

# Ugly Duckling: No One Wants Me

**The Ugly Duckling:**

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## Chapter 1

December 16th how I hate this day. You see on this day 7 years ago one of my two big sisters Nobuhle got married. So each year both families come together and celebrate. Last year they came to my parent's house so today we are going to their place. I don't even know what to wear, I'm not a fashion follower or anything like that, I just take out whatever and wear. I'm waiting for alarm to ring at 6 and its 5:59am. Even if I wake up before the alarm goes off I stay in bed until it does. Yesterday I came back very late because we can't go to Nobuhle's in-law empty handed. So my mom decided that we need to try these new salad recipe Nonjabulo's mother-in-law told her about. Nonjabulo is my other big sister she's the second born and I'm the last born. She got married 5 years ago. Just two months back her in-laws came over to celebrate their anniversaries.

*I long for the warmth of days gone by when you were mine Urg* there goes my alarm tone I snooze the alarm I need 5 more minutes. I just love this song even though I don't even know what they are singing about. Yup I am 24 actually I just turned 24 yesterday I didn't even get a simple birthday text from my family but I'm used to that. For me to get special treatment from them I need to get married. Nobuhle got married when she turned 21 and Nonjabulo when she turned 20. At the age of 20 I was doing my final year in BA Journalism at the University of Johannesburg. At the age of 21 I was doing my BA Honours in Communication Studies which was second major.

My big sisters always get the special treatment from the family. Even when I graduated no one bothered to come both times, my parents still believe that a girl's place is in the kitchen not going to Tertiary and studying, my sisters never went to Tertiary. I'm not close to them or anyone. I'm loner I enjoy reading magazines and listening to music.

*I long for the warmth of days gone by*

I hit the dismiss button and walk into my en-suite bathroom. I prefer taking a bath. I fill the bath tub then I take off my pj's and sink into the bath tub I know I forgot something but I can't put my finger on it. I take a long and relaxing bath. As soon as I get out I remember that I didn't pour the foam bath it means I'll take a little longer to clean the bath. I walk into my walk in closet and I pull my favourite suit. Navy blue pants and blazer and a white t-shirt. I think suits look better with t-shirts than shirts after all I am not going to an interview, it's a family gathering that everyone enjoys well except me. When I open the shoe side there's an incoming text. I know it's from my parents or sisters I don't have friends and I don't work on weekends. I walk to the bedside table. I take my phone and Mom appears on the notifications showing that the text is from her. I tap on the name to see the text.

**Don't be too formal. This is a family gathering not an interview or a place to show that you are educated.**

*Hehehe* that's my mom for you. I'm used to such texts. So I decide to go back to the closet and take out one of my yellow maxi dress I think it looks great for the occasion. For some reason I thought of wearing the suit just to piss off my mom but that doesn't actually end well. We let's just say it ends with one of us crying and that is me obvious. I wear the dress and my white sandals. I have great feet and I like showing them off. I make my bed walk to the kitchen for a cup of coffee, I'm a coffee addict my family has been telling me that I'll die from a heart disease due to the amount of coffee I consume. I make a fish paste sandwich my favourite I eat 6 slices of bread and apparently it's unlady like. Who cares? As soon as I'm done making breakfast I eat wash the dishes. I'm a bit of a clean freak. I walk back to the bathroom to brush my teeth we all know how tin fish smells so I can't have that smell in my mouth so early in the morning.

It's 7 and the gathering starts in 3 hours. I walk over to the night stand to take my phone, I see 5 texts from the whatsapp group Nobuhle created a year ago *SISTERHOOD*. I tap on the whatsapp icon to read the texts. I read for the sake of reading. They discuss marriage and kids most of the time. I mean I am not married, I don't have a boyfriend or a kid and well *uhm* I'm a 24-year old virgin.

*Mrs Mabuza (Nobuhle): Mbalì what are you wearing?*

Well yes I am Mbal'enhle (which means beautiful flower) but well according to my family and the society I am the total opposite. Basically they are saying I'm ugly.

*Mrs Vilakazi (Nonjabulo): I hope you bought something for the occasion. The last time you looked like you were going for an interview.*

*Mrs Mabuza: Mbalì you need google outfits for such occassion otherwise mama will kill you. Remember how she almost sent you home the last time. If it wasn't for Richard you would've left right there and then.*

*Mrs Vilakazi: Lil sis we get, you're not into fashion like us but it's okay to ask for an advice from us you know.*

*Mrs Mabuza: Oh and Mbalì I hope you're not sleeping cause you need to use public transport, I won't be able to fetch you anymore.*

I read the texts and looked for my handbag and leave the house. I am travelling from Millpark to Pretoria and it will take longer since I am using public transport. I am not even mad I'm used to this kind of life. Instead of asking for a lift from my parents I take a taxi to the nearest taxi rank. Then from there I take a taxi to Pretoria, I have a feeling that I am going to be late.

## Chapter 2

As soon as I press the intercom I check the time, I am 30 minutes late. I'll never hear the end of this. The gate opens a few seconds later. I rush to the front door I don't even get the chance to knock, the door is swung open and I am standing in front of my furious mother.

"Why do you always have to come late" she asks very angrily. "Well mama *ngiyaxolisa* (I'm sorry), Nobuhle told me after 7 that I have to use *amataxi* (the taxis) to get here" I tell her hoping she stops shouting.

But this is my mom we're talking about. "Why do you depend on your sister's car? Remember you're the one with qualifications you don't need a man to take care of you. So why do you want Nobuhle to fetch you with her car that her husband has bought for her?" she asks.

I don't answer her I just walk into the house. Nobuhle's husband bought her a car 2 years back and my mom told me that I should also get married so my husband can buy me a car. I told her that once I have my qualifications I will buy myself a car I don't need a man to do that for me. Well I've been working as a freelance writer for 3 of South Africa's biggest newspapers, but I know that a car is a liability it doesn't determine a person's wealth. I want to own a house first. Right now I'm renting a flat. Well my sisters may have the beauty in the family but I definitely have the brains.

As soon as I walk in I bump into Richard's cousins, Thabo. He walks towards me to give me a hug. After hugging me he tells me that I look beautiful I know he means nice dress. Because about a year ago when I started showing interest in him he told me it will never work out I'm just too damn ugly for him to date me. So since then I hardly talk to him. One of the other guys also says the same.

"That dress suits you, you have a very nice body, pity I can't say the same thing about your face" he says that out too loud the whole house laughs.

I thank him and walk away. My parents never defend me, so I learnt to take all those comments and say thank you. A lot of people always say that I have a nice body but as soon as they see my face they run into the opposite direction. So yeah I am the ugly duckling and no one wants me. My self esteem is so messed up that's why I chose to be a freelance writer. Even though I'm used to these comments sometimes they are too much. I passed most of my modules with distinctions obtaining both my degree and honours qualifications with *cum laude*. The comments people made about my looks really motivated me. I had to show them that I may not have the looks but I definitely have the brains. I made it to The Star's front page twice when I obtained my degree and honours. So many companies wanted me but because of my low self esteem I took part time posts.

"The yellow looks good on you" Nonjabulo tells me and she walks away.

My sisters are used to getting all the compliments when it comes to looks, marriage and kids things that I don't have. But as soon as someone comments about my qualifications and body I see sour faces and they try to change the topic back to looks, marriage and kids. Well my grand mom also told me that there's no point of having the best house, cars and qualifications if I don't have a husband or a child. I never felt good enough. What am I supposed to do when guys don't ask me out, force them to? I've never met a guy who can hold a decent conversation. They all brag about material things. Things that don't impress me. I need a guy who's smart, someone who can think out of the box.

"Are you going to stand there, or you going to come eat", my mom asks.

I stand in between Richard's cousin as soon as I dish up everything on the table they mock me and the whole room starts to laugh.

"I always tell her that if she keeps eating like that, no man is going to marry her but she won't listen, Buhle my beautiful daughter can you dish up for Mbali. No wonder she says she doesn't need a man because she acts like one" says my dad.

I am used to such comments so I just ignore them. I'm about to dig in when the plate is rudely taken away by my mother. They may treat me like this every time I see them which is becoming less and less but a person can take things to a certain point and right now I can't stand this. So I stand walk out the door, and leave the Mabuza premises. I wait for the taxi for almost 20 minutes. After 2 hours I am back at my flat. I take off my shoes and go straight to bed. I must have been sleeping for more than 5 hours cause I woken by someone banging in the front door and it's already dark outside. It's summer the sun sets after 7pm. I walk to the kitchen and peep through the peeping hole and I see my parents and sisters standing on my door. I open the door and walk in looking very mad.

