the first time I hear my dad yelling. I don't know how long I've been screaming. I stop screaming when I see my door on the floor. My dad and some of my neighbours are standing here me looking with worry written on their faces. Momo suggests they look at my phone but I take it before they do.

"What's wrong?" my dad asks me looking all worried. I don't want to tell him they will want us to go to the police and the guy probably has the justice system on his payroll. I'm raking my brain trying to come up with an answer.

"I had a nightmare" I just tell them. I see them sighing. They are relieved but my dad can see right through me. I apologise for waking them up. They apologise for the door and

they leave with the promise to check up on me the next day. I try to sleep and I can't. My dad decides to take a chair and he sits in my room looking at me with so much worry.

I toss and turn for 5 hours. At 4AM I eventually fall asleep. My dad left 2 hours ago, he looked tired. I told him to go sleep he didn't want to at first but he kept falling asleep so it was pointless. I wake up at 11AM there's an incoming call it's Bonga's mom.

"*Yebo sawubona ma*" I answer.

"Zeh, it's Bonga. His wife found him slaughtered when she came back 10 minutes ago" she tells me crying. *Bonga had a wife?* Surely Bonga's mom is distraught. I'm too tired and emotional to talk so I tell her that I'll come by later and I hang up. I fall back asleep. My dad wakes me up at 1 in the afternoon. He made me lunch, I thank him and I head to the shower. I take a quick shower. I wear a red knee length dress and I walk to Bonga's house, it's 4 streets from my house. There are so many people, his sister tells me that his mom is in her room. I walk there and she cries when she sees me. I hug her, I can't help but cry. I'm hurting and I feel super guilty. If I didn't say no to that guy, Bonga would've lived.

"No, it's not your fault" she tells me wiping my tears.

"Yes it's not your fault. You didn't kill Bonga"

"What?" I ask them confused.

"You just said it's your fault" his mom tells me. I freeze for a minute. I don't remember saying that. We don't say anything else to each other. I sit with his mother for some time, when more neighbours come in I go to the kitchen to help his sister Thobeka with whatever she's busy with.

"Bonga had a wife?" I ask her and she chokes on her drink.

"Yes he paid lobola for her late last year."

"And I didn't know?" I ask her getting angry.

"It wasn't my place to tell" she tells me looking anywhere but my face.

Bonga's wife got here while I was still helping his sister in the kitchen. Yesterday was his funeral. Everything went well. I was introduced to his wife as his childhood friend and she has heard a lot about me. And I didn't want to cause any drama I just got along with her and I was one of the many speakers. It was so hard but I did talk and I cried throughout the service. It was very sad. I'm taking a break today, I'll go to the workshop tomorrow. I took a leave since Bonga died and I'm glad to say my customers have been very understanding.

My alarm rings at 5am. I need to wake up and for the first time since I started working at the workshop I don't feel like going to work. But I have to. My clients have been understanding for the past week and I can't take advantage of that. They need their cars today or tomorrow. I can't stop thinking about Bonga. I can't believe he had a wife and I didn't know. God I'm so stupid. I wake up, take a shower. When I walk out the door my dad is sleeping on the couch he has been watching me all night since the day I received the pictures. I wake him up so he can go sleep on his bed peacefully. I take his car and leave. I get at the workshop at 6:45 and there are 5 people waiting for me. I greet everyone and I open the roller door. I do all the administrative work after 30 minutes I start working on the cars it looks like I'll be able to finish today before 5PM. My stomach grumbles after I finished working on the 5th car. I look at the time it's still 9am been up for so long in my mind. I thought it's already mid-day. My body is tired but I have to work to keep my mind off things. Bonga's betrayal cut very deep. *A whole wife and I didn't know*. It doesn't add up we always talked at 8pm and we always said love you before we hung up. Where was the wife then? I'm so deep in thought with the spoon half way through my mouth when Mr. Deep voice decides to grace me with his presence. He's all smiles like he didn't kill my boyfriend and sent me the pics of his chopped corpse and threatened to kill my dad. *Bustard*. I ignore him, that's probably the dumbest thing but guess what? I don't care.

"How have you been?" He asks me smiling. Such a beautiful smile if he wasn't a murderer I'd be charmed and I'd definitely smile back.

"What do you want?" I ask him annoyed.

"We need to discuss our wedding that's in a month" he tells me looking very serious I choke on my food. *What?*

"I can't marry you" I tell him getting emotional.

"You can and you will. Unless you want your dad to follow your unfaithful boyfriend" he tells me dead serious. I don't answer him instead I walk to the next car that needs to be fixed. I'm trying to see what the problem is when he walks over to me. *I'm trying to work here* I feel like screaming. My phone rings it's my dad.

"Hello" I answer.

"Zeh I just got a letter from the Khumalo family. Why didn't you tell me the good news? Are you that angry at me?" He asks seriously but I know he's smiling judging by the way he's talking.

"Khumalos? I don't know anyone by that surname may..." I don't get to finish that sentence when the guy chokes me.

"What did I tell you" he asks me.

"How would I know your surname? This is a bad idea"

"Are you okay?" my dad asks. I nod forgetting that he can't see nodding so I tell him and we'll talk later today. I apologise for not telling me sooner I wanted to surprise him. I hate lying to my dad and I did twice already.

"I don't even know the little things about you. My dad is going to ask me questions" I tell him.

"I'm Zwelibanzi Melusi David Khumalo" that's all you need to know. "Don't bother telling me about you. I know everything" he tells me smiling.

"What exactly do you know?" I ask him, actually I'm challenging him.

"You're Zekhethelo Zethembiso Mazibuko. You turned 24 on September the 25th. You live with your dad your mom left 20 years ago with Joe your father's best friend. Your favourite colour is black. You just finished your BA in Literature at the University of Johannesburg. You dated that bf of yours for 4 years though you've known him all your life" he tells me smiling. My God if he wasn't a murderer I was going to fall for him. I want to ask him so many questions but it doesn't look like he'll answer me so I just continue working on the cars and he keeps trying to help like he cares. Maybe he does. *Stop lying to yourself. A girl can dream right?*

"Look I need all the information I can get about you. My dad is going to ask me questions so if I don't even know the smallest things then he won't allow me to marry you. I know you said he's next. I don't want to lose him so I'm marrying you so my dad

gets to live not because I want to. I hope you remember that” I tell him looking around my tools for a screw. He doesn’t say anything.

We talk the whole time trying to get our story together for the sake of my dad. I work until 6PM. I thought today wasn’t going to be a long day. I need to walk home and Zwelibanzi won’t let me. I don’t feel comfortable with him dropping me off, it’s disrespectful and I know my dad won’t like this one bit. I agree because every time I say no he keeps threatening to kill my dad and I can’t take that chance. So I agree. Ten minutes later I’m home and the whole family is here my grandparents, 7 aunts and 4 uncles, they hug and kiss me. My grandma tells me how proud she is she thought I was going to die single. It’s a beautiful night. My dad didn’t tell them about my mom or they don’t want to talk about it.

“Did *baba* tell you that Nonhle came by twice with her family?” I ask them looking at my grandma. Judging by the look on her face, my dad didn’t tell them and I wonder why. All eyes on my dad, my granddad looks super angry if he was still a child I bet he was going to give him some serious hiding. I continue eating. Don’t get me wrong my dad is a very good cook by my grandma is the greatest. I enjoy her meals more.

“When did Nonhle come here?” my granddad asks me. He’s too mad to talk to my dad, I think.

“Few weeks back” I tell him. I start tidying up.

I’m washing the dishes when I hear my grandma shouting at my dad. I can’t really make out what they are saying. I’m not really interested. As soon as I’m done I walk to my room. It’s been a long.

To be honest I have mixed feeling about this marriage. One minute I want to marry Zwelibanzi because I’m forced to but the next minute I want to marry him because Bonga’s betrayal cut very deep. I’ve been so stupid.

“I hope you’re thinking about that boyfriend of yours” aunt Thembi tells me when she walks in my room.

“I’m just worried about my dad. He’s going to be lonely here. I did tell him that I’m not against the idea of him marrying another woman. Nonhle left *mos*” I tell her.

She tells me that Nonhle is my mom, I shouldn’t call her by her name. It’s disrespectful. I roll my eyes at that and she leaves the room. Soon after I follow her out.

Morning come too early, I walk to the workshop it's a little hot but I need to keep my mind off things. We didn't really discuss the letter from Zwelibanzi's family and he might come around today to ask and he'll threaten to kill my dad for the million times.

It's been a long and productive day and it looks like it's going to rain. I know my dad will be busy so I'll catch a taxi home. Today is my lucky day, I don't have to stand for long, the taxi is here within 5 minutes.

"We have to discuss the letter, we don't want the young man thinking we're ignoring him" my grandma tells me as soon as I open the door.

It's been a long day, I was hoping we'd discuss this tomorrow since I won't be going to the workshop. I left a notice telling me clients that I won't be at the workshop tomorrow. I try to tell her that I'm tired, we'll discuss this tomorrow. I'm so not looking forward to the discussion. If the guy is serious then in a month I'll be Mrs. Whatever his surname is. I have so much on my mind. Grandma won't let me sleep until my granddad tells her to let me rest.

I should've known that my grandma will wake me up at 4am. My God I thought she'll let me rest. I tell her that I will join her in 30 minutes. I take a shower and make the bed. I walk to the lounge, the whole family is up and sitting staring at me. These people can't be serious. It's not even 8am.

"*Sanibonani*" I greet them. They greet me back.

"We need to discuss this letter, your in-laws are coming this Saturday". So he was serious about marrying me within a month. Who sends a letter on Tuesday and expect the family to be here that very same weekend.

"How long have you known this guy?" my grandma asks me. I was expecting this question.

"Long enough to agree to marry him" I tell her looking at my hands in my lap. I can't look at her and lie. I'm not saying I've never lied to her but I've never lied about big and serious things. They ask all kinds of things. They ask if I'm sure. I don't want to marry the guy but I have to, pity I can't say that out loud we'll get into trouble. We plan for the arrival of my future in-laws this Saturday.

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My family loves Zwelibanzi, maybe they should marry him not me. He finished lobola within 2 weeks and he paid R80 000 without even blinking. I don't know why but I get the feeling that I'm going to pay for that R80 000. I told my dad to charge him R20 000 but my grandparents were against the whole idea. They demanded that kind of money because I'm educated and I'm a virgin. I paid for my fees and it was my choice to remain a virgin until I get married and Zweli has to pay for that. I was scared he was going to say it's too much and threaten to kill my dad because he thinks the money is too much. Instead he expected them to say R100 000. This guy is not paying the money out of love or because he thinks I'm worth that kind of money. But he paid it because in his mind he's buying me. If only my family could see things from my perspective they weren't going to charge him that much. Instead they were going offer me for free.

"I'm so proud of you. You look beautiful" my dad tells me with tears in his eyes. I just smile thinking, *I'm doing this for you so you get to live.*

I can't believe I'm getting married in about 10 minutes. Zweli is a controlling bustard. He practically planned the whole wedding. All I had to do was to agree to everything because, if things don't go his way then he will threaten me. I always wanted a white wedding but nope he wants a traditional wedding and my family has never been so happy. They keep singing praises as if he's suddenly God. We always argued about my wedding and I always told them I want a white wedding. My dad invited my mom and she was hurt because we didn't tell them about the negotiations.

It's time to go out. I was raised by traditional people so I know everything about culture. I'm ready for *ukugida*. So I walk out with my cousins. It's one of the days I wish I had siblings. *Imagine doing this with them.*

As soon as I come face to face with Zweli I cry. My family come running. I tell them I can't do this. *I can't marry a murderer.* People think it's normal for a girl to cry and get cold feet on her wedding day. My aunts and grandma keep telling me that this is normal. Ayanda walks towards me smiling but I know he's doing this for my family if we were alone he was going to kill me like he killed Bonga then kill my dad. They move away when he puts his hand on my shoulder. My aunts smile. The hand is supposed to be warm and assuring and I'm sad to say Zweli's hand is the total opposite. It's sooo cold and the way he's rubbing my shoulder says a lot like *keep crying then your dad is next with you watching.* He doesn't have to say anything. The message is loud and clear. I ask to take a break, he says no. He walks away but not without threatening me. "You're

going to pay for this” the way he speaks the words proves that the threat isn’t an idle one. At least he threatens me not my dad.

I drink water and I go on with *ukugida*.

Three hours later, we are sitting at the table eating and listening to speeches. My grandparents were the first to talk. I didn’t hear a word because I kept thinking about how my life is going to be. If he controlled a simple wedding then he’s going to control my life. Where I should be, what I should be wearing and he’s going to choose friends for me no doubt about that. I can’t even eat. I feel like running away.

Before I know it, it’s time to go. The moving truck has my stuff. I was never told that we’re leaving, I thought we’ll stay in Joburg. What about my graduation and honours. What about the workshop, my dad, my family and my neighbours.

“You look sad more than happy. Are you okay?” my dad asks. Zweli gives me a threatening look.

“I’m just sad that you’re not coming with me” I tell him, I’m not lying but it’s not the whole truth. He just smiles at me also looking sad. We say our goodbyes and Zweli drives off. I don’t even know where we are going and I won’t even ask him.

I must’ve fallen asleep because I’m roughly shaken by Zweli telling me to get up we are here. I get off the car and I follow to the biggest mansion I’ve ever seen. I don’t know if this is a house or a mall. I follow him and we head to the 2nd floor and he open the first door. I follow him in, it’s his bedroom. It’s empty there’s a 4 poster bed at the centre nothing else. As soon as I get in he closes and locks the door. My heart thumps heavily against my ribcage. I move and he follows me. He starts kissing me. I’m not ready to consummate the marriage. I knew that I won’t have a say on most things in our marriage but I didn’t expect this to be one of them.

Chapter 3

I don’t know when I fell asleep. I’ve been up all night. I must’ve have fallen asleep around 4am when Zweli left. As soon as I open my eyes, I can feel the wetness of the pillow. And then it hits me all over again. Zweli raped me, I told him I’m not ready. I was hoping he’d understand, but I was dead wrong. *I married a rapist and a murderer*. Last night when Zweli was through, I tried to wash the filth off me but I couldn’t. The rape

lasted for less 20 minutes. It's amazing how such a short period of time can turn a person's world upside down. I remember crying the whole time he was raping me and he didn't stop. I begged him until I stopped crying.

I drag myself out of bed and I walk to the bathroom. Maybe today I can wash the filth off me if I try harder. Last night I was too weak, I'm still the same but I need to scrub myself. I run my bath and sink in. As much as I try to block last night's events, I can't. I feel tears running down my face. But they don't stop me from scrubbing harder. I don't stop even when I see blood and the water runs cold.

"Ma'am are you okay?" an old lady asks beeping from the door.

I try to fake a smile and nod. But I'm too numb. I just continue scrubbing and crying. I freeze when I feel her small hand on mine. I wasn't raised by my mom but I know for a fact that I don't have anger issues or I don't despise women. But right now I feel like slapping the woman's hand away. She hugs me and she tells me that it's going to be okay. I wish I could agree with her but it's more like *it only got started*. And I can't call the only person I called when things were bad. Because my dearest husband decided to murder him and I know it's only a matter of time before he kills me too.

I let the woman hold me and lie to me. I know that it's not okay and it's not going to be okay. I stop crying not because the woman is consoling me but I need to pull myself together otherwise my dad's life depends on me. I have to pretend like I'm okay and I'm happily married because that will make my dad happy. She helps me out the bath takes a towel to dry me then she continues to choose an outfit for me. All the things my mom has never done for me. This woman's children must be happy to have such a wonderful mother. She walks to my side of the closet and she takes out matching underwear and a long blue dress. She helps me get dressed and she tells me how beautiful I am. I want to believe her but it's hard. She makes the bed and she takes my hand and she leads me downstairs to the kitchen and she makes me breakfast.

She tells me stories probably to help me take my mind off things and I'm grateful for that. But I can't really take my mind off things now can I? She tells me about her family. She's a great story teller. I don't say much and it doesn't look like she expects me to say anything. I enjoy her stories. Before we know it, it's supper time and Zweli walks in. He doesn't say anything he just eats and type on his phone the whole time. I feel like getting up, but I can't. MaShezi, the old maid, has been very sweet. The least I can do is

sit down and finish the food. After eating, I help her wash the dishes. She didn't want to but I insisted, I had to buy time, maybe Zweli will be sleeping when I get to the bedroom.

"Zekhethelo, you have a visitor" maShezi announces when she walks in.

Flip I forgot that I'm meeting Zwelibanzi's mom. We met on my wedding day but it was brief. She promised to take me out so we can get to know each other. I quickly make the bed and I wear a long white dress and black sandals. I walk downstairs and I find her sitting on the couch at the parlour. She must be in her 50's but she looks 20. She's dressed to the nines. She's wearing a gold knee length dress with black heels. Even her greying hair looks good on her. I don't smile much since I got here but her smile is contagious as soon as she smiles at me, I smile back.

"You look beautiful" she tells me smiling. She looks super beautiful. She walks over to hug me. I'm getting emotional. My mom has never hugged me and I feel dirty not beautiful. She tells me we can leave. I look forward to going out.

"Such a beautiful car" I tell her when I see her red Range Rover. My God, I can't believe I'm going to ride in this car. It's one of my many dream cars. She thanks me with a sweet smile. She seems sweet. I just hope she enjoys my company and visa verse. Thirty minutes later, we're at a mall.

"I never really bought you a wedding present. So I was hoping we'd do that together so that I buy something you like"

This woman must be very wealthy, she paid for almost everything for my wedding and now this? I start to shake my head but she insists. I don't want to take advantage. We keep going in and out of stores. When I eye something, it's on her basket. I always wished I had a life like that. I'm not really poor but I had bills and fees to pay. Getting a bursary is not as easy as people say. And the workshop is not always busy. Sometimes, I'd be at home for almost a month, no client. But then again life has never been easy, especially for me. Now that we are done buying, we head to the food court.

"Where would like to eat?" she asks me.

"Spur" I reply shyly. I hope she'll let me settle the bill.

We head to Spur and this other guy keeps checking her out, it's so embarrassing. She's not even giving him any attention, she must be used to this. I enjoy my steak and chips

and she goes for a burger instead. We are quiet the whole time. I don't speak when I'm eating. When it's time for dessert I'm super full. I wasn't even hungry but I didn't want to come across as rude so I ate. After a long and beautiful day, I need to go back to Zweli's place. So not looking forward to that, but I have no choice otherwise my dad is next with me watching. Even during the rape he kept telling me that.

Zweli's mom drops me off and leaves, I wish I could go with her but I drag my feet and I'm greeted by Zweli. He doesn't say anything, so I also ignore him.

We're sitting at the kitchen and talking about MaShezi's family when 2 guys walk in. They look so much like Zweli. MaShezi walks to them with a very big smile on her face. They greet each other.

"This is Zekhethelo" she introduces me.

"I'm Mpumelelo, Zweli's big brother and this is Sizwe, our little brother. So nice to finally meet you" he smiles and pulls me into a hug. He sounds sweet. Sizwe also comes forward to hug. It's supper time and Zweli is nowhere to be found, so his brothers talk me into having supper with them. I join them, they seem nice. They smile all the time, I wish I could say the same about their brother. Throughout the conversation, I find that Sizwe and I have a lot in common.

We love books, both reading and writing. He's a Journalism graduate. Zweli is a business and marketing graduate then Mpumelelo is a dentist. Their mom must be very proud.

"Have you started applying for a job?" Sizwe asks me.

"Not yet, I just needed to take a break. Studying and working can be hard. Sometimes I had to work till very late"

"Oh you're a workaholic just like your husband. He works ungodly hours that one. He won't rest even when mom insists" Mpumelelo tells me smiling. I smile back, they must think their brother and I love each other. We continue talking until 10PM, I decide to go to bed. I'm waken up by someone ripping my clothes. I scream.

"Scream all you want but this room is sound proof" he tells me taking his clothes off. I close my eyes because I know what he's about to do. I just hope I get through all of this. And when he's done, he walks to the bathroom, leaving me crying, even when I promised myself that I wouldn't. When he's done he walks back.

“Go clean yourself up” he commands. I get off and walk to the bathroom, I lock myself and I scrub myself not without crying. I must’ve been here longer. When he tells me to get to bed, I quickly dry myself, clean the tub and walk over. I toss and turn I can’t sleep and he’s snoring.

I keep thinking about my dad so that I can stop myself from running away. I don’t fall asleep until after he leaves at 5am. I wake up when someone shakes me. It’s maShezi.

“You have a delivery.” *Me? A delivery from who?* I ask her to sign for it, I’ll be downstairs soon. She looks at me funny, opens her mouth to say something but decides against it. She says okay and walks out. I bath and make the bed. Thirty minutes later, I open the box. I smile when I see my basic tools.

“Thought you might need these. I’m sorry I couldn’t attend the wedding, as you know my wife is sick.” Moses.

Moses is the original owner of the workshop, I smile. I send him a thank you text before I forget to. This is so thoughtful of him. At least I can fix cars to keep my mind off things. I don’t know where to put my tools. I decide to put them next to the items Zweli’s mom bought me. I still need to unpack.

I walk to the kitchen, Zweli and his brothers are here. They are busy tickling Sizwe and they are laughing so hard. Zweli seems happy and carefree if I were to tell people that he killed my boyfriend and raped me twice, they’d think I’m lying. I’m hungry, so I was hoping I’d make breakfast without bothering maShezi or any of the maids. I rummage through the cupboards, with as little noise as possible. I just make myself 8 slices of bread with butter and cheese. When I’m done, I wash the plate.

“Dear child, you should’ve told me you’re hungry” an old woman I haven’t seen before walks towards me.

“No it’s okay. I don’t mind”.

“Can I use your phone? I need to call the mechanic my tyre is flat. I swear someone is trying to stop me from spending my time off with my family” maShezi walks in smiling at Zweli who’s also grinning like an idiot.

“I’ll help” I tell her. She looks shocked and shakes her head no.

“This is the mechanic, I was telling you about” Zweli tells them smiling. This is the first time I’ve seen him smile. Is it pride that I hear ? Or maybe not.

“You lie” says Sizwe smiling. I don’t hear Zweli’s answer because I’m heading to maShezi’s car. Ten minutes later I’m done. Zweli and his brothers are smiling from ear to ear with their eyes almost popping out of their socket.

They seem pretty close, but come to think of it. I didn’t see them at the wedding. Maybe they aren’t so close. We say our goodbyes to maShezi and we go back to the house. Zweli heads upstairs leaving me with his brothers again. They are still in shock.

“Shake it off guys” I tell them smiling. They are sweet, I just hope I get along with them. We just sit and chitchat almost the whole day until their stomachs rumble. I miss cooking. I decide to go cook. I cook simple food. Rice with chicken stew. Almost 2 hours later, I’m done. I ask everyone to dish up for themselves. Sizwe calls Zweli to tell him to come down food is ready. When he gets here we all start to dig in.

“I was told that you still haven’t changed the cheque” Zweli tells me.

“Shit the cheque”

Shit the cheque. Why do I keep forgetting?

“Yes the cheque” he replies in a bored tone.

I tell him I always forget to. After eating I wash the dishes before I head to bed.

*

“Have you started applying” Sizwe asks when he walks in the kitchen.

“Yes, I’m busy with that” I reply. He wishes me luck and he makes breakfast for everyone including me. I smile at him and I eat. I feel very tired. I excuse myself and I head to bed.