"Why do you always cause a scene. It's not like all the stuff that was said today is new. I mean you don't have the looks and eat so much like a boy" Nobuhle sneers looking at me.

"I'm surprised she's not eating" says my mom.

"She was sleeping, I hope you're not pregnant..." Nobuhle doesn't even finish the sentence when my parents burst out laughing.

"Mbali preg? Who'd impregnate her, she doesn't even have a boyfriend" that's my mom.

They are busy talking they don't even hear me calling the security. As soon as they knock they all stop talking and turn to me, with a smile on my face, I open the door and move aside. The security takes them out, but not without a fight. My mom and Nobuhle are very dramatic. Nonjabulo was always sweet and we were kinda close but that's before she got married she changed, she started looking down on me. When they are in the hallway I wave them goodbye and close the door. I don't have the energy to do anything. I take a quick shower change to my pjs and I take my laptop to watch the new medical detectives episode that are recently uploaded. I must have fallen asleep because I am waken by my alarm. I switch it off and I go back to sleep, I wake up 3 hours later. I make breakfast after eating I take a quick shower, gosh I am so lazy to comb my hair so I wear a doek, make my bed, wash the dishes and I go to my closet to look for an outfit. I buy food every week, I hate going out but I go out at least once a week. I usually go out to buy groceries on a Saturday but yesterday I wasn't home. I take a taxi to Campus Square. The queues at the stores are crazy but it's the festive season, parents are already spending their bonuses on stupid things. I decide to buy food that will last me for a month from now, because during the festive I won't find anything.

As soon as I am done I take a taxi back to the flat. I check my personal email account. I have 2 email accounts one is for my personal stuff and the other is for work. I last checked my personal email in May, gosh. When I refresh my inbox, I get 540 new emails. This is shocking given that I do not have friends and stuff like that. I got through the first 50 when I'm about to give up I see an email from the University of Johannesburg for my Master's application gosh I even forgot that I applied for Master's degree and they accepted my qualification months ago and I am only seeing it now wow. I should check out my personal email account more often. I hate cooking so I eat a jam and butter 8 slices sandwich and I go to sleep I need to work tomorrow.

### **Chapter 3**

It's been a month and I haven't heard from my family. Nobuhle and Nonjabulo left the whatsapp group that night. Not that I care. I am registering for my Masters in Communication Studies. It will take me 2 years to finish this programme. I won't stop studying until I am Dr. Mbal'enhle Nxumalo. I have been reading lots of romance novels a lot lately and for some stupid reason I think I want to get married some day. Well I secretly envy my sisters. The look they have in their eyes when they are looking at their husbands and visa verse, you know the idea of waking up next to the person you love so much. Okay I am done with the registration and I am doing research for one of the company I work for. I have 2 weeks before the deadline. See why I want to be a part time writer well except for the self esteem part. But I didn't study so hard to work for someone else, to create wealth for someone else soon I want to start my own free lance company. Where I'll be creating websites or writing content for companies and individuals.

As much as I like the peace and quiet in my life right now. I'm scared my parents are up to something. They don't go mute on me for more than 12 hours. I was actually expecting them to come back the following day, I must say I'm shocked and scared that they didn't. I stand up to make food, I'm hungry. I open the fridge and I find it empty oh God the food is finished. I'm going to faint. I take my keys and bag and I walk out to catch a taxi as soon as I walk out from the complex there's a taxi that is short with 1 person. Oh lucky day I rush in before someone takes the seat. I get in all eyes on me. And this cute guy sitting next to me, turns to me with a smile.

"Beautiful eyes" he says and turns away I'm waiting for him to say *but*, but he doesn't. I thank him. Well it may sound stupid but I am happy this is actually the first a person especially a guy has ever complimented me without referring to my looks. He gets off before me before closing the door he looks at me and smiles then closes the door, the taxi takes off. I am the back seat all eyes on me **AGAIN**. I'm sure, I'm grinning like an idiot.

I get off by McDonalds and walk in. All eyes on me **AGAIN**. I order my food I wait and when I get the food I walk to the booth at the corner away from these people. I'm too hungry to take the food to my flat. The place is fully packed and it's January the 16th so I guess all the people here got paid yesterday *hehehe*. When I'm about to take a bite, *uhm* I mean a big bite, I see a guy standing in front of me. Well I'm assuming it's a guy judging from the shoes I'm seeing. I don't look up.

"Hello, sorry to disturb you, but can I sit I mean there's no place seems like people got paid this morning" okay I look up cause this person has a strange voice he sounds gayish but I see a guy wearing a 3 piece suit looking super hot. I must've been drooling over him, because I hear him laugh.

"Honey close your mouth and stop drooling, I'm gay, but if I wasn't I'd definitely date you" I close my mouth and I wipe the corners with the back of my hand. I should've guessed that made him laugh even more and people are now staring.

"Oh I'm sorry love, I'm Bongani but you can call me Bobo" he introduces himself.

"Oh yeah you can sit, I am Mbali" I answer not looking at him, I don't want to embarrass myself even more.

"Hmm your name suits you, you look like a flower, I love your dress" he says smiling at me. "Oh thank you" I reply staring at him. I have so many questions but I'm scared to ask him. He must've seen something in my eyes or he's a mind reader. He answered all the questions I wanted to ask. "Yes love I'm gay. I'm wearing this suit because I have to wear one to work. I'm a lawyer, I work at the law firm by the SABC. I'm 28 years, been working there for 2 years. I studied LLB at the University of Johannesburg. And right now I'm taking a break, I lost a case"

"Are you a mind reader or something" I mumble under my breath.

"No I'm not, but I always wished I was" he says laughing.

Now I am super embarrassed. We talk, and laugh a lot, he's very funny and positive. We have been chatting for a very long time we don't even realize until one of the waitresses asks us to leave. When I checked the time it's been almost 2 hours. For the first time in my life I enjoyed talking to a person. Bobo is a very nice person, I always avoided having friends but now I think I can have him as my friend. We talked about a lot of things. I told him about my family and he told me about his. Never been complimented so much before. So for the first time ever I'm glad I went out. I decide to accompany him to his work place since we were kicked out. From McDonalds to the firm it takes plus or minus 20 minutes but it takes us almost an hour. Bobo is so dramatic, sometimes we have to stand at the center of the road so he can emphasize his point. I've never laughed so much in my life. After leaving him at the firm I am walking towards the taxi route to catch a taxi when I hear someone calling out my name. Well I've never heard this voice before. The person was waving and running towards me.

"Hello, I'm Luthando you were my Journalism tutor 3 years ago, I just wanted to say hi" she says shyly.

Am I going to die today why is everyone nice? "Oh wow this is great. Thanks it means a lot, how have you been?" I ask.

"Been very good thanks, well I should rush my boyfriend is waiting for me" she tells and start walking towards a tall guy, well that must be the boyfriend.

I catch a taxi back to Campus Square to buy groceries. When I'm done I walk towards the taxi, my phone starts ringing I can't answer it it's not safe I'll get back to the person when I get home. 20 minutes I'm home. I pack all the groceries and search for my phone. Well there's a message from my mom okay I didn't hear any incoming message maybe it came in when I was packing the groceries. Today has been a great day so maybe my mom wants to deliver good news. Well it's okay to be positive right.

**Mom: You're meeting your in-laws this Saturday. Wear something long and cover your head**

I feel dizzy, what in-laws. I immediately dial her number, she picks up after the second ring. "Oh she finally calls, we're still expecting an apology from you, you know" that's the first thing she says.

"Well mother dearest, you can forget because I Mbal'enhle Nxumalo won't apologise. I called because of the text you sent" I've never disrespected anyone in my life but I've had enough of this family.

"Habe" well that's my dad, my mom must've have put the call on speaker for everyone to hear.

"You're so dis..." I disturb her before she even finishes. "I said I called because of the sms you sent. Like I said you guys owe me an apology not the other way round" I say smiling at myself. It's high time I stood up for myself.