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For the first time since I got here. I had a good night sleep. That’s probably because Zweli didn’t come to bed last night. I shower, make the bed and head downstairs. I find the guys in the kitchen, Mpumelelo is making breakfast. They are talking and laughing like yesterday. There’s so much food and I notice the guys hardly eat. Zweli and Mpumelelo eat 3 slices and Sizwe 2 while I eat half the loaf.

“The food was delicious” I tell Mpumelelo.

“But you’re a great cook” he replies with a smile. I can’t help but smile back. My phone pings, it’s an email. I applied for more than 5 editing internships around Durban. I didn’t get the any of the jobs. It’s sad but I have hope. I mean my results should speak for me. Zweli leaves right after breakfast. He doesn’t say a word to me. But then again we were never in love so I just sit there and watch TV the whole day.

I must have been tired because I fell asleep while watching TV. And I have been sleeping for more than 5 hours because when I look at the time, it’s 5 in the afternoon. I need water so I walk to the kitchen. I find Zweli cooking and his brothers are arguing over something. I walk over to the tap, after drinking water I walk back to the couch. Soon supper is ready. We are eating, rice, fried fish and gravy. WOW, even my dad is not this good. When I tell him the food is delicious he just nods. I just continue eating. Maybe I annoy him. After eating I head to bed but I’m afraid tonight is not my lucky night. Zweli walks in, walks over to me rips my underwear and rapes me. Like always he walks to the bathroom, takes a shower, he tells me to do the same when he’s done.

I like mini dresses but since the rape, I don’t wear anything short. They suddenly make me feel dirty. But today I’m wearing a short dress. I walk to the kitchen for breakfast, Zweli’s brothers left a week back and the house is so quiet. I miss their presence. They make living here a little easier. I am able to put everything at the back of my head when I’m with them. I walk to the lounge to read a book Sizwe borrowed me. When I pass by the dining room, Zweli is in a meeting with buffy guys they must be his guards or securities. He’s no longer talking he’s staring at me. I don’t know whether I should walk to the lounge or just stand there. The voice in my head is screaming move but I can’t move. It’s like my legs no longer work. The guys are looking at me funny. If I was beautiful I’d say they’re drooling over me but I can’t lie to myself now can I? The next thing I know he’s dragging me to the dining room table. He rips my clothes and the people gasp and then he does the unthinkable, he rapes me in front of these people. I try to scream but my voice doesn’t come out. It feels like a dream I just hope someone wakes me but it’s not. And when he’s done he tells me that I should go wash myself up. One of the guys is crying. I walk away with no clothes. I walk to the bathroom to ‘clean myself up’. This is too much. This is getting out of hand. My dad will have to forgive me, I can’t do this anymore so I rummage through the drawers for any kinds of pills there are

none. I start to scream, I'm frustrated I hope he had pills so I can commit suicide. I find pain killers at the bedside drawers he purchased a week ago. I put them in my mouth and then I think of my dad. I can't do this to him it'll kill him. I walk to the bathroom to flush them. I take a long bath. I'm never satisfied no matter how hard I try to scrub myself. Eventually, I give up I won't be able to scrub all the filth. So I dry myself clean the bath tub then I walk to the walk-in closet I take a maxi dress. I walk over to the bed and I try to sleep. But I can't 3 hours later I give up. I just sit on the bed and stare at the ceiling.

"There you are" maShezi walks in, she tells me that she's been looking for me. I enjoy her company so much but right now I don't feel like having company. She asks me what I feel like eating, I'm not hungry. I always force myself to eat but today I can't. I can't walk into that dining room after he humiliated me in front of all those people. I can't do it. I tell her I'm not hungry she frowns. Fortunately she doesn't ask any questions she says okay and she leaves. I take my phone and I go through my emails. I have so many emails. I've been applying for a lot of jobs and all the emails start with 'we regret to tell you'. I thought obtaining my degree with so many distinctions I'll get a job quick. It's funny how they want experience even when someone is fresh from Varsity. It's really frustrating. I apply for more jobs. I hope I get one job even if I have to work for transport it's okay. I can't be sitting here all day it's going to make me sick. And now I can't go to the lounge to fetch the book.

I must've fallen asleep because I feel someone shaking me. It's Zweli. I freeze, he's not here to rape me now is he?

"My mom is here" he tells me then he walks out the door. I fix the bed cover, walk to the bathroom to wash my face. I walk to the lounge. No matter how much I try to avoid the dining room I can't. I quickly walk past it. I find Mrs. Khumalo on the couch with her son massaging her swollen feet. I greet her with a hug, she's a hugger this one. She tells me that Zweli is going away for 2 weeks for business so she's here to take me to her house since my dear husband won't be able to take me with. I smile, never been so happy to leave this house. I run to our bedroom. I even take 2 steps at a time. I quickly pack my bag. Five minutes later, I'm done. I walk back to the lounge. They are busy talking so I wait for them to finish. I'm the first one out the door. I hardly go out, I didn't even notice how beautiful the weather is. I like sunny days.

“Aren’t you going to kiss your husband goodbye?” OMG. I shake my head no when Zweli walks towards me with a smile. He kisses my forehead, cheeks, chin and lastly my mouth. We say our goodbyes.

“You don’t have to be shy. You’re a married woman” I’m too shy to say anything. Besides it’s not like we are married because we love each other. I honestly don’t know why Zweli chose me of all people in the world. It’s not like I’m beautiful. No matter how much people say beauty is not everything. I actually think, beauty is everything. Otherwise we wouldn’t have slay queens and people who go for plastic surgeries.

I’m so happy to be out of that house. I’m even smiling at myself.

“Did you hear what I just said?” Mrs Khumalo asks me smiling. I hope she’s not thinking I’m thinking about her son because I’m not. We get to her house after an hour on the road. It’s a beautiful one storey house. I see guards outside the house like Zweli’s place. I greet them they just nod. We go through a sliding door. She decides to give me a tour.

Such a big and beautiful house. 5 bedrooms and 4 bathrooms, 2 dining rooms, a kitchen and a very beautiful lounge. We sit on the couch and watch a movie. I don’t watch the movie because we are busy chitchatting. Around 4pm we decide to go cook supper, her boys are coming over. I’m so excited they are coming by. They are sweetest people ever. At 5pm they walk in looking very beautiful. They both hug their mom and kiss her on the forehead. They also hug me.

“We have a surprise for you” Sizwe tells me smiling. I love surprises more than anything.

“We know you are graduating tomorrow. So we are taking you to Joburg. Mama bought you a dress and shoes” Mpumelelo announces. I choke back the tears. I forgot about my graduation. With everything going on.

“Oh guys, I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t have to say anything” Sizwe answers.

“When are we leaving?” I ask them quickly tidying the table.

“We’ll wash the dishes” Sizwe takes them from me. I want to argue but Mpumelelo shakes his head. We leave after they are done with the dishes. Mpumelelo is driving. Seven hours later we’re at my house. It’s 3 in the morning. My father is so happy to see me. I didn’t tell him I was coming. I wanted to surprise him like I was surprised.

Mpumelelo and Sizwe share one of the guest rooms, while I share my room with Zweli's mom. I missed home so much.

My alarm goes off at 8am. Four hours before my graduation. An hour and half we're done. I feel beautiful today. I'm wearing a red knee length bob tube dress with black heels. Zweli's mom works her magic on my black natural hair. I look in the mirror and smile to myself. I've been looking forward to this day since I started Varsity. We eat breakfast and leave. There's so much traffic, I was scared we wouldn't get there on time. When we get to Campus I remember that I get 3 tickets. When I tell them, Sizwe tells me not to worry, he'll get a ticket.

"How?" I ask

"I'll pretend you didn't ask me that". I'm so nervous. I hope everything goes well and that I don't trip and fall on stage. We decide not to wait for transport. We walk to the auditorium. While I'm getting the tickets and my name tag, my dad and Zweli's mom go to hire my gown. I see the guys talking with some girl. When I walk over, Sizwe shows me a ticket with a huge grin on his face. Zweli's mom loves taking pictures. We take so many pictures I end up complaining. Soon we're ushered into the auditorium.

Graduation begins. I'm so bored, makes me question what is it exactly I was looking forward to. Soon our row is standing in a queue. Names are being called. When it's my turn, I'm so nervous. When my name is called. The boys clap so loud and whistle. My dad is a humble and shy person. He just smiles at me. When I move back to my seat, I'm so bored. I wish I could just leave. I take more pictures to kill time and lucky for me. We leave 30 minutes after. There are snacks but we don't take anything, we leave. When we get home, the whole family is here even my mom and Joe. The nerve. There are 2 boys who look like twins and they look so much like her. They must be my brothers. How I wish I had brothers. There's a buffet. Momo, and Bonga's mom are also here. They bought me presents. Bonga's mom tells me that his wife sent a package. Apparently Bonga bought me a graduation present when I was doing my first year. I feel so emotional. We take more pictures. We eat and chat the whole time. I'm so happy. Having a supportive family is not something everyone experiences. I mean it's during the week but everyone is here makes me emotional.

"Zeh, I'm so proud of you" Nonhle hugs me. And I hug her back, but I quickly pull away. This makes me think of all the times, I needed her hugs.

“I want you to meet Lindokuhle and Melokuhle” and the 2 boys walk over with huge smiles on their faces. And I smile back. I’m not a hugger so I just smile at them.

“I’m Lindo” the first boy hugs me. I hug him back. And then Melo follows with a smile. He hugs me longer and he tells me that he’s been looking forward to seeing me. I’m so happy to meet them. I see my dad smiling at me. I take their phone numbers before I forget to. They help me with the dishes. And we get to know each other. Unlike Melo, Lindo is a little quiet. Lindo is an IT specialist at Nedbank here in Joburg. Melo is a club DJ. Even though Joe and Nonhle were against the idea of him not going to Varsity like Lindo they finally accepted his choice.

It’s time to leave but I don’t feel like leaving. Being here with my family makes me forget all the bad things I have endured in Durban. I leave with the promise to stay in touch with my brothers and meet with up with them soon. I don’t say anything to Nonhle. I didn’t take her digits, I have forgiven her but I don’t want her in my life. I’m not even angry at my dad for inviting her.

We travel the whole night. We get to Durban just after 6am. I’m so sleepy. I just hope Zweli’s mom is not against the idea of *makoti* sleeping during the day. Sizwe makes breakfast, we eat and we head to our different rooms. I take a shower and head to bed. I fall asleep as soon as my head hits the pillow.

I guess it’s true when they say time flies when you are having fun. I really enjoyed my time here with Zweli’s family. He’s here to fetch me. I feel like dying. I’ve been dragging this day. I say goodbye to his family. My heart feels heavy.

We travel for almost 15 minutes when he stops under some bridge. I’m sitting here thinking he needs to pee or something until he opens the passenger seat. Now I see why he chose a car with tinted windows. He rips my dress and underwear and he rapes me. I try to scream but he puts his hand over my mouth. I keep begging him to stop but like the previous times. He doesn’t stop. When he’s done, he walks to the driver’s seat and he drives to his house.

Zweli’s mood swings change every 5 seconds. One minute we are sitting in the couch with his brothers laughing. The next he’s so serious and he rapes me. Like now he’s in a very good mood. It must be a contract gone according to plan or something like that. He talks to me, he doesn’t ignore me all the time like he did when I first got here. The

other day he asked if I'd like to go out, he's meeting some people for business and he wanted me to come over. But I didn't want to. And he didn't force me to he just let me stay and read some of his books.

I'm so frustrated and I'm taking my frustration out on everyone. I almost bit Zweli's head off the other day. He accidentally spill coffee on my cv. It's been 3 months, I have applied for more than 300 jobs and I'm not getting any. Makes me regret going to Varsity.

"What's up with you?" Zweli asks me.

"I have applied for so many jobs. I even lost count but I keep getting 'we regret to tell you' emails. It's so frustrating. I mean I studied my butt off and for what to be rejected by these stupid companies"

"I can always get you a job or buy you a company" he replies like he means that. Why am I even talking with this guy? I just nod, I don't trust him. I go upstairs to look at the tools I need to open a workshop and fix cars around here because car owners around here are clueless. But then I remember that Zweli didn't even bother to show me around the house. So I decide to give myself a tour. I'm walking towards the pool when I hear voices coming from the ground. Am I going crazy or what? I look around I don't see anyone. And then I see a crack on the concrete by the pool. I kneel down then I put my ear on the crack and then I hear laughter and voices. So this is a door? Who has a door on a concrete by the pool. I know I need to walk away and pretend that I didn't hear or see anything, but being the person that I am I decide to go inside. I push the concrete slab to the side and the door opens like a sliding door. I look around, I don't see anyone in sight I get in and I quickly close the door behind. I walk down the stairs. They are busy talking they don't hear me coming in. I knew something illegal is going on here but I didn't expect to see drugs. I see girls in bikini's some are putting the drugs inside their bags others are swallowing the drugs. I quickly leave the place before anyone can see me and report me to Zweli.

Chapter 4

For the past 2 months, I haven't been feeling well. I know I might be pregnant because I missed my periods twice. I always wanted to have babies but not with a monster like Zweli. I don't know who to ask so I call his mother. I'm scared to take one of Zweli's car.

"Hello" his mom answers.

"Hello?" she repeats when I go mute. I don't know what to say.

"I'm sorry to bother you ma. I have no one to call. I need to buy a pregnancy te..." I don't get to finish. Mrs. Khumalo squeals into the phone like a little child and she tells me, she's coming over right now. I'm so glad she's happy. But the problem is that I'm not.

"Zekhethelo" she walks in more like runs inside. She plants kisses all over my face, telling me how happy she is. We walk out to her car, and today she's driving a blue BMW. Twenty minutes later we are at the medical centre. She's busy telling me how happy and proud she is. She's hoping for a girl, it has always been her dream to have a baby girl but instead she gave birth to 3 boys. I'm so happy, she's happy. I wonder what Zweli will say. She booked an appointment at the local gynae. And she confirms that I'm 4 weeks pregnant. Unfortunately she cannot say the gender as yet but I should come in 2 months for routine check-up. If it was possible, I was going to abort. I can't bring a child into this world. I'm not ready, I'm only 24. Okay I'm old enough to be a mother. But I was hoping I'd have my first child when I'm almost 30. Mrs. Khumalo is so happy, I wish I could share her happiness. I'm scared I won't love my little one.

Two weeks later, I haven't told Zweli. I know this is stupid but I am looking for a special way of telling him. I just have an idea that if I make him love me he will treat me right. I know that he has a sweet tooth and he loves chocolate muffins. So I'm standing by the sink, I just baked a muffin. The only thing left is the icing. I'll give him a muffin with the words: "*Congrats you're going to be a father*" because I'm not sure on the gender yet. I was thinking I should use a white frosting for the words. When I'm done, I put the muffin in a box and I walk to our bedroom, for a quick shower. His family will be here. I also want to surprise his siblings. I hope their mom haven't told them because I know for sure she hasn't told Zweli. After bathing, I leave the room. I'm walking towards the steps when Zweli shouts my name walking towards me. I'm standing at the top step too

shocked to move. He's so furious, calling me a whore and all sorts of name. He chokes me against the hand rail.

"Why didn't you tell me you were pregnant? Or am I not the father" he asks. I'm too shocked to move or answer him.

"So now you can't talk?" he asks pushing me forcefully down the stairs. I black out before I can land on the floor.

*

I wake up in a hospital bed with Zweli, his mom and brothers sitting around the bed looking all worried. If I had my way, I wouldn't have seen Zweli until the next life, that's if he's not going to hell like his mother-in-law.

"You almost gave me a heart attack" Mrs. Khumalo tells me getting emotional.

"I'm sorry" I put my hand on my stomach and Mrs. Khumalo wails. I know the belly hasn't started showing. But ever since the gynae confirmed I was pregnant I always put my hand on my tummy, and I am starting to love the baby even though it was conceived under such circumstances. Zweli excuses himself.

"Zekhethelo, we have something to tell you" Sizwe tells me looking anywhere but my face.

"Sure"

"It's not easy, but you lost the baby"

I think I stop breathing for a second. This is too much. I'm only 24. First it was my mom, Bonga's death, being forced into marriage, the rape and now this? I don't think I'll cope.

"Thank God you're okay" my grandma walks in with all my aunts and uncles. My dad walks in last, I thought he didn't come. When my grandma hugs me. I can't pretend to be strong anymore, I can't hold back the tears. I cry my eyes out. It hurts.

"It's okay *mzukulu*, we're here." *It's not okay* I feel like screaming but I know my grandma means well.

"How are you feeling?" Mrs. Khumalo asks me.

"I don't know" *all I know is that I need to be alone*. But I don't say that out loud.

“Next time watch where you are going” my dad tells me giving me a hug. I didn’t realise I missed him so much. One of the nurses gets in and tells them that I need to have a maximum of 4 visitors. So my aunts, uncles and Zweli’s brothers leave. Leaving my dad, grandparents and Zweli’s mom. My dad holds my hand the whole time.

“I told your mom that you’re here. I hope you don’t mind” my grandma tells me. I do mind but I just nod. I hope she won’t come here and play mother hen.

“Where is your husband?” my granddad asks frowning in disapproval. I’m just glad he’s not here. His mom tells my granddad that he went out to buy me something to eat. The bell rings. Visiting hours are over. They all hug me goodbye. As soon as they leave the Doctor comes in for his daily afternoon rounds and she tells me that they will release me tomorrow morning.

As if I haven’t suffered enough. Zweli is here to fetch me. He takes my hand but I yank it back. I’m too mad. I lost my baby because of him. Instead of apologising he’s pretending to be a good husband. I decide to follow him behind. Thirty minutes later we are home. I’m welcomed by both families. My mom is here with Joe and with Lindo and Melo. I greet everyone. Nonhle decides to hug me. I hug her back. I really need a hug so I put the abandoning part at the back of my head for now. She starts crying. *My God this woman.*

They cooked lunch. There’s a buffet. I’m not hungry but they went all out so I dish up a very small portion. Everyone seems surprised but I just need to sleep. After lunch I say goodbye to my family and I head to bed I need to sleep.

The past 4 weeks have been hard. I’m starting to feel like I wasn’t meant to be happy. I don’t know but I blame my mom for all of this. If she didn’t leave then I wouldn’t be in this mess. I wasn’t going to be working on the workshop. She’d clearly help my dad and I’d go to school like I wanted. I wouldn’t be a mechanic and on that day I wouldn’t have met Zweli. I haven’t seen or heard from Zweli since I came back from the hospital. I was told that he went away for business his brothers have been keeping me company. They probably feel bad about their brother leaving me at a time like this but it’s cool with me. I need to be alone.

I'm lying in bed, today I don't feel like getting out of bed or opening the curtains.

Someone budes into the room and they open the curtains. I don't even look I keep my eyes closed.

"My mom invited us for lunch" Zweli tells me. I don't answer him I just keep quiet. I don't feel like leaving the house. I just want to sleep in peace.

"Did you hear me?" I still don't say anything. I don't want to hear his voice or see his face or I'm going to vomit. He sits on the bed but he doesn't say anything. His phone rings it must be his mom because I hear him saying I'm not feeling well so he won't be able to leave the house. As if he cares.

"Have you eaten?" I hear tenderness in his voice. But the tenderness doesn't drive away the hate in my heart.

"I'm sorry. I thought the baby wasn't mine. And when I saw the muffin it was too late"

The more he speaks is the more I hate him. I didn't know my heart could have so much hatred especially for someone who's my husband. He leaves the room. He comes back with food and my stomach grumbles. I haven't eaten in 2 days. He's doing this because he lost the baby otherwise he wouldn't even care.

"Can I go visit my dad?" I don't know why I'm asking for his permission but I ask for it anyway. He doesn't answer me instead he leaves the room. He send maShezi to tell me that I can leave. I look at the time it's 2pm. It means I'll travel all night. I don't mind as long as I can see my dad. I take a long bath, make the bed and walk downstairs to eat. The fact that I'm leaving this house even if it's not forever makes me super happy. I'm in the kitchen singing while making lunch.

"I've never seen that side of yours. I was starting to think you're always grumpy" Zweli comments when he walks into the kitchen. *Leaving your house can put someone in a better mood* but I don't say that out loud or so I thought. Because I see the smile on his face being wiped out completely as soon as I finish that sentence.

When it's time to leave, I run out the door. No time for goodbyes. I'll see them when I come back that's if I do come. Lucky for me when I get to the bus depot there's a single seat. I've never used a bus before so I googled and most people recommend Greyhound. I'm counting hours till I see my dad. I'm planning on going to the workshop apparently there's a new guy. I'm so happy I hardly sleep.

I keep checking the time. I'm now counting minutes until we get to Park Station. Been up most of the night, I must've fallen asleep. The bus driver wakes me up when we get to Park Station. I thank him and head out the bus. It's 6 in the morning. I walk to the taxi rank. An hour later, I'm knocking on the door. Momo opens the door, she's very shocked and embarrassed. I'm speechless but I smile and greet her. I find my dad in the kitchen, he chokes on his saliva when he sees me. I wanted to surprise him but clearly I'm the one who got surprised. I'm very excited to say it's a beautiful surprise on my side. Momo tells me that she'll be out of my way. I tell her she can stay. I walk to my room, I take a bath. When I'm looking through my suitcase, there's an incoming text and Zweli's name pops. Why would he text me? I wait till I'm fully dressed, then I walk over to the bedside table.

Zweli: Hey, I hope you're home and you had a safe trip.

Why is he acting like he cares. I head to bed. My phone rings I look at the clock in the bedside table. It's 11:20. I have been sleeping for a little over 4 hours. It's Zweli, what does he want? I decide to ignore his calls. He stops after 7 missed calls. There's a knock on the door, it's my dad. He hands me his phone. He mouths *it's your husband*.

I don't want my dad asking more questions. I came here to rest.

"Hello?"

"Hello. I got worried when you didn't take my calls. I thought something terrible happened to you"

"More terrible than the rape and losing my baby" I ask him getting angry the nerve. He goes mute. I hang up make the bed. When I'm done I look for my dad and I find him outside I give him his phone.

"You didn't tell me you were coming"

"I wanted to surprise you. But it looks like I'm the one who got surprised" I reply pretending not to see Momo eavesdropping. My dad doesn't say anything but he's avoiding looking at me like he did something wrong.

"Baba, I keep telling you that I don't have a problem with you marrying another woman. I always wished you'd marry Momo. She's been the closest thing to a mother. I told you years ago that I like her. This is your house no need to be embarrassed. I have one request though" he looks at me probably expecting me to say something bad.

“What is it?”

“Marry her as soon as possible” I reply smiling. He sighs, he’s relieved.

“I was afraid you’d never approve” Momo comments. I smile and I tell my dad that I’m heading to the workshop. He drops me off.

“Hello?” I call out when I get to the workshop. A young man walks over to me. He must be the new guy. I introduce myself. He also does the same. He’s Samkelo, Simon’s nephew. I ask to help him he lets me. We chitchat the whole time and I enjoy his company. I leave around 4. I decide to walk home and I start feeling like I’m being watched. I turn to look, I don’t see anyone but I can feel someone out there hiding in the shadows looking at me. Thirty minutes later, I’m at home. I take a long bath. Momo cooked supper. They look so happy and in love. Makes me wonder how long they’ve been together. Looks like they’ve been seeing each other for longer than I thought. I hope my dad marries her. I know she’s going to be the best wife ever.

I wash the dishes and I give them space. I go to my room and I call my twin brothers. I haven’t had time to call them and I doubt they have my digits. I decide to call Melo with the hope that they are currently together.

“Hello?” he picks up just after 2 rings.

“Hey little brother. It’s Zekhethelo”

“Hold on I’m putting you on speaker”

“Hello sis” I’m thinking it’s Lindo.