Well talking with Bobo has helped me. "Well since you know that you're not capable of finding a man, we took it upon ourselves to find you one, the lobola negotiations took place on Saturday. There will be no wedding. There's gonna be a small ceremony, you'll exchange vows and there will be lunch afterwards. I will send you, his pics on whatsapp. He's handsome don't mess this marriage up" that's Nobuhle always straight to the point. I love that.

Well believe it or not I am super excited I always wanted a handsome husband. My phone vibrates and showing the whatsapp icon. That was quick. When I look at the pics Dear Lord, I've never seen someone so handsome in my life. I am so happy. I send my parents a thank you text. But my happiness is short lived. I know for a fact that my family didn't show him my pictures, that's if they have any. Nobuhle later sends a text telling me that the guy's name is Mcebo Makhanya. What if he doesn't want me. I decide to text Bobo.

*Me: You won't believe this, so I am getting married this Saturday to this guy. \*sends pics\* I just talked to the fam. But we haven't met before and what if he doesn't find anything beautiful in me?*

I hit send. After some times Bobo replies.

*Bobo: O.M.G why are handsome guys taken and straight. Gosh I'm so jealous. But wait you didn't mention anything about inviting me. Are you scared that Mcebo will decide to marry me instead? Hahaha you jealous bitch. I am happy for you. Sweetheart you are beautiful in your own way. Never compare yourself to anyone not even your brainless sisters. So back to the invitation part why am I not invited I thought we friends \*sad face\**

Bobo is so dramatic.

*Me: You are definitely invited just don't steal him from me.*

*Bobo: Gosh we've been friends for like what 6 hours yet I'm already a bad one. I only saw the pic and wedding. I didn't even read the texts. Like I've been telling you, you're beautiful, don't let your family decide the definition of the word beautiful for you. When you think of the word beautiful look at the mirror you'll see the definition. If he doesn't see the beauty in you then it's fine he doesn't deserve. You'll find the love of your love. You're still young. Just don't think everyone will reject you. I'm here for you. Got to go I am meeting bae for dinner. Love you.*

His words warm my heart. I don't even know what to say. I've been typing and deleting for over 5 minutes now. In the end I just send: *Thanks \*kisses\* Love you too.*

The love you too part was kind of strange. I've never included that in a text not even with family. I'm not hungry but I am very tired I decide to have an early night.

## Chapter 4

*I long for the warmth of* urgh there goes my alarm, it's 3am I should be at the in-laws by 5am. So I have to get ready in 30 minutes. I'll be travelling to Centurion the wedding venue is there. We have to get there and prepare everything. The ceremony will start at 7am. Who gets married at 7am. My life is a joke. I go to the guest bedroom to wake Bobo and his boyfriend Melusi up. Yup they slept over they helped with everything so far. The only thing left is the decor. Bobo doesn't want to wake and Mel kisses him and he wakes up. Ncoooo that's sweet, I hope Mcebo is this romantic. I walk out to give them space. I made the bed, take a quick shower. I go the kitchen to prepare breakfast and I put the food in containers so that we will eat on our way. Mel will be transporting me. I take all the decor stuff and put them in the boot of Mel's Hyundai i30. After 20 minutes they come out of the guest room and we head to the car. The journey is quiet well I usually wake up at 8 on Saturdays and Bobo wakes up after 12. So we are so grumpy Mel is the only one taking.

After almost 2 hours we arrive at the venue and we do the decor. Using my favourite colours, blue and grey they actually complement each other. My sisters refused to help until I apologize. I won't apologize so clearly they won't talk to me anymore. Gosh I am so fine with that. After 1 hour and 30 minutes we are done. I take a shower. Bobo and Mel help me with the dress, hair and everything else. I don't want to wear makeup and Melusi is happy with the decision. We finish exactly 7am, I am waiting for my dad to hand me over to my handsome husband to be. The music starts playing my dad walks to the room, doesn't say anything. He hooks our arms and walks me to Mcebo. But Dear Lord the guy standing besides Mcebo is super handsome I hear Bobo sighing I know the guy is the reason. The ceremony starts we say the vows. Well we didn't write any. What am I supposed to say to the stranger I am marrying. When it is time for him to raise the veil and kiss me I am nervous. The veil is being lifted from my face.

"Habe *imihlolo*, do you expect me to marry this ugly girl. Well after seeing her sisters I thought she's also beautiful. *Thixo* I would rather sleep with a pig" he says and walks out.

Since the family has never met me they all come forward to see me and they all gasp and walk out. My family runs after them. I can feel the tears forming in my eyes. I've never been so humiliated. I feel strong arms around my shoulders I cry thinking it's Bobo. Bobo and Mel are too shocked to even move. After crying I raise my head to apologize to Bobo for messing his suit, but the person I see is not Bobo. I see *him* the guy who was standing next to Mcebo. I turn around to

see Bobo and Mel standing there with their eyes wide open. I run to Bobo and I throw my arms around his neck and cry so more.

"Honey if you don't let go now, Mel is going to kill you he's jealous right now you'd swear I turned straight" he said trying to lighten the mood. We all laugh except *him* maybe he hates gays.

"He's been starring at you, you know" he said slightly towards *him*.

## Chapter 5

I walk towards *him*. "Hello" I greet him shyly.

"I'm Mbal'enhle" I introduce myself. "Hello, I'm Njabulo Madondo" he smiles. I always loved this surname so I know all their clan names.

"*Mnquhe*" I say bowing as if bowing to a king with a smile on my face. Oh that earned me a huge and genuine smile but I smell sympathy there. *Mnquhe* is his clan name.

"*Zwide ka Langa*" he also bows using my clan name. It's normal for people to know other people's clan name. You tell them your surname they call you by your clan names. I love that, in fact we all do.

*You're so handsome*

"Oh Wow thanks. You're beautiful too" he replies suppressing a smile.

*Oh God I'm so dumb. Did I really say that out loud?*

"No you're not dumb and yes you did say that out loud" he replies laughing this time.

Oh God I mumble. I'm a loner so I'm so used to talking alone. Sometimes I don't even notice that I'm thinking out loud. I even forgot that Mel and Bobo are still here. They are looking at us and from the looks from their faces they are trying not to laugh. This is humiliating. But wait did Njabulo say I'm beautiful. So the most handsome guy I've ever seen is saying that I'm beautiful. I don't realise that I'm standing there grinning like an idiot until I am brought back to the presence by Bobo.

"She's probably planning your wedding and your future" he tells Njabulo and then he turns to me. "I hope your dreams come true" he says with a big smile on his face I turn to Melusi and Njabulo they are also smiling.

I decide to start cleaning because I honestly to humiliated I can't even say anything. But I couldn't stop staring at him. I love his body, looks and height. I have a thing for tall guys. My first crush was our neighbor. He was tall and very handsome. So Njabulo is 6'9, dark in complexion, brush and a beard. *Guys with beards Dear Lord*. They all join to help me even Njabulo when we are almost done Mel and Bobo tell me that they need to somewhere. *Hehehe* they are lying. What am I supposed to say to Njabulo when we are alone? I'm not used to talking to people especially strangers. But with Bobo I just flowed. I hug them and wave goodbye with the promise that I will call them later. I have a feeling that Njabulo asked them to leave. Why would he ask them to leave? Before I can even think of possible reasons Njabulo is standing in front me smiling but he looks nervous maybe I'm seeing things. I mean I'm not beautiful or anything.

"Can I take you out after we're done?" He asks looking nervous. I smile and nod I don't trust myself enough to speak. I've never been asked out. Strange things are happening to me this week first it was Bobo, the SMS from mom and now this? Is God tryna repay me for all the bad things he put me through all my life or did someone pay these people to be nice to me? What's going on?

## Chapter 6

It's time to go home but guess what? I don't have transport this place is far from my place. I can't ask Njabulo for help I mean after I cried my eyes off ruining his expensive suit he helped me clean up everything which took 2 hours. He must be tired. He seems sweet, I wonder if he's related to Mcebo if yes how? Mcebo is really cruel. Thinking about his words brings tears to my eyes. My family didn't even bother to stay and console me. Even though he's a stranger his rejection hurts like hell. After packing the last box, I ask Njabulo to look after the boxes I need to use the bathroom. I'm still wearing my wedding gown so I need to go change. He just nods typing on his phone. I spend 10 minutes in the bathroom I need help with the zip and I can't exactly ask Njabulo now can I? I end up tearing the dress, I'll pay whatever fee. I put my long black dress and I can't help but think wearing black on my wedding day was not a very good idea. I fold the dress and walk to the hall and I see guys taking the boxes to some old car. I look around for Njabulo I spot him talking to one of the guys pointing me and other guys laugh. He must be telling them what happened. For some reason I don't even care. Njabulo walks towards me and he introduces me to his friends. They are 3 of them, I'm too stressed to remember their names. Njabulo tells me they will drive me home. This is great, I didn't know how to ask him. I mean I can't take 6 boxes at home using a taxi. Tomorrow morning I'm going to a car dealership, I can't go on like this. We get inside the car, I must've zoned out because one of Njabulo's friends nudges me in the rib.

"Sorry, what?" I reply looking at Njabulo. "*Uhlala kephi*" (Where do you stay?) he asks. "Millpark" I tell him.

"Habe" they all say at the same time. Well I just said Millpark like it's just around the corner, and it's 2 hours drive from here. One of the guys is complaining telling Njabulo that he'll pay him the petrol money. He must be the owner of the car. I tell him I'll pay. Hell I can even pay him now. I must've fallen asleep I mean I woke up at 3am and for what to be left at the altar? *Geez*. I feel the wind blowing in my face, the worst way to be woken up ey. When I open my eyes I see that we are in Auckland Park. Five minutes away from my apartment. Njabulo asks for the address or directions I'm too sleepy to give an answer I just mumble some rubbish and he smiles asking me the same question again, the other guys are too busy laughing. I give him the directions to the complex and go back to dream land. I need to sleep. I close my eyes to sleep and then I remember that I was supposed to go meet my inlaws or something at 5am I didn't go. It's okay to forget stuff right I mean it was my wedding day I had so much on my mind. Why didn't my sisters remind me though? We're here. I open the door to go out, and inform to the security guards that I'm with them. But before I step out bab' Mkhize one of the guards greets them.

"MaZwide how do you know these guys?" bab' Mkhize asks me smiling. Clearly they know each other I'm too sleepy to care or even ask how they know each other.

He lets us in, I walk to my apartment I'm too tired to even close the door so I use my foot to shut the door but it doesn't I hear heavy footsteps. Njabulo's friends walk in carrying boxes. Oh shit the decor and the dress I totally forgot about those. My stomach rumbles, I'm too tired to care or think about food. I tell them to feel at home. I go straight to bed and look at the time before I sleep. It's 12:15pm. I wake up 5 hours later I can't ignore the hunger any longer. I walk into the kitchen, there's a note on the counter. Who leaves a note in the 21st century? I take the note and read I can't help but smile.

*We were hungry I made mince meat and rice, it's a quick and easy to make. I hope that's okay with you. I hope you enjoy the food. Here are my digits.*

*Mnquhe*

I quickly open the micro wave there's a plate. And there are no dirty dishes pheew at least they know that they need to clean up. I eat and wash the dish. I have nothing to do, I decide to call Bobo he's not picking up maybe he's busy. I save Njabulo's digits, I don't know if I should call or text him. If only Bobo was here, he'd know what to do. After 5 minutes of debating I decide to call him. He picks up after the 1st ring like he's been expecting a call from me.

"Hello" he answers, okay believe it or not I don't know what to say.

"*Mnquhe*" "Oh MaZwide, you're up" he replies.

"Yes, thank you so much for the food, it was delicious" I tell him. He goes on to tell me that he loves cooking. We chat a little longer and we hang up, I'm disappointed that he didn't bring the date thing again. But he felt sorry for me. *Beep beep* okay there's a text it's

Njabulo: **Do you have plans for tomorrow?** Pheew at least he doesn't shorten the words it's really frustrating given that I don't know what they mean I never had mxit.

I smile and reply: **Yeah I do, but you can come along. I need someone's opinion by the way.**

**Mnquhe: When and what time?**

**Me: Can we meet at the complex? Mnquhe: Yeah sure no problem. What time.**

**Me: 8am. Mnquhe: Cool see you then, I can't wait.**

This is great at least I won't be going alone. I always imagined this differently, always thought my parents will be there you know but nope. I decide to call Bobo one more time.

"MaZwide" he replies after the second ring mimicking Njabulo. Bobo though. "Where have you been?" I ask smiling.

"We decided to go shopping seeing that Njabulo felt uncomfortable talking to you while we were there. Besides I'll be meeting Mel's parents this weekend. I need to look fly, apparently they want him to marry some girl *nje*" he tells me laughing

"*Haw*" I reply shocked "Do they know that he's gay" I ask.

"Yes sweetie they do. But they think it's an act" before I can reply I hear Mel from the background screaming and Bobo's phone goes off. Something is wrong I can feel it. I try to call Bobo he doesn't pick up. I don't have Mel's digits. I keep calling he doesn't pick. Gosh I'm worried sick I don't even know where they stay. I've known them for a week.

## Chapter 7

At 8 o'clock sharp Njabulo knocks at my door. Hmm he's a time keeper I like that. But I'm still worried about Bobo I don't know what to do. I hardly slept, been trying to call him all night for over 50 times. I take my bag and leave the house. Oh Lord Njabulo looks yummy. He's wearing all black with shades.

"You look so handsome" I tell him, I can't help myself. He's the most handsome guy I've ever met. Yeah I know I also said that about Bobo and Mcebo but let me just say, you should meet Njabulo. "You're also beautiful" *eeh* I don't know what to say to that so I just smile and he leads the way. He is wearing a black skinny jean, black vest and shirt and all black All Star. We take a taxi to Lenasia Ext to a Mercedes Benz dealership. I want to buy a car not far from home so that I will go show my parents. When we get there he helps me choose a car. I buy a black Mercedes Benz and we drive home. If I knew how this will turn out I shouldn't have. I drive home, open the gate but

before I can drive in my parents refuse to let me in, because I humiliated them. The last time I checked I am the one who was humiliated and left at the altar. I don't have time for this, I just bought my dream car and I go home to celebrate with my parents and what do they do? They tell me not come into their house because I humiliated them. I'm starting to think I'm adopted.

I had a very long day yesterday I don't have time for this. Njabulo is tongue tied, apparently he's not used to such drama. I decide to take Njabulo out for a meal, we hardly talk, I think he's tryna give me space. We decide to drive around. After 2 hours of driving we decide to go back to my apartment. When we get home he sits in the couch while I pour juice.

"Are you okay?" he asks after some time. "Yeah, *wena* (you)"

"Yeah I'm okay, I'd love to get to know you better" I smile this is like the first time a guy has said that to me. Before I can say anything my phone rings it's Bobo OMG I'm so happy I almost fall off the couch.

"Bobo are you and Mel alright? You almost gave me a heart attack" I tell him.

"*Hahaha*, that's really sweet of you. My baby (I roll my eyes at that, you'd swear he's referring to a 5 year old) fell off a stepladder yesterday. So I had to rush him to the hospital you know how men are, they are such cry babies. I saw your missed calls, sorry I couldn't answer I even forgot that I have a phone. Thank you so much for caring. Mel is okay now they had to monitor him all night" Gosh Bobo can talk.

"Okay sweetheart. Tell him to get well and be careful next time" I tell him. We say our goodbyes and hang up.

"Oh sorry about that" I tell Njabulo. "No it's okay" he replies. "What do you want to know about me and why?" I ask.

"Well I like you, I want to know the little things for now" he tells me. "Well you can ask me anything" I tell him.

"Okay full names, age, favourite colour, siblings, favourite song and artists stuff like that" he replies.

Hmm these questions may sound stupid but except for Bobo no one has ever shown interest in me even asking my favourite colour.

"Hmm I'm Mbal'enhle Nxumalo *Zwide ka Langa uMkhatshwa* (clan name), I'm 24 years old, currently doing my Masters in Journalism, I love writing. I have 2 big sisters Nonjabulo and Nobuhle, *uhm* my favourite song is stubborn by Keisha Cole, my favourite colours are blue and grey. I love reading and writing, I'm a free lance content writer. I like staying indoors by myself no offence. Yeah I can't think of anything else, your turn" I tell him.

“Hmm I’m Njabulo Jet Madondo *Mnquhe wase maQhudeni uMwelase* (his clan names), I’m 26, I work for Fidelity a security company I am their receptionist been working there for 8 years now. I have 6 older siblings 2 brothers and 4 sisters. My favourite song is smash by Ltido, my favourite colour is black. I like going out and reading I’m currently reading *When Hope Whispers* by Zoleka Mandela I’m reading for the 10<sup>th</sup> times.” He tells me this goes on for like 2 hours, it’s time for him to leave and I don’t want him to, but he has to go home he lives in Pretoria, I offer to drive him he says no. We plan to go out again the following weekend.