“We are glad you called” they talk at the same time. Judging by their tones, they sound excited makes me feel guilty for not calling sooner. We talk for over an hour. We hang up with the promise to see each other this weekend which is only 2 days away.

For the past 2 days, I’ve been helping Samkelo at the workshop. He tried to make a move on me but I told him I’m a married woman. He backed off and I’m glad he didn’t take the rejection in a bad way.

Melo and Lindo come by at 7am to fetch me. I take my overnight bag. I say goodbye to my dad with the promise to see him tomorrow. We get to the flat and we find Nonhle and Joe. Day spoilt so early in the morning. I greet them but I don’t say anything. I don’t even ask how they are doing because I don’t care.

"I'm glad you are building a relationship with your brothers"

"Yeah, I'm also glad you put what happened between us and your father aside" Joe also comments. It's the first time I'm hearing his voice and I hate it already. I decide to ignore them. There's so much awkwardness in the room and I see the twins squinting on their seats.

"I was hoping I could have some time alone with my brothers" I tell them and I see tears in Nonhle's eyes. I hope she holds them back, I'm not in the mood for this.

"Mom and dad regret what they did to your dad. You've punished them enough. I was hoping you'd clear the air with them so we can move on and have a good relationship. I'm sorry but we can't have a relationship with you until you clear the air." Lindo comments. Melo is quite like he isn't in the room with us.

"I told Nonhle..."

"Mom" Lindo corrects me.

"Yeah, she's your mom. I told Nonhle that I forgive her. But if you won't have a relationship with me because I refuse to build one with her. Then we'll continue to be strangers" I tell them. And then I turn to Melo and ask him to bring my bag when he returns with it, I leave.

I get home after 3 in the afternoon. I decided to go to a mall. Whoever was watching me the other day. He's still watching me.

"I thought you were coming home tomorrow"

"Yeah, but Joe and Nonhle were there" I continue telling my dad and Momo what they said. I was hoping I'd spend some time with my dad before I go back to my jail. Melo decides to text me.

Melo: Hey sis. I'm sorry about earlier. I didn't know mom and dad would be at the flat. What mom did to you was very wrong and terrible. I hope one day you'll fully forgive her and my dad. But I don't want that to get in our way of building a relationship. I'll be in Durban for the next 2 months I was hoping we'd meet.

When I'm about to reply. Zweli also decides to text.

Zweli: when are you coming back?

My God, I haven't been here for long and he is Zweli texting me.

I reply to Melo's text first telling him that I'd like to spend more time with him. He should call or text me as soon as he gets to Durban. Then I text Zweli telling him that I'll come back after 2 days.

It's time to go back to Zweli's place. My dad and Momo decide to drop me off at Park Station. They kiss me goodbye. I wave when I'm at the luggage room. The bus will leave at 7pm and the expected arrival time is 4am. I don't know my way to Zweli's place but I know that I wouldn't get lost. I get the feeling that anyone can direct me to his house. I take out my ipad and listen to my music. When it's time to leave. I get uneasy. I'm being watched. I hope Zweli will be at the depot like he promised. As much as I hate him, I don't want to be kidnapped and worse get killed before my family can find me. I know they wouldn't even know where to start. They don't have the money and the resources. But I know Zweli is powerful and well equipped he can find me in a matter of hours. My phone pings which makes me jump. I'm not used to getting texts or calls. It's Momo.

Momo: I was scared you wouldn't approve. The stuff you said to your dad mean the world to me. I smile at this text.

Me: Thanks for choosing my dad *smiley face*

I fall asleep and wake up when the bus stops at the depot. I get off and I look for Zweli he's not here. I check the time it's 5am. I stand here for 30 minutes he's still not here. I call him he doesn't pick up. I walk outside maybe he parked and fell asleep while waiting. Wrong move.

I feel someone standing too close. Then I feel a very sharp pain in my neck and I black

Chapter 5

I open my eyes and I feel dizzy. I look around and then I remember what happened. I wonder how long I have blacked out. A very beautiful lady walks in. Smiling cruelly. I've never seen her before. I'm a nobody why would anyone kidnap. Unless Zweli is punishing.

“Hubby hasn’t stopped calling you” the lady tells me. I try to talk but my throat is so dry. I just blink away the tears. She tells me I can cry all I want she doesn’t care. She tells me I’ll pay for humiliating her. Her voice has so much venom I shake.

“Is this the woman Zweli left you for?” a guy around Mpumelelo’s age asks, when he enters the room. “Such a plain looking girl” he continues when the lady gives her a dirty look.

“What do you want me to do with her?” he asks walking with a glass of water towards me. I want to apologise to the girl and tell her that I didn’t want to marry Zweli but he killed my boyfriend and threatened to kill my dad if I didn’t. But instead I keep quiet. The look on her face tells me that no amount of begging or money can change her mind. I know I’m not going to come out of this place alive. I keep quiet while they are discussing ways to kill me. If they want to frighten me, well they are doing a very good job. I didn’t ask Zweli to leave her for me. I read this other facebook about a year ago some girl saying something like when a guy leaves you for an ugly girl it’s insulting. So I know I don’t hold a candle to this one why is she mad?

“I feel like shooting her right now” she screams.

“No, don’t you dare” says a guy walking into the room. I smile thinking at least someone has some conscious but he continues. His comment wipe the small smile on my face.

“I just got this carpet installed last month. I don’t want any stains on it” that’s when I notice no one is wearing shoes. Is he a clean freak or something? He tells them that if they want to kill me they’ll have to do it somewhere else. The carpet guy introduces himself as Sthembiso, he introduces the other as Thami then the lady as Amandla.

“I was one of Zweli’s competitor. My empire crumbled when he stole my clients. He knows in this kind of business getting married is a very bad move. But he went on to marry you. I didn’t believe it when they told me he was married. He’s the first guy to hide his wife. But judging by your face, I’d hide you too” they all laugh and he continues. “He thought keeping you a secret will help him but we found out anyway” he doesn’t tell me how and what kind of business he runs. He looks like a thug. I don’t want to get in trouble so I just keep quiet. Marrying Zweli alone has put me into trouble. I always avoided any kind of trouble. I never stand up for myself. I just keep quiet like I’m going to keep quiet now.

“Keeping quiet won’t get you out of trouble” Amandla sneers. The Sthembiso guy hates Zweli and he has a reason. But I’m confused by Amandla, I’ve never seen her but she hates me so much.

“I don’t even know you yet you hate me so much. Whatever I took away from you?” I comment in a bored tone. Because I’m bored by her behaviour. She’s acting all bitchy yet I don’t even know her.

“Don’t...” she slaps me so hard I almost fall off the chair.

“Amandla stop making a fool of yourself. Zweli was using you. We warned you, you never listened” Thami tells her dragging her out of the room.

These people have kept me for over 2 weeks and they haven’t done anything but drug me. I haven’t seen Amandla since that day. Thami is the one who keeps coming.

“Today we want you conscious. We want to send that husband something that will hurt him. He must be looking all over for you. Or not”

They walk into the room with big cameras, a bed and some plastics. I wonder what the occasion is. They unchain me and they tell me to take a bath. I comply. I really needed a bath. After 30 minutes I walk out. They tell me to take my clothes off. I don’t. Everything is set like they are going to shoot a video and it looks like I’ll be the star.

Thami walks towards me and he rips the clothes off me. I hope they are not going to rape me and record the whole thing and then boom my face is all over porn sites. It’ll break my dad’s heart more than mine. I don’t know what to do. After making sure I was naked he tosses me on the bed and then Sthembiso starts to take off his clothes starting by the belt and when he’s fully naked he gets into this massive king size bed so slow like a lion approaching its prey. He pins me down, I try to push him away but he slaps me so hard I almost faint and then he rapes me. And when he’s done he smiles at me.

I don’t cry not while they are in the room. As soon they shut the door. I cry. This is really too much. I knew marrying Zweli will put in trouble. But I had to do it for my dad. I know he’d also do anything to make sure I stay alive and that I’m happy. If I could be half the parent that he is, it’d be really great. I know they are worried sick about me. I quickly

wipe the tears using the back of my hand when someone walks in. It's Amandla, she's laughing.

"You knew marrying him will come with all sorts of stress and trouble. But you did anyway."

"I really didn't want to marry him. But he killed my boyfriend and sent me the pictures. Then he threaten to kill my dad" I don't why I'm telling her this. She looks stunned like she doesn't believe me.

"So you don't love each other?" she asks. This lady is dumb. I don't know why Zweli married me but it has nothing to do with love. Whatever he saw me only God knows. Like Thami said I'm plain. And I'm not rich, why me of all the girls in the world.

She leaves and I decide to sleep on the carpet they didn't even leave that bed. I'm so exhausted both physically and emotionally.

*

According to Sthembiso I've been here for a little over a month. And they drug me the whole time. They have bigger plans for me. Apparently they want to hit Zweli where it hurts. They should've taken his mom or brothers not me. Zweli must've married me for this.

I wonder if Melo went to Durban. Maybe he thought I'm ignoring him after what went down that day. They haven't fed me in 3 days and I feel so weak. Even though I hated Zweli's place at least he fed me. I close my eyes and picture my dad's wedding just to escape my current situation. I don't know why they haven't drugged me for the past 3 days but I hope they do today. It helps me escape reality. Being unconscious really helps. But I don't have to wait for long. Sthembiso walks in, he tells me that the big day has finally arrived. Zweli won't know what hit him. And then he drugs me. I black out thinking and hoping that if I ever make it out of here. It won't be too late. Judging by the amount of syringes they've injected me with, I'll be super lucky if I don't become addicted.

I don't know how long I've blacked out. I slowly open my eyes, I'm in a Hospital and all sorts of machines are attached to my body. I don't remember what happened but for some reason I feel safe. I try to move but I can't. I fall asleep again and when I open my eyes. I see Zweli staring down at me and tears begin to fall. I'm too stunned to say

anything. We just look at each other and then he hugs me so hard I almost think I will suffocate and die. Finally he lets go and he takes both my hands into his and he asks in a soft voice if I'm okay. I know I hate him, but I've never been happy to see him. He tells me it's going to be okay but I doubt. After everything I went through in that house, I really doubt. But I just nod. He fills me in and he tells me that he didn't tell my dad he found me. He wanted to wait until he was sure it's me. I can only nod.

**

My Doctor tells me that I'll be discharged in a week. My family couldn't come this time. My granddad is very sick and they've been helping my grandma and my dad. Apparently our car crashed killing Amandla, Thami, Sthe and the driver. I survived because I was in the boot. I was heavily drugged. I wonder where they were taking me to. But Zweli's family and Melo are all here. I'm so happy to see all of them.

"I have some very good news for you. I got you a job" Sizwe tells me smiling. I can't help but smile back. Soon it's time for them to leave it's so sad but at least I'm being released in a week. Zweli kisses my forehead before he leaves.

Zweli comes alone in the next 2 days. His mom and brothers decided to go visit my granddad. They are so sweet. I wonder why Zweli isn't like them. He takes me to his house. He cooks my favourite food chicken and rice. It's so delicious, it almost makes me forgive him for everything. But then again, I remember that if Zweli waited at the depot like he promised I wouldn't be in this mess. As soon as that thought crosses my mind, I lose my appetite. Zweli is busy typing on his laptop he doesn't even see that I stopped eating. I want to go home.

"What's wrong?" instead of answering, I stand up and move away from him as far as I can. I can't stop the stupid tears. He doesn't move he stares me like I just popped another head. He probably has never seen a woman cry. He stands there looking at me. And then he takes his phone and he taps a few times.

"Mama it's Zekhethelo, she's crying I don't know what to do. Usually when a woman cries I take her shopping. But now I have a feeling that it's not going to work" he says that last statement as a question. I don't know what his mom is saying but he looks so uncomfortable and he asks if she can't just come over. After he hangs up he walks towards me looking like he's about to cry too. He hugs me and that makes me wail. He takes a step back and then he looks at me like he's not sure whether to hug me or what.