## Chapter 8

For the past three months Njabulo and I have been spending our free time together. He took me out a lot, and people would stare and make nasty comments. This one time Njabulo punched this guy who said I don’t have the looks but I have the body and he spanked me.

It’s Friday, tomorrow Bobo and Mel are getting married. Yes they are finally getting married but after so much drama. Bobo punched Mel’s brother when he tried to hook him up with some floozy. Never seen Bobo so mad he was shaking with rage. They are getting married tomorrow and their families are not coming. I’m Bobo’s bridesmaid and no he won’t be wearing a dress. Njabulo will be Mel’s best man. He actually doesn’t like gays but he agreed and he’s trying for my sake. We are busy running around trying to prepare things on time, so that Bobo and Mel can have their dream wedding. Since their parents and siblings won’t be coming it won’t be a very big wedding. We’ll sleep at the venue on the floor because Bobo is worried that we might get late.

Okay we are done, it’s 11pm and they are getting married at 10am at least we won’t be cooking. I wish I was the one getting married. Hey I always forget to ask Njabulo how he knows Mcebo so I turn to him. “Njabulo, I always forget to ask you. How do you know Mcebo?” I ask him.

“Oh shit you can’t be asking about that asshole” Bobo complains.

“No it’s okay. That asshole is my cousin” Njabulo replies. We have nothing else to say so we go over the to do list one more time, before we go to sleep. I have to share my blankets with Njabulo, it is so uncomfortable. I’ve never shared a blanket with a guy except for my dad about 15 years ago, when he thought I’ll be married by now. I eventually fall asleep. When I open my eyes I see the most handsome face in the world even Trey Songz is not this handsome. He looks peaceful, I’m staring at him grinning like a idiot thinking I wouldn’t mind waking up to see this face every day for the rest of my life. I kiss his forehead he stirs and rumbles some rubbish.

“Ncooo” that’s Bobo I thought they were still sleeping.

“I thought you guys were sleeping” I reply shyly.

“No we woke an hour ago, we have been watching you ogling and kissing him” Mel replies pointing at Njabulo.

“This is really embarrassing” I say using one of the blankets to hide my face.

“No need to be shy, I’m glad you’re happy” he tells me and they walk out. I check the time it’s 6am. I have 4 hours so I go back to sleep.

“*Vuka* (wake up)” someone is shaking me. I open my eyes it’s Njabulo, hmm I’d love to wake up like this. “Thanks, what’s the time?” I ask him.

“It’s 8:30” he replies folding the blankets I stand up and help him. After that we take a shower, not together though. I’d never seen a naked guy, I’d definitely faint. After showering I wear a long blue dress, tie my hair into a bun. I help Bobo with the check list we go over it 5 times before he is satisfied, before we know it it’s 10am and he walks down the alter. They look so beautiful, they say their vows I don’t even hear a thing because I am busy staring Njabulo. I think we’re dating because just next week I’m meeting his siblings and I am nervous. Even though I go out a lot and Njabulo, Bobo and Mel always tell me that I am beautiful I don’t believe them. I’ve known them for almost 5 months and I have been told that I am ugly all my life so I still find it hard to believe.

“This is my wedding you know, I’d really appreciate it if you focused on me you know” Bobo whispers in my ear smiling.

We head to the reception. Everything is beautiful the theme is silver and pink Bobo and Mel’s favourite colours. Obvious Bobo likes pink. We spend an hour on the reception then they head out to their honey moon. Njabulo and I pack our things, I drop him off since he lives 30 minutes away from the venue, the same venue I hired for my wedding. Njabulo lives in a 2 room shack. I’ve never been to his place, he never suggested us to. In fact we always met in public. We walk in, he’s a neat freak, at least I won’t have to clean after him in the future, and I’m also a neat freak. His place is very tidy and small. There’s a table and 4 chairs at the centre of the kitchen, a fridge, cupboard with a 2 plate stove and a kettle on top, and a shelf with lots of books, there’s no TV. There’s a 2 sitter couch, a wardrobe, chest of drawers, a neatly made bed and a plastic tub hanging from a nail.

“Feel at home, do you need something to drink” he asks me.

“You’re neat freak *yoh*. Yes please can I have coffee” I reply.

“Yoh my mom used to beat the shit out of us if we didn’t clean after ourselves” he replies.

“We did everything around the house, we cooked, cleaned and did our own laundry. I always loved cooking so I’d cook for my sisters since they hated cooking so much and they would do my laundry” he tells me.

“Hmm and you are a good cook, your mom must be proud” I reply. We chat for hours and soon it’s time to leave, I hate leaving him. He walks me out to the car and I drive off with a sad smile. At least we’ll talk on the phone. We can spend the whole day together but we still talk on the phone for hours sometimes until one of us falls asleep. I never want him to hang up when he’s feeling sleepy and I sometimes cry if he falls asleep while talking to me. I have fallen for this guy so hard I don’t it’s normal or healthy. I get home and go straight to bed.

## Chapter 9

I’m meeting Njabulo’s siblings today. I’ve seen their pictures they are all beautiful and I’m afraid that they will reject me like all the people I have met in the past. We decided to go to Pretoria Zoo, I will be meeting them there at 9am. I take a bath, do the bed, I wear a dress Njabulo bought me about a month ago. It’s a grey maxi dress. It’s 7:05 I drive to the Zoo, I can’t see them at the entrance, so I pay and enter they are standing there looking my way. I walk to them shaking I’m nervous. Njabulo walks towards me with a smile like always, doesn’t he get tired of seeing my ugly face.

Okay his siblings look shocked. “Oh so you’re the girl!” that’s how one of his sisters greet me, I don’t know how to answer that so I decide to keep quiet.

“So she can’t talk” she goes on when it’s clear to her that I’m not going to answer.

“She’s so ugly no wonder Mcebo ran the opposite direction when she saw her” says one of the brothers and they all laugh except for one his sisters. Njabulo punches him in the face.

“What’s that for? The truth hurts” he replies smiling. Njabulo takes my hand walking towards the exit. I know what his siblings are saying hurts but I can’t be the reason they are fighting or not speaking to each other. So I wait for him to calm down and beg him to spend time with his siblings, he refuses at first, I keep asking him until he agrees. The quiet girl walks towards us with a smile, she introduces herself as Smanga and she tells me not to mind her siblings, it’s easy for her to say. But I can ignore them I mean what’s new. We go around the zoo they continue making their comments but not enough for Njabulo to hear them, I just thank them like always. After the zoo we head to the nearest Debonaires they want pizza. They came here with taxis, oh the look they had on their faces when they saw my machine. The whole 20 minutes they are asking where I work, when did I buy my car. I never answer I just keep quiet Njabulo decides to answer them. After Joyce said I’m quiet because I’m a prostitute, why do people hate me so much? But I know that’s not her talking it’s her jealousy. We eat and I drive them to Njabulo’s house. There isn’t much space for everyone, they ask to come to my apartment, I tell them NO but I take Smanga with. They can’t insult me and expect to spend a night at my apartment. We say our goodbyes and we leave. During the ride, we chat and we find out that we have so much in common.

## Chapter 10

Smanga is the 6th child, there's a 9 months gap between her and Njabulo. I like her, but I don't know I don't want to be friends with any of his siblings. Don't get me wrong I like Smanga but I can't be friends with her. Okay she can call me when she needs help that's it. I think I like the small circle, I heard stories about girls having drama. I did some stupid research back when I was doing my first year. I was interested in what friends talk about. And 90% of the students I interviewed have guy friends. Girls can be dramatic look at my sisters for example. We had a chit chat when we got to the apartment, but I'm so used to being alone, typing not going out and talking. So yeah I'm a boring person I don't know what to say at times. I just smile or nod. Smanga talks a lot though, the kind of person who doesn't have a full stop, if I don't say anything she doesn't push. After eating bread, butter and polony I show her the guest room and I go to my room and I fall asleep as soon as my head hits the pillow. I even missed Njabulo's calls and texts, I feel so bad if it was me I would've cried the whole night. I call Njabulo he does not pick up, but one of his sisters does, the rude older sister I can't remember name. Joyce Joy *urg* whatever her name is.