He wipes my tears using his thumb and then he hugs telling me it's going to be alright.

"I'll keep you safe" he tells me in a calm and caring voice. I feel bad for even thinking he had a hand in that.

Even though Zweli promised to keep me safe. I don't feel safe. I don't even want to be left alone in the room. We didn't sleep at all. I keep following him around the house.

Even when he has to use the bathroom for number 2. He didn't feel comfortable at first but he got used to it. When it's my turn to use the bathroom he stands outside the door and he keeps talking so that I know he's there.

"If you don't hurry we'll be very late" he tells me walking into the room.

I don't answer him. We are visiting my granddad today. My dad called Zweli to tell him that he got worse and the Doctor said we should expect anything from now.

We travel for almost 5 hours. Apparently Zweli decided to put my granddad in a private hospital. I'm not comfortable with the whole idea. I know I'll have to pay for that money when I'm not even done paying for the lobola money.

We find most of the family outside the ward. I walk in with Zweli. My grandma is standing by *mkhulu*. She's trying so hard not to cry. I wish I was as strong as she is but I'm not. As soon as my eyes land on *mkhulu* I can't hold back the tears. He stares at me like he doesn't know me. He has heart problems and me disappearing didn't help him. I don't want to stand here and see him like this. If something happens then I want to remember him as a strong person that he is. I leave the room and Zweli's mom and Sizwe follow me outside. I try to walk but my feet give in and I end up on the floor. I must have fainted because I wake up at my grandparent's place. There's so much wailing and screaming. And then it hits me. *Mkhulu* is gone. Just like that? Zweli is sitting at the corner of the room looking at me.

"He's gone" that comes out as a statement not a question.

"Thirty minutes back"

I go numb. Mkhulu has been my second dad. He taught me most of the things I know. I remember how he got mad when my dad refused to let them take me when I was 10. Zweli walks over to me. He hugs me and kisses my forehead. I don't say anything. I don't even cry, I'm too numb.

Mkhulu knew almost everyone in the neighbourhood. People have been coming and going the whole week. I know people mean well but I wish they had only come today. No one is really looking forward to this day. *Mkhulu* will be laid to rest today. Of all people in the world not even Nonhle or Zweli but God chose *mkhulu*.

“It’s time to see *mkhulu* before he goes outside” my dad tells me, when he walks into the room. I shake my head no. As if seeing him like that at the hospital is not enough. Zweli tries to persuade me to but I stand my ground. My dad says okay and he leaves and Zweli and I follow him. I help *gogo* go outside, walking behind *mkhulu*’s coffin. It’s too hot for her to be using that big blanket. One of my aunts suggested she uses a smaller blanket but she didn’t want to.

There are so many people outside, I’m glad Zweli’s mom hired a catering company. Even though we didn’t want her to but she’s so damn stubborn so we decided to let her have her way this time. We sit in the tent, Zweli is holding my hand this time. He looks so far away like he’s been through all of this before.

People keep fainting and I’m busy dealing with them no time to concentrate on the service. I’m worried about my grandma. She’s just staring into space. She’s not moving or crying. I get the chance to sit down. One of *mkhulu*’s friend and neighbour is talking about him. I’m listening but one would swear that *mkhulu*’s friend is speaking some foreign language. I hear the words but I can’t really process what he’s saying.

Soon the moment we all not looking forward to is here. The hearse is here. We heard to nearest cemetery. I ride with Zweli’s mom and brothers. I feel a hand in my shoulder it’s their mother. Funny how I never saw mine. She’s not family but she should be here to pay her respect to the man who helped raise the daughter she left behind. We get to the cemeteries, the Reverend reads the bible and when he’s done we all watch as the coffin is lowered into the ground. Our hearts sink down with it. I’ve been trying to be strong for my family but now I can’t hold back the tears. As soon as my shoulders shake, Zweli hugs me so tight. My uncle and his son come with a spades we take the soil from one spade and pour to the other. That’s what I was praying for. I doubt we’re strong enough to go over where the coffin was lowered. They start to fill in the hole. My grandma starts to wail it hurts so much. I want to go to her but I’m not strong enough. We pray, and my dad thanks everyone then we go back home. My grandma won’t stand up. I feel so

helpless. Zweli forces me into the car we wait until my grandma gets into the family car and we head home.

Yesterday was a very heart breaking day. The thought of never seeing *mkhulu* again makes everyone cry. Today we woke up around 4am to wash the blankets and windows. Only God knows why we have to do that. As if the day of the funeral is emotionally draining. My grandma won't allow us to open the curtains and she won't wake up. I hope she recovers soon. We can't afford to lose her too.

"We are heading home. Mama is staying behind with you" Zweli tells me. They've been very supportive and helpful they also need to rest. So I accompany them to the car. I hug them. Sizwe hugs me longer and then Zweli starts to complain. I honestly don't know what his problem is because it's not like he's jealous. For him to be jealous it'll mean he loves me and we all know he doesn't.

Zweli's mom left last night, after staying here for 2 weeks. Apparently Zweli lost his granddad 2 years ago, and the loss hit him hard more than anyone. They thought he wouldn't recover. He started withdrawing from people. He hardly smiled until I came along. He called his mom that night he came to my house. And he told his mom he's going to marry. If he didn't kill Bonga to make me agree I would've thought the story is sweet or something.

"You're a married woman. It's time you for you to go home" my grandma tells me like she's been telling me for the past 2 weeks.

"I'll leave tomorrow morning" I tell her.

But I'm scared to use public transport, I know my kidnappers died but I know Zweli might have pissed more people and it's no longer safe. My world has been unsafe the day he came to my house.

"Looks like your husband decided to come fetch you" I turn to see his car parked by the gate. I go to my room to pack. I find him in the kitchen with my grandma they are drinking coffee and they are laughing so hard. I'm so happy to see my grandma laugh she hasn't since mkhulu died. I'm so glad someone made her laugh even if it's my evil husband. Zweli tells me that we need to leave right away. My aunt decided to come live

with grandma since her children are old enough to look after themselves and her husband died 10 years ago. I kiss my grandma goodbye.

I must've fell asleep as soon as Zweli started the car. We get home, his brothers and mom are here. It's good to be back. Grandma's house was starting to depress me. I needed the air.

Chapter 6

For the past 2 weeks, Zweli has been hovering over me like mother hen. If it's not him it's his mom, brothers and maShezi.

I open my eyes and Zweli is not in bed. He's been super great since mkhulu died. He even stopped raping me. So it takes losing a grandfather to be treated well. I walk downstairs and the whole family is here well everyone except for *mkhulu*. Even Nonhle, her twins and husband. Momo hugs me, I'm happy to see her. Nonhle comes towards me for a hug but I side step her and think.

Funny how people like mkhulu get to die and then people like Nonhle and Zweli get to live. The world is really fucked up

I turn to ask my dad something but I see everyone looks shocked and Nonhle has tears in her eyes. *Okay I might have said that out loud.* They tell me that they came by because they didn't get the chance after I was kidnapped. We sit and eat in uncomfortable silence. Everyone is looking at me like I just killed someone. Okay I have killed both Zweli and Nonhle but in my head not literally.

They all leave after lunch and I can tell it wasn't what they planned to do. As soon as the last car is out the gate. Zweli takes my hands he leads me upstairs to the bedroom.

"What was that about?" he roars in anger. *Eeh banna this guy kingpins, rapists and murderers deserve to die or he thought they deserve to live forever?*

"Those were my honest thoughts. I didn't realise I said that out loud but I meant that"

"You're going to take that back"

"No, I won't..." before I get the chance to talk he slaps me so hard I lose balance I fall on the floor. He doesn't stop he keeps telling me to take it back in between kicks. But being the stubborn person that I am, I don't. He kicks me so hard I black out.

"You're awake" my stupid husband sounds and looks shocked.

"Nah, I'm dead"

"Don't say that" his mom reprimands.

"You're going to give me a heart attack. If you come back here. You've been in a hospital 3 times within a year" she continues.

"I hope I don't come back here" I reply but looking at Zweli.

"You shouldn't have left the house alone. The world is not a safe place" Sizwe comments. I don't know what Zweli told them.

"When am I leaving this place?" I ask no one in particular.

"In an hour" the doctor walks in with a smile.

"I have a business meeting with some guys. Can you come with me?" Zweli asks during breakfast. I nod. I'd love to go out.

"When are we leaving?" I ask.

"In 10 minutes". I nod.

We drive to some mall. There's an Audi it looks like it's stuck. Good thing I have my tools with me. A tall guy walks towards us.

"Mandy's car stuck. There's no network, she went to look for help inside" the guy tells us.

"My wife can help. She's a mechanic"

"I'd like love that" he replies looking worry. I think Zweli can see that, because he tells him not to worry. I walk towards the car. Zweli's follows with my tools.

I'm inside the car trying to start it and see what the problem is when the door is roughly opened. The next thing I know I'm being dragged out of the car. For some reason I think I'm being hijacked until the girl comments.

"You bitch what are you doing in my husband's car" she screams in my face and she slaps me across the face. I don't even get the chance to defend myself she slaps me

again and she throws me on the ground. I see some guy and Zweli running towards me.

"Mandy what are you doing?" the guy screams.

"I found this bitch in Ayanda's car. It's either she was stealing it or she wants him" she replies giving me a nasty look.

"This is my wife. She's a mechanic. Your husband told us your car broke down and she was trying to help"

"I thought..." Zweli doesn't give her the chance to finish.

"What happened to asking?" he asks her, but he doesn't wait for her to answer he turns to me and tells me that we're leaving. I start to shake my head but he takes my hand and leads me to the car.

"But you had a business meeting" I comment when we get to the car.

"His wife will have to apologise to you first"

His phone rings non-stop throughout the drive and the names Melusi and Ayanda keep popping on his screen. And then Melo sends me a text.

Melo: what you said about mom the other day is cruel. She hasn't stopped crying since that day. I thought I can build a relationship with you even if you didn't forgive her but I can't. I'm sorry.

If he's trying to make me feel guilty then he's not succeeding. Even if I was forced to take back those words I won't. I'm not even going to reply.

But on second thoughts I will.

Me: Sorry lil bro but I won't take those words back. She's been crying for the past 6 days? Hell I cried for years. I thought we'll have a very good relationship too.

I have so many things I want to say but like always I choose not to. And then my phone rings it's my dad.

"Yebo baba"

"Nkosazana. I'm calling to remind you, of the cleansing ceremony this Saturday"

“Thank you for reminding me. I’ll see you on Friday. I want to talk to you about something” he says okay, we say our goodbyes and hang up.

“I’ll take you to your grandparent’s place” Zweli tells me.

When we get home we head to the kitchen.

“Can I ask you something?” he asks looking anywhere but my face. This is not the Zweli I know. Zweli doesn’t avoid eye contact. Everyone who knows him will tell you that sometimes he’ll stare at you so hard and long you’d want to crawl out of your skin.

“Shoot” I answer rummaging in the cupboard for peanut butter.

“Why did you stay after everything I put you through?”

“I don’t know” he looks like he doesn’t believe and that he wants to say something but decides against it.

*

The cleansing ceremony went well but it was a bit emotional. I’m sitting on the couch searching for jobs not just in book publishing companies but everywhere I can apply with my Literature Degree. MaShezi walks in with food. I’m not that hungry but I take the plate and thank her.

It’s been a week since Zweli walked out on his business partners and they have been calling and texting. He didn’t want to reply or take their calls until I told him to. The guys agreed that the Mandy chick has to apologise. But he will meet them next week. We are heading to his mom’s house we have to prepare for tomorrow. We are meeting Sizwe’s girlfriend. I can’t wait. The text Melo sent makes me think of my mom and I don’t want to.

We are standing at Zweli’s mom porch waiting for Sizwe’s girlfriend. According to Zweli, Sizwe and his gf have been together for 7 years. But what I didn’t understand is why Zweli would laugh so hard when I said I didn’t know Sizwe had a girlfriend. I’m so deep in thought I don’t see Sizwe and some guy walking towards us. Sizwe has a huge smile on his face while the guy looks nervous.

“Ma and Zeh meet Anthony my gf” I choke on my saliva.

“Your what?” I ask in shock. *Sizwe is gay and I didn’t even notice the smallest signs.* I’m so shocked Zweli reminds me to close my mouth once we are sitting down at the dining table. I can’t help but stare.

“Stop staring, you’re making him shy” Mpumelelo tells me smiling. I can’t help it.

Two hours later we are sitting in the lounge.

“You’ve been staring” Zweli whispers in my ear which makes me jump.

Everyone knew Sizwe is gay. I decide to join the conversation and wipe off the shock on my face. And once Anthony gets comfortable, he’s a funny person. I’d definitely like to see him again. My stomach hurts from laughing.

“I decided to meet my business partners again today. You should come with me because Mandy is also going to be there. I told her husband I won’t go into business with them if she doesn’t apologise and he knows I mean it” Zweli announces when he walks into the room.

He looks at my phone and asks why I’m still looking for a job he can provide for me.

“With the money you get from drugs? Blood money?” I reply without thinking. He chokes on his drink. Did Zweli think I’m that stupid?

“I know that you know about the drugs. Funny how you saw them when you first got here but you only telling me today. And believe me all the money I used to pay lobola for you and the money I use to buy food that you eat is not the money I get from drugs.” He replies leaving the room. He comes back within a minute and tells me we can leave. We are quiet the whole time. We are meeting his business partners where we were supposed to meet them the other day. We get here first.

We are 10 minutes early. They arrive on time this time. Ayanda had to force his wife to apologise. She doesn’t want to.

“You know what it’s okay really...”

“She has to apologise” Ayanda insists and the wife keeps giving me nasty looks. And then she tells me she’s sorry and we all know she doesn’t mean it. Zweli takes my hand. I tell him it’s okay he can’t punish Ayanda and Melusi over this. He doesn’t want to stay until the guys both beg him. Gosh I married a stubborn man *yerrrr*.

“Will you sit here with Mandy while we talk to your husband?” Ayanda asks me and I nod. I take my earphones and I listen to my music plus I downloaded the 16 Album and I haven’t had time to listen to it. I’m on the second song when a shy girl walks towards the guys. I see Melusi standing up, they talk for some time and she shakes both Zweli and Ayanda’s hands, then Melusi points her towards us. She stays rooted until I smile and wave her over.

“Hey, I’m Sidingo Mkhize” she smiles at Mandy.

“Hey, I’m Mandy Madondo. Ayanda’s wife” I roll my eyes at the last 2 words. She smiles politely at her and turns to me and introduces herself again.

“Wow such a beautiful name. I’m stealing the name for my baby in the future” she smiles shyly. And then I introduce myself.

“I’m Zekhethelo Khumalo. So nice to meet you” she smiles.

“I hope you’ll treat Bova well otherwise I’ll rearrange your face” Mandy tells Sidingo. We both don’t say anything. I just hope Zweli finishes real quick. After sitting here in uncomfortable silence I decide to start a conversation . We get to know each other, because it looks like we’re going to spend more time together. We share information like our parents, where we are from and stuff like that. When it’s Mandy’s turn she answers in a different way which earn eye rolls from us. I think she’s trying too much.

“As you know I’m Ayanda’s wife. His only wife. I just obtained Masters in Communication Masters at, I did both my Degree and Honours in Johannesburg where I’m from. I have a BA Degree in Journalism, then BA Honours in Communication Studies. I obtained them at UJ” and then she doesn’t say anything.

“Okay wow. Are you married?” Sidingo asks me.

“Yes. My maiden name is Mazibuko. I married Zweli 7 months ago”

“*Konje* who’s Zweli?”

“The guy wearing white shirt and dark blue jeans. The handsome one.” The last 3 words makes her laugh. I like this girl.

“Time to eat” Melusi announces.

“Yippy” we all reply at once. We are looking at the menus when at the corner of my eyes I see one of the waitresses winking at Zweli. For some stupid reason, I’m jealous and I hope he won’t flirt back.

“I find him handsome” she tells her co-workers.

“And I find myself married” he replies showing her his ring. I hide my smile. This is like the sweetest thing he has ever said.

“That’s sweet like *ncoooo*” Sidingo whispers in my ear. I hide myself using the menu.

“She’d be lying on the floor with a gun wound in the head, if she said that about Ayanda” she tells me.

“I trust Zweli enough to fend the girls off” I tell her and wink at Zweli who smiles at me.

“I’m so good with guns” she brags looking at me.

“I’m not good with guns but I’d definitely panel beat her if I had to. But like I said I trust Zweli enough to fend the girls off” I tell her in a bored tone. She continues to say

“I guess I love my husband too much. I would’ve...” she doesn’t get to finish.

“Oh God give us a break please” I’m usually quiet but she’s too much.

“Zweli are you guys done?”

“Yes”

“Can we leave?” Ayanda and Melusi frown. He nods and leaves cash for our meals and he takes my hand and we turn to leave.

“I guess I’ll get your digits from Melusi” Sidingo shouts and I turn to smile and nod.

“That was rude”

“You didn’t get to spend 2 hours with her. Guess what she said when we introduced ourselves” and then I tell him the whole story.

“So you didn’t mention that you’re my only wife”

“I didn’t know that marrying you is a lifetime achievement”. He laughs so hard and tells me how intelligent I am. Sounding like a proud parent. During the drive home he tells me about this business deal. I actually didn’t expect him to tell me everything. When we get home, I go over to my side of the walk-in closet. I need to change and wear

something short since it's hot and then I remember what happened the last time I wore something short and I can't hold back the stupid tears I cry my eyes out. And then my phone vibrates it's Zweli.

Zweli: are you okay in there? I reply saying I'm okay. If he cared he'd come inside and ask that for himself. I open the drawer with my important documents and then I come across Bonga's present. The box has some weight, I shake the box so that I get a clue of what is inside but that doesn't help. I walk to the bathroom to wash my face then I take the box to the kitchen where I find Zweli and his brothers. I'm so happy to see them. I rush over to give them both hugs.

"Are you okay? You look like you've been crying" Sizwe asks.

"Yeah. I'm okay"

"But..." Sizwe begins.

"I don't want to talk about it" I reply he looks at Zweli who shrugs in return.

"I heard her crying in the closet. But she told me she's fine"

"Did you go in there and ask her what's wrong?" Sizwe asks

"No"

"When did she tell you that she's okay?" Mpumelelo asks him.

"I sent her a text" he replies looking anywhere but their faces.

"You're kidding right?" Sizwe sounds shocked.

"You know I'm not good with these things". Sizwe and Mpumelelo are both speechless.

"Why did you marry a bustard like him?" Mpumelelo asks giving me a warm hug. I wish I could tell them.

"Because I love him, I guess" I reply honestly. We all sit in the kitchen no one is talking. I decide to open the present.

There's an envelope and a golden frame and a note.

I bought this as soon as your application was accepted. I arranged for it to be delivered 4 months after you finished your degree. The frame is meant to frame your degree. One of the envelope has your spa ticket which I bought a week ago. On

the other envelope, is a friend of mine's contact. He works at some publication company, so I made sure you don't struggle to get a job after Varsity. Please contact him and tell him who you are then you'll take it from there

Love you always.

Bonga

I reread the note one more than 5 times. I feel tears running down my cheeks. Bonga has never been good with words. The fact that he believed in me and took it upon himself to get me a job makes me wail. Zweli snatches the note, he reads it and he leaves the room.

"Who's Bonga?" Sizwe asks.

"A friend of mine who passed away 8 months ago" I reply through tears. I miss him so much.

Chapter 7

"I'm taking you out" Zweli announces walking into the bedroom.

"I don't feel like bathing" I tell him honestly.

"Then I'll bathe you"

"Oh no thank you. I'll take a quick shower. I'll be done in a minute"

"My God you don't want to bath for real". I don't reply instead I walk to the bathroom. I take the quickest shower in the history of quick showers. It must've taken less than 5 minutes. I walk to the closet I take a blue knee length dress and I wear my black Adidas sneakers. When I'm about to walk out. I hear a loud sound. Something must've fallen off the shelves from Zweli's side of the closet. I walk over, a shoe box has fallen off the shelf. I try to put back the papers so we can leave until I see my name and picture in one of the papers. The picture was taken 4 years ago because on the little profile it says I'm 20 years old. Now I'm curious.

I sit on the floor and I go through the papers when I see a familiar face. Damn it, I should've seen the resemblance in Zweli and his 2 brothers.

*

It's been a long day. I was hoping to take a day off since it's my birthday but sadly bills don't take a break on a person's birthday. I just closed the workshop and it's getting dark. I'm planning a weekend away not paying attention to my surroundings until I hear gunshots. Luckily I'm not far from the workshop I quickly run back, I wait until I hear cars pulling out. I wait 5 more minutes then I walk out. There's a car and a man sitting on the passenger seat. I walk over to ask if he's okay. When I walk over to him, I see so much blood. I panic, I call an ambulance. Thirty minutes later it's not here. I decide to drive the car to the nearest hospital. I lie saying he's my granddad we were travelling home when he was attacked.

They quickly take him to theatre. I'm sitting here crossing my fingers hoping he makes it through, searching for his family will be very hard. While I'm still waiting, a tall police officer walks towards telling me they need to take down my statement so that they find the culprits. I roll my eyes at that, I know they won't. But I give my statement, the real statement. He then goes on to lecture me about the dangers of what I just did. I just ignore him and he leaves. The doctor comes back to tell me that he made it through the operation. They open a file for him. I put myself as next of kin. I leave around 6am after he is in a ward. The nurse lets me see him for a few minutes. I find him sleeping. I sit with him then I leave after 10 minutes.

For next 2 weeks, I'm the only visitor he has and he's sleeping most of the time.

One day I walk to the ward and the nurse tells me that he was fetched by his grandsons and daughter. They left me a cheque. It's so rude, why didn't they just leave a thank you note? I tear the cheque and I walk home.

According to some information, I got my 3 million and then I died a year after receiving the money. I never received any money. What is going on here?

"I thought you need help" Zweli stops on his tracks when he sees me on the floor reading his documents.

"Oh My God, I always thought you looked familiar. You're the girl that saved *mkhulu*?"

"Who wrote this report because I never received the money and I didn't die"

"You didn't?" he asks frowning. I shake my head no.

“The bustard” he punches the wall then walks out. I find him in the kitchen on the phone. I’m trying to find answers but he’s so focused on typing whatever on his phone he doesn’t hear a word. An hour later, his mom and brothers walk in. They all gasp as if they are seeing me for the first time.

“I should’ve known it was you” Mrs. Khumalo gives me a bear hug. She’s crying.

“We can never thank you enough”

Sizwe walks towards me with open arms when a tall and very dark guy walks in. He greets everyone and they all turn to stare at him.

“What happened to the 3 million *mkhulu* gave you 4 years back” Mpumelelo asks

“I gave it to the girl”

“What happened to the girl?”

“She died”

“How?”

“She was involved in a car accident. I think, why all these questions?”

“Because, I am that girl. And I never received that kind of money” I reply looking at him. He looks at me and he starts to sweat. He turns to sprint out the door but Sizwe is quicker.

“What happened to the money?”

“I gave it to her”

“You’re still going to continue lying?” Zweli asks in a low voice. I’ve never seen him this mad.

“I’m sorry”

“Sorry? What happened to the money?” Mrs. Khumalo asks him

“I gave it to the girl”

“Sizwe call the police” Mrs. Khumalo shouts.

“The police are useless. I’ll teach him a lesson” Zweli drags him to some room and he closes it behind him. Leaving all of us outside. His brothers try banging on the door but they eventually give up when it’s clear that he won’t open the door.