"If someone doesn't pick up, they clearly don't wanna talk to you" she answers. I don't say anything I just hang up. "*Sisi*" that's Smanga knocking at my bedroom door. "Come in" I yell from my bedroom. It's 7am where is Njabulo, why did he leave his phone again? And now I had to talk to his rude sister.

"How did you sleep, you can come in" I tell her when she just pops her head. She comes in and stands by the door. This girl needs permission for everything she does in this apartment, I like that about her but she needs to be free I can't be giving her permission for everything it's tiring.

"I slept thanks, *wena?*" she asks.

"Good thanks" I know she wants to ask something but I can't keep pushing her to ask, it's frustrating. While I'm waiting for her to say something, her stomach grumbles she's hungry. Maybe she wanted to ask for food. I don't know if I have food around the house. I buy groceries every Saturday, I couldn't go yesterday because we had to go to the zoo. I tell her to take a bath, we'll go out because I doubt there's enough food for the both of us in the house. When she leaves, I make the bed and take a shower, I don't know what to wear. I search the closet, gosh that's why I hate going out. I take out a grey short, blue vest and all black all star. She comes back to tell me she's done, but not without knocking and waiting for me to tell her to come in. Gosh I won't cope. "Smanga, you don't have to wait for me to tell you to get inside twice. When I say come in, just come in. If the door is open don't knock just come in" I tell her, she nods but I know that she won't just come in. She's wearing a long dress, it now looks brown, but you can see that it used to be black. Yesterday she was wearing something similar. I don't know should I ask her or should I just take her shopping, I don't know. I think I'll text Njabulo and ask him. I call him instead and this time he answers and tells me to buy her clothes he will tell me later about her. We walk out

to the car, I feel tired I wanted her to drive but she can't. I wish Njabulo was here, but he doesn't drive my car until I beg him to. We drive to Campus Square because she wants to eat at Chicken Licken, Smanga talks a lot but right now she doesn't say much so we just sit there in silence. I don't know what to say about us going to buy her clothes, I hope she's not offended.

We go to Pick n Pay to buy groceries. When I ask her the brands she buys for her toiletries, she doesn't seem comfortable with me asking, she tells me that she buys any brand. If she feels uncomfortable with me buying her toiletries what about clothes then? I press her to tell me and she tells me she uses no name brands, she's lying there's no such and I won't let this go. So we test all the products so that she can choose the ones she likes. After 30 minutes of going over everything we find the right products. We move to the other sections, we buy all the stuff we need, I don't like ice cream but I think she might like it, but the problem is that she doesn't want to choose, this girl *mara*. Eventually she chooses her favourite, after 10 minutes of arguing.

I'm a coffee addict, I rarely eat ice cream, it's been almost 3 years since I last ate it. After we're done with the food, I take the plastics to the car, I bought groceries for the whole month, I don't really know how long they'll be staying and I think she'll be staying with me for that period of time. Because we had many plastics I decide to take them to the car. I tell Smanga to go to Mr. Price and look for clothes she might like for me, I tell her that I hate choosing my own clothes and I ask to take whatever she likes. I don't take long. I find her at the underwear section, taking a set of matching pair of bra and underwear, she puts them back and stares so I just tell her to take them, she feels uncomfortable and she puts them. So we move to other sections she thinks she's helping me shop but nope she's buying stuff for herself. I didn't know how to tell her after the toiletries and ice cream arguments. So when she's not looking I take the underwears and put them in the basket. She finally hands me the basket. I pay for the clothes. We've been here for like 3 to 4 hours, we go to buy lunch at McDonalds. We eat my favourite McFeast and I buy her an ice cream I think she likes it. We leave.

When we get home, I tell her that the clothes are for her she cries, like sob. Okay I'm scared now. I mean I just bought her clothes why is she sobbing like I just bought her most expensive car. I don't know what to do. She jumps and hug me, okay I'm lately surrounded by huggers I hug her back she continues crying and thanking me. I just hug after 30 minutes she tells me the reason she's unemployed and don't have many clothes.

## Chapter 11

While I'm staring at Smanga not knowing what to say, Njabulo calls me asking to bring his siblings over since his place is small for Sunday supper. I don't like his nasty siblings but I know he likes spending time with them so I agree. Two hours later the apartment is filled with so much noise. I'm helping Njabulo and Smanga cook. The rest are watching soccer, I hate soccer but I decide not to be nasty and let them watch. I'm grinning at Smanga tickling her little brother, when I see an incoming text. It's from my mom. Well that's a surprise. I'm praying it's good news but like always God doesn't answer my prayers when it comes to this family.

### **There's a family meeting. COME HOME NOW.**

She can't text me demanding me to come to a family meeting when they didn't allow me to enter the last time I went there. Because I'm not going and I know they'll want to come here, I switch my phone off. Njabulo is watching me. I just mouth "later" and he goes on with frying the fish. I go to the bathroom and sit there. I want to be alone, I'm used to being alone. But I have to tolerate his family. So after 20 minutes I walk in and one of his brothers is arguing with Joyce about her being bossy because she's the first child. I just go to Njabulo I need a hug, as if reading my thoughts he asks Smanga to look after the pots, he takes my hand and leads me outside. When we get there he hugs me and asks what's wrong. How do I tell him that I want my space, I don't like his siblings? I just say I'm okay I'm just tired he goes mute. Maybe he knows I'm lying but he just hugs me and we stay silent for like 5 minutes. I love that about him, he knows when to go mute. After some time we go inside and Smanga is taking the plates out. I help them dish and we sit. I'm already digging in when Smanga nudges me, I look and I see everyone starring at me.

"What" I ask them.

"Can we pray?" Joyce asks.

"Okay sure" I reply and continue eating. They still don't pray, these people and asking for permission for every little thing they will drive me mad. When I look up Smanga and Njabulo are trying hard not to laugh.

"What's going on" I ask them confused.

"Baby, can we pray and you will eat after?" okay this is the first time Njabulo has called me that. Oh shit this is embarrassing. "Oh no problem" I tell them while I put the food on the table. After praying we all proceed to eat. They are chit chatting, but I am bored because I don't know who they are talking about. Joyce's phone rings she puts it on speaker and continues to eat. Okay this family is strange, who does that.

"Joyce, you need to come home quickly" comes a very loud voice. The person is panicking and judging from the voice, the person is trying so hard not to cry. This must be the husband, the bastard who tried to rape Smanga and placed the blame on her.

"What's wrong" Joyce answers panicking.

"It's Joy, I can't tell you. You need to come now" he yells over the phone.

"How am I going to get home? The train leaves in 10 minutes and you know I can't afford to take a taxi I don't have money" she replies.

"You have to come now" he yells again and the line goes dead. We all go mute. "How am I going to get home, this time when I don't have money" she asks her siblings.

If she wasn't a bitch I'd book a flight for her but I won't. So I leave the room to give them some privacy. I have been in my room for 5 minutes when I hear someone screaming. Oh God I walk to the lounge. It's Joyce they are all tryna console her, they look helpless. She needs help let me put the negative things aside. I take Njabulo outside and I ask him what's wrong.

"It's her daughter, she was hit by a car about 30 minutes ago, she's critical. The Doctors said she might not make it, so Joyce needs to be there as soon as possible" he tells me.

He looks sad. I'll do anything to wipe that sadness in his face. I take his hand, he looks surprised well I've never done that but right now I feel that he needs that.

"I'll help her" I tell her siblings. They all turn to look at me. They look surprised. I rush to my bedroom and take my laptop, I book her a flight, she's lucky there's a flight leaving in an hour. I rush her to the airport and we get there in time. I give her another R500 just in case she needs to use uber. She opens her arms to hug me but I just push her towards the gate before her flight leaves. She waves and runs towards the plane with the promise to call when she gets home. Njabulo hugs me again.

"I love you" oh shit, I know we have been dating for like 6 months now, but this is the first time he has told me this. I don't know what to say so I just cry. I tell him I love him too through the tears. This is the sweetest that he has ever said to me. I always wanted him to tell me this. After some time he takes my hand and leads me to my car. I know he won't drive until I ask him to. I take him out for coffee we stay there for almost 3 hours, he's quiet, so I give him space. I'm too emotional to even drive and concentrate on the road. He drives after some time he thanks me for helping his sister even though she was nasty to me. I didn't do this for his sister but I did it for him I tell him. When we reach the apartment Phindile the other sister and Mpilo are crying.

"What's wrong" Njabulo asks them.

"Joyce called 5 minutes ago, Joy passed away" Mpilo answers. I don't know what to say, when I see tears in Njabulo's eyes. I feel helpless, I just hug him, Smanga joins us, they are close. When the family turned their backs on her, Njabulo was the only one who supported her and believed her when she told her that Joyce's husband wanted to rape her. I just hug him without saying anything. I don't know what to say. After some time, they all calm down. I don't know what to do, so instead I make them coffee. We all sit in silence. After some time Mpilo says they need to leave

first thing in the morning, but they don't have money for transport because they were planning to go back home by train after 3 weeks. Apparently they visit Njabulo during this time for 3 weeks, but their stay was cut short. There are 6 of them, they won't fit in the car. I decide to let them sleep we will leave first thing in the morning. I give them my phone so they can call their annoying big sister and I give them privacy. I prepare the guest room for Njabulo and his 2 brothers Mpilo and Simon. Then I prepare my room for all of us, Smanga and I will sleep on the floor. Then Phindile, Mary and Sweetness will share the bed. I go back to the lounge when everyone is in bed, to tidy up and wash the dishes. Njabulo joins me, he was planning to do the same. I wash the dishes he dries them. After 30 minutes of washing the dishes and tidying, we sit in the couch. He's too silent, I just hug him. I check the time it's after 12 midnight. I tell him to go sleep we'll leave after 8 in the morning. I join Smanga on the floor, as soon as my head hits the pillow I fall asleep. Njabulo wakes me around 4 they need to leave and fetch their bags. There are no taxis around this time, so I force him to take my car. I wake Smanga up, we bath. Then I wake her sisters while they are bathing, I am packing. I want to support Joyce even though she's annoying, she needs my support right now. At 7 we have already had breakfast. Njabulo and his brothers walk in after 10 minutes, they eat. While they are eating, I'm organizing a trailer for the bags. I ask Njabulo to drive. I sit in the passenger's seat, his sisters behind us. Simon and Mpilo are sitting at the boot. I'm praying we aren't stopped by traffic cops. We leave at 9.

We stop at 4 garages for food and the bathroom, 8 hours later we're at Joyce's gate. She lives in KwaMashu, never been to this place. We enter her house, all eyes on me. God I won't get used to this. There are people where Joyce is so we wait. Njabulo asks me if I want take a walk. I tell him to go ahead, I'll sit here. After 20 minutes they leave, her siblings are nowhere to be seen. So I enter alone. I put my R200 on the saucer; I greet her with a hug. I ask how she's holding up, she's holding back tears. I tell her to cry and I hold her, and when she does. I can't stop myself I join her. After some time she thanks me. We sit there in silence until she shows me her daughter's pictures. She was an adorable 10 year old. Too sad her future was taken away from her so quick. I tell her that if she needs anything, she can tell me. I leave when some family walks in and they start crying. This is too sad. I leave and find Njabulo standing with a very cute girl. I just decide to sit down I don't want to disturb him. When he sees me he waves me over, I join him. He introduces me to the girl, she's Nobuhle his ex. He introduces me to her as his girlfriend, I can't help but smile.

## **Chapter 12**

My parents have been calling me non-stop so I decided to switch off my phone. They always have family meetings without me, so why change that now? It's 4am and already people are up and cooking, do these people ever rest. I am sharing the room with Njabulo's 3 sisters and 4 cousins there's no space. They wanted me to have the bed since I am the guest but I refused. So I slept on

the floor with Njabulo's sisters. I need to bath, so I wake Smanga up to ask her to help me I need warm water and a bath tub. I am a visitor, I can't be walking around here as if I own the place. So Smanga leaves to fetch water for me. She comes back with water in a bucket plus a plastic tub. I take a bath and change to the grey dress Njabulo bought me. When I was packing I came across lot of clothes I don't wear, some of them still have price tags so I don't know what to tell Smanga when I give her the clothes, I don't want her thinking I look down on her or that she's some charity case, I only bought 4 dresses with me.

"Smanga would you like to have this dress, I never wore it" I turn to Smanga holding a black maxi dress across my chest.

"Oh *yebo* (yes) *sisi* I would love to" she smiles and hugs me.

"Do you have other clothes, you no longer want" asks Phindile.

"Yes, here" I answer her while looking through my bag.

"Here you go" I hand her one dress. I also give Sweetness the dress, I'll give Joyce the 4<sup>th</sup> one, I hope she'll like it. After taking a bath, I walk to Joyce's bedroom. I knock she answers. It's 4:36am. Gosh the last time I was up at this time was on my wedding day.

"Good morning *sisi* how are you holding up?" I ask her. Never been to a funeral before, so I googled what to say and what not to say to a grieving parent.

"Morning to you too, I'm not so good. I wish I hadn't left here. I should've taken her with me. My heart is sore" she replies.

"I'm so sorry, I wish I could help" well I didn't google that answer.

I really feel bad for her, even though she was nasty.

"I bought you something, I hope you'll like and it will brighten your day" I tell her and give her the dress. For the first time ever, I see her smiling. Such a beautiful smile pity she doesn't look like she smiles too often.

"Well I was just checking up on you" I tell her, I suck at making conversations, I just want to leave now.

"This means the world to me, thank you so much. Even when I was nasty to you, you still helped me. I am sorry for acting that way" she replies.

"No, it's cool" I tell her and leave. I miss Njabulo I last saw him last night around 8. When I leave Joyce's bedroom I bump into him, I take his hand and lead him outside.

"I missed you" I tell him as soon as we're outside. "Missed you more" he tells me while hugging me. Oh boy I love Njabulo *yazini*.

"How are you, how did you sleep?" he asks. "I'm good thanks, I slept well. *Wena?*" I ask him. "I hardly slept, but I'm okay. Thank you for the support. I will repay you the money you used for the plane ticket and the extra R500 you gave Joyce for the taxi as soon as I can" he tells me.

"Nah it's cool. You paid the driver that day I forgot to" I tell. He's still hugging me. I think I'm getting used to being hugged. "I love you" he tells me kissing my forehead. There goes my heart.

"I love you too" I tell him.

"I have to go. I'll see you later" he tells me then he walks out with some guy I'm assuming is his cousin. I go inside and I find the sisters and cousins already preparing breakfast, I join them and before we know it. It's 7am. Joyce's husband walks in, smiling and he sees Smanga the smiled is wiped off his face and he disappears to the bedroom. Joyce's neighbours are coming for *ukududuza*. I serve them tea and biscuits. Njabulo's siblings are really good at cooking hey. Their mother must be proud. Speaking about their mother, I haven't seen their parents. This is strange. We're busy serving people I don't see Mcebo and his family coming in. Smanga is trying to distract Mcebo until I leave the room but it's too late. I feel tears in my eyes. I can't help but think about the cruel things he said and to make things worse he remembers me. If we met under different circumstances and in a different place I wasn't going to be polite. "Hello, Mcebo how have you been?" I ask him.

"Been good thanks. Didn't your parents tell you? I got married 4 months back. Meet my beautiful wife, Selinah" he says pointing to a very beautiful lady with a model body. Hmmm she's so beautiful.

"Oh you're so beautiful. I am Mbali, nice to meet you" I tell her shaking her hand. I mean she's beautiful.

"Oh so you're Mbali. Now I see why Mcebo left you at the altar" she had to say that. I don't say anything I just take the tray back to the kitchen. There are people who still need to be served. When I return with the biscuits and tea, Mcebo and his wife refuse to take them. His family does, his parents and his 2 sisters. After an hour they leave, I'm so relieved. We're taking a break, there's no one. We were so busy we forgot that Joyce hasn't eaten anything. Phindile prepares something for her. They are close, they are also 9 months apart. I miss Njabulo but I am lazy to switch my phone on. Smanga hurries towards me handing me her phone. *Pheew* it's Njabulo. We talk for 10 minutes and it's never enough. We never talk for 10 minutes but it's busy I understand. I hate it when we have to hang up. I always feel like crying. I'm relieved no one told him about Mcebo don't want him worrying about me. I'm a big girl now. At least I saw him maybe I'll get over the pain. Even though I have been rejected all my life, it still hurt to be left at the altar, even by a stranger.