“Okay okay. I used the money” the guy replies screaming on top of his lungs. I can’t hear what Zweli is saying but the guy keeps saying sorry and he starts sobbing.

“What is Zweli doing to this guy?” I ask no one in particular. We stand there for more than 2 hours. We decide to wait at the lounge. Five minutes later they emerge with the guy holding his hands and crying like a baby. There’s so much blood in his shirt and pants.

“I want that money tomorrow morning or I’ll kill you” he shoves him out the door and he calls one of the young guards to clean the blood. Everyone is so shocked by this. I’m not, I was expecting this from a kingpin. I mean I saw the “business partners” and I don’t have to have a criminology qualification to see that they are in the mafia or they are kingpins.

We go through the notes this guy made and something doesn’t add up. All of his information is incorrect even my second name and surname. I guess he made sure they wouldn’t trace me and now he has to pay all of the money.

Zweli’s phone rings and he smiles, I look at the screen. There’s an incoming call from Prince. Zweli is not gay right? Why would he smile when a guy calls him? I missed the signs from Sizwe and I get a feeling I might’ve missed the signs from Zweli.

“Relax he’s not gay” Sizwe suppresses a smile. I try to act as if I don’t know what he’s talking about but he just laughs and continue talking with his mom.

“If only he knew” he laughs and hangs up.

“Zeh thinks you’re gay” they all laugh at my expense.

“That’s Prince he’s a policeman. Apparently Mondli went to the police saying that I just cut three of his right hand fingers for nothing. And that he knows I’m involved in some mafia business” he tells me then he leaves the room. Come back with a glass of water and a packet of panado.

“That guy can scream my God”

“Why didn’t you change the cheque we left at the hospital” Mrs. Khumalo asks me.

“If I was helping because I wanted money, I was going to sell that car. I was helping because I wanted to. What you did was arrogant. Why leave money instead of a thank you note? Whoever told you I needed money?” I comment rather rudely but I’m angry.

The problem with rich people is that they always leave money instead of saying thank you *nxa*. They all go mute, I guess they are still in shock by how I replied and because they have never seen me angry in the 8 months we've known each other.

**

I'm sitting in the kitchen bar stool looking at my emails. I'm so tired of applying. I wish I was born into money, I wouldn't have struggles to get a job. My phone rings, it's a local landline. My heart thumps so loud, I'm even surprised Zweli doesn't hear it.

"Zekhethelo Khumalo, hello?"

"Hello, Mrs. Khumalo this Dora from PM Publishers. We got your application a week ago. Can you come for an interview in 3 days" It's so strange being called Mrs. Khuamlo

"Hello. Yes sure please give me the time and the address. I'll definitely be there". I feel tears in my eyes. I know I'm only going for an interview but gosh after 8 months of applying, I've never been called for an interview.

**

"So you think I'm handsome?" Zweli asks during supper. I almost choke on my food.

"Where's that coming from now?"

"Bova told me"

"Bova?" I don't know anyone by that name.

"Melusi"

"Why is he called Bova?" I ask hoping he'll forget the silly comment I made the other day. So Sidingo must've said something Bova who then told Zweli who's grinning like an idiot right now.

"You're avoiding the question"

"No. I'm not"

"Liar"

"Okay. I don't think you're handsome. I know you're handsome"

"Okay nice because I know you're beautiful"

"Stop lying to me. I don't even know why you chose me. I'm not beautiful I'm just plain and I'm not rich"

He goes on to tell me that I'm beautiful and that I should never doubt myself. I just keep quiet. The family practically changed as soon as they find out who I am. They loved me but right now they just love me more. Sometimes they fight on who is supposed to take me out. Like the other I wasn't feeling well and I had my periods a week earlier and I've been postponing to buy pads. Zweli must've heard me telling maShezi because he went out to buy them for me. Later his brothers also bought me pads. This is like the sweetest thing he has done for me.

*

PM Publishers called me later that afternoon telling me they can't take me. I cried my eyes out. Zweli promised to get me a job or buy PM Publishers for me. But I just said no.

"Your phone is ringing" Zweli shakes me. I look at the time it's 00:15. Momo is the one calling. I hope nothing bad happened.

"Momo?"

"Zeh I'm sorry to wake you up. But I just couldn't wait till morning. Your family wrote my family a letter. Your dad said we'll call you tomorrow and tell you. But gosh I couldn't wait till then" she sounds like she's been crying.

"This is a dream come true. I wonder what took him so long. Momo I am so happy for you and me obviously. I can finally call someone mama" I reply getting emotional and she cries and tells me how grateful she is and we say our goodbyes. I wake Zweli up and ask him to take me home. He tells he's tired he needs 2 more hours of sleep. But I can't wait that long. I waited so long for this. I tell him I'll drive. He walks to the shower. I quickly put on the clothes I was wearing yesterday and I go to the garage. He finds me by the car.

"Aren't you going to bath?"

"Nope. I will at home" he doesn't argue because I'm just as stubborn. From Durban to Joburg it takes a minimum of 7 hours but it took me 6 hours to get home. My dad is so surprised to see at 6am.

"Momo couldn't wait for today. Dad you have no idea how happy I am. I'm going to have a mother. Do you know how that makes me feel? Like a 7 year old on Christmas" I give him a big hug. I love this man. He looks tired and stressed he tells me that he couldn't sleep. He thought I was going to be against the idea.

I'm so busy planning the wedding I even forgot about Zweli. I walk to the car he's still sleeping. I wake him up. He'll sleep in my room. I walk to Momo's house she's talking to someone on the phone. I can't really hear what she's saying because she's speaking rapidly in Setswana. She speaks IsiZulu so fluent I even forget that she's Tswana. I leave, I'm sure she'll come to my house when she sees the car with a KZN number plate. I'm in the kitchen cooking when my family arrives. They tell me how good I look.

"You have this glow. I hope you're pregnant" grandma comments. I don't think I'm ready for a kid. An hour later I wake Zweli up he takes a quick shower then we head out to eat. Momo is all smiles especially when my aunts call her *makoti*. It's so nice seeing her this happy.

*

"How long are you staying?"

"I'm not sure. I'll ask Zweli" my dad nods at that. We join the rest of the family outside. It'll take time for us to accept *mkhulu's* absence in our lives. But wherever he is, I hope he's smiling down on us. We spend the whole day preparing for the wedding. My grandma and Zweli get along so well. She's forever laughing when she's with him. My aunt the one who moved back with gogo called a week prior telling me that grandma is not herself. It's like she also died the day *mkhulu* did. She hardly smiles let alone laugh. The last time she heard her laugh was when Zweli came to fetch me.

"Baba I forgot to tell you. Remember the old man I helped 3 or 4 years back? Zweli is one of his grandsons" and I go on to tell them how I found out and what happened but I leave the finger cutting part out.

It's been a great weekend but we need to head home. It's always sad when I leave but I'll be back in 2 weeks. Zweli decides to drive this time. On our way, I get a call from Sunshine Publishers they want me to come for an assessment on Wednesday. I hope I get this job. When we get home. Zweli tells me that he's meeting Ayanda and Melusi again. He wants me to go with him. I'm tired from all the travelling and I'm not in the mood for Mandy.

Ten minutes later he tells me they decided to come over. Great and now I have to play polite host.

They get here almost 2 hours later they find us in the kitchen cooking. And Mandy goes on to tell us how Ayanda took cooking classes just to impress her. Doesn't she stop? Sidingo is rather quiet.

"What's up?"

"I'm just stressed about the exams"

"Oh shit that's the part I don't miss about school". We talk about school she's doing her last year in criminal law. At least someone is going to represent us. Mandy goes on to talk about her qualifications **again**.

"The last exam you wrote in high school?"

"Actually my wife here is a BA Literature graduate" Zweli tells her with a huge grin and she looks shocked. This girl should stop looking down on people. We eat after they are done discussing business.

"Ayanda you're a great guy and all but I can't stand your only wife. She's arrogant and annoying. Next time you have your meetings please count me out" I tell them when we are done eating. Zweli frowns and Ayanda looks embarrassed but he nods anyway.

**

So I got the job, and I decided to celebrate after 9 months of searching, I finally got something. Zweli has been offish lately. I thought he was going to be happy for me but he's not. He avoids me most of the time. He sleeps in one of the guest rooms downstairs. Now that I don't have a problem with sleeping in the same bed as him he sleeps in another room. Just 2 days ago I asked him if I did anything wrong. He just stared at me until I decided to leave. It's clear he doesn't want me here so I'll leave.

"I watched the video 2 weeks back" Zweli tells his mom and brothers.

"What video" his mom asks.

"The one Thami sent me"

"You still have that video bro?" Sizwe asks and judging from his tone he sounds angry.

"Why are you telling us" his mom asks

“Because I can’t do this anymore”

“Do what?”

“I can’t stay married to Zekhethelo. The fact that someone else slept with her makes me sick”

“You know she was drugged right?”

“I don’t know what to believe” I decide to go out. I can’t listen to this conversation. I’m the one who deserves to be angry. I’m the one who was kidnapped because of someone else’s sins. I’m the one who was forced into marriage, raped, miscarried, kidnapped, drugged and raped.

I decide to go look for an affordable place. My money is running out and I can’t ask my dad for money. I use the internet to search for affordable places and I end up choosing a back room. I’ll look for a flat when I can afford the furniture. I don’t start at work until January. And it’s September. In 10 days’ time I’m turning 25 and I have nothing to show for it. This is not how I planned my life. I walk back to Zweli’s house.

“They say we have to wait 24 hours” Sizwe announces when I walk in.

“Where have you been? You had us worried” Mpumelelo asks. So stupid of me to wish Zweli would say that.

“I went to look for a place to stay”

“Why?” Sizwe asks frowning.

“I heard what Zweli said this morning” and then I turn to him “Please give me 2 more days then I’ll be out” he doesn’t say anything. I walk to his bedroom to pack my stuff. I hope I get all the furniture in time. The coming 2 days are going to be the hardest.

My alarm rings at 6am. I take a bath and I take a taxi to town. I spend almost 3 hours at second hand furniture shops. I buy a 2 seater cream white couch, a wardrobe, fridge and a bed. Then I go to other furniture store to buy 2 plate stove, kettle and some pots. I’ll buy groceries later. The goods are delivered at my new place. I decide to buy everything today and fetch my stuff later today. I buy groceries. Gosh I don’t know when was the last time I bought groceries. At 3 in the afternoon I’m done. This is the part I’m not looking forward to, so I decide to sleep at my new place. I wake up at 7am the next day. I take a bath then I take a taxi to Zweli’s house.

“Where have you been? We almost called national security. Your phone was off” Zweli’s mom comments as soon as I open the door. I see almost everyone sitting in the kitchen looking tired, but I don’t see Zweli.

“I decided to move out yesterday. I’m sorry my battery died and I left my charger here”. I walk to Zweli’s bedroom and my heart sinks when I see my clothes in black plastic bags. *I guess this is it.* I take all the plastics to the rented car outside the gate. I will sort through everything when I get to my backroom. I want to send back the stuff Zweli and his family bought me.

“Please don’t leave like this” Zweli’s mom stops me crying.

“Please don’t make this hard for me” I force back the tears.

“You can move in with me while you work things out with Zweli”

“Zweli made it clear that he wants me out of here and out of his life.”

“Don’t say that”

“It’s true. It looks like you guys are the only ones who didn’t sleep while he did. I’m the one who was kidnapped and raped because of him. I’m the one who should be angry but I decided to forgive and forget. And what do I get in return. This kind of treatment. I can’t stay here or with any of you. Zweli has made his decision and I also made mine. I wish you guys all the best” I turn to leave. Mrs. Khumalo wails, but I have to go.

The End

Oh no but it’s not. I’ll start with book 3 right away.

Hope you enjoyed the book. Thanks for reading.



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