At least it's not that busy in the morning and during the day because most people are at work. The food is ready for family members. It's a little after 10 and Joyce's parents aren't here and I'm really curious now. Maybe they don't get along. We decide to go stay with Joyce since she's

currently alone. She talks about her kid, it's heart breaking. We've been sitting with her for an hour when 2 people walk in. They're their parents. Njabulo looks so much like his mom, body wise he takes after his father. His mom is very tall 5 '9 I think with greying hair, brown eyes slender like all her children, she must be in her early 60s or late 50s, light in complexion. His dad is also tall 6 '2 I think with greying hair, he's also slender with brown eyes. So I take that as my queue to leave. I am sitting outside alone just thinking about Njabulo when Mcebo and his wife join me. She talks about herself, Mcebo's wealth and her looks. Beauty with no brains, I wonder how Mcebo survives. She's 5 '3 with blonde weave, flat stomach, hips, big bums and breasts. I feel sorry for such girls, she depends on her looks so much it even hurts, not because I'm not beautiful. But what if something happens and her looks are no longer there. What's she going to depend on? I mean she doesn't have a business not even a small tuck shop. At least I have my qualifications something I can always depend on no matter what. You can't depend on looks and marriage. People get old, some change and leave you. But I rest assured that no matter what my qualifications will never ever leave me. We sit there listening to her talk, I can tell that Mcebo's embarrassed by her stupidity. I love the colour of her lip stick even though I don't wear makeup.

"I love the colour of your lip stick" I tell her.

"I can always borrow you" she replies.

"Oh no thanks. I don't wear makeup" she looks so surprised.

"Why?"

"I just like being natural no makeup, no fake hair no offence"

"None taken sweetheart". We go mute for some time. She borrows Mcebo's car keys she wants to drive around.

"You know, I never had the chance to actually know you. I mean your age, what you do for a living and stuff like that" Mcebo tells me after 30 minutes of sitting there in silence. I am so surprised, where's this coming from now? "Me too all I knew is that you are rich. That's what my family told me" I tell him.

"Oh yeah?" he asks really surprised. "Yup" I reply popping the p. I decide to switch my phone on. There are no missed calls or voicemail messages from my family. I guess they decided to give me a break. I check my emails. There's nothing. I decide to check my results and I passed with distinctions gosh this is great. I call Njabulo immediately as soon as he answers I tell him the good news. "Oh baby I am so proud of you..." he's about to continue when his brother calls him in the background saying it's urgent.

"Go" I tell him, he tells me we'll talk when he comes back. "So you're a student. Which subject are you rewriting?" that's Mcebo. Oh boy I love it when people look down on me. "Yes, I am a student. I wasn't rewriting any subject" I tell him, still looking at my phone. "Yoh you have time dear, I

didn't go back to school when I failed my Grade 9. School is useless. I am beautiful so I can actually use that" This girl is stupid, I'm just too speechless to say anything. So I keep quiet. "What do you do for a living?"

"I am a freelance writer. You?" I ask her.

"What's a freelance writer? I am a model. For some company in Durban"

"That's great" I don't know what to say to her.

"Sisi can I borrow your car key. I think I forgot my shoes" that's Smanga. I give her the keys. The look on Mcebo and Selinah faces when they see the logo on the keys. "You drive a Mercedes? Selinah looks surprised. Which model? Hmmm 2002 I bet" I don't answer her I just go mute. Smanga returns with the keys. Mcebo's phone rings and he answers it, he takes Selinah's hand and they leave. I'm busy texting Njabulo when Mcebo returns, to ask me to accompany them. They ran out of petrol. Because there's nothing to do, I decide to accompany them. I smile when I see Selinah standing in front of an old Mercedes, waiting for me. I walk past her. Oh the look they have on their faces when they see my machine is priceless. I get that all the time. A 23 year old with a Mercedes SUV. I get on the driver's seat and wait for the 2 to recover and get in. "Is this your car?" Mcebo asks.

*Yes duuh dummy*

"Yes" I reply with a smile. I ask for directions.

"Kanti what were you writing?" that's Selinah.

"My Masters exam" I tell her, I hope she knows what that is *hahaha*. I think I'm getting nasty by the day. "Masters?" she asks clearly confused. Her husband explains what that is to her.

"I thought you only have matric like your sisters"

"You thought wrong." I don't know what more to say to them. Mcebo is asking many questions as if he doesn't believe me. I wait for them outside some gate for 10 minutes and they return with a plastic I hope the plastic don't have anything illegal. We drive back Mcebo is busy questioning me. When we get to Joyce's house, I hear voices people shouting at each other. So since I'm not family I return to my car and wait there. After about an hour Njabulo comes to the car. I've never seen him this angry, I'm even scared. So we just sit there in uncomfortable silence. He will tell me when he's ready. Smanga is walking towards the car crying. So I go to her to cry and console her. She's trying to explain why she is crying but I can't hear anything so I tell her to calm down first, she'll explain later. We just stand there. Once she has calmed down she explains the situation. Bonga, Joyce's husband has not been paying their insurance policy so their insurance won't help them, and they don't have that kind of money. The whole funeral will cost about R15 000 excluding groceries and transport and both the families only have R7 000. Yoh this is bad and Joyce is thinking of borrowing money from a loan shark. This is bad. Why did Bonga stop paying

something so important? I have the kind of money, but I can't offer they have to ask me first. I don't want them thinking I'm looking down on them. "What did Mcebo say? He has businesses, can't she borrow the money from him?" I ask her. "I doubt Mcebo doesn't help people even if they are family, I'll tell Joyce to ask him" "Okay please get back to me". This is a mess no wonder Njabulo is this mad. I go back to him, he's still silent. We just stay there.

This is getting too much. "Are you okay?" I turn to him and what I see breaks my heart. He has tears in his eyes. I just open the door and run to his side. I just hold him. Njabulo is always smiling and laughing seeing him like this breaks my heart. I just hold him and we stay like that for like 5 minutes. Phindile comes to fetch him, there's another family meeting which takes almost 3 hours. This is bad. I'm hungry now, so I go inside to tell him that I wanna go grab a bite. But he tells me to dish and eat, there's enough food. I can hear Joyce crying. This is bad. What kind of a husband and father does that? I dish up rice and cooked potatoes and I take my plate outside. While I'm sitting there, I see everyone leaving except for her parents and siblings. Soon after her parents and brothers leave, Phindile asks me join them. I am done eating so I wash the dishes and join them. Bonga is still there, the air is too thick with tension. Joyce is constantly glancing his way, there's going to be a double funeral here I tell you.

"What are we going to do?" asks Bonga. The nerve of this guy. Joyce just keeps quiet. It doesn't feel right this is a family matter I stand up and head for the door, when Joyce stops me. "What's wrong?" she asks.

"Oh nothing I just feel that this is a private matter" "No you can stay, dear." she then turns to inform her husband that I am the one who bought her plane ticket and gave her the taxi fare. He doesn't say thank you instead he asks about my car. So I just ignore him. I text Njabulo asking if he's okay. He says he's okay he'll call as soon as he can. It's 3:30 I ask if we still need to cook, but Smanga says no, the food is enough. I don't like plain potatoes but I can't be picky right now. I'll go buy a meal. I want meat man. I excuse myself, Smanga asks to come with. Eish I feel bad, she'll think I look down on them because they eat potatoes. So I explain the situation to her and I'm relieved that she understands. We go to the nearest KFC, but I feel bad once we get there. I buy 2 buckets of KFC with the plan to come back tomorrow for meat shopping. I don't think I can live without coffee and meat. When we get to the car 3 girls asks to take pics by the car. They take longer, but I wait I don't want to sound rude. After more than 5 minutes they thank me and leave. I drive to Joyce's place. The house is full with neighbours so we decide to leave the meat at the car we'll fetch it later. The cousins are already serving the guest tea and biscuits. The last guest leaves after 10pm. This is crazy. Njabulo is not back I try to call him and it goes straight to voicemail. I send Smanga to fetch the meat, we dish up and join the others in Joyce's bedroom. They all thank me for the meal. We wash the dishes and prepare to sleep, but they're scared to leave Joyce alone. So Phindile goes to her room. I try to call Njabulo one more time it's voicemail. It's late for me to call Bobo, I'll call him in the morning. I fall asleep as soon as my head hits the pillow. I'm so tired. I waken up by someone shaking me. It's Njabulo oh God at least he's okay I was worried about him. He takes me outside. "Where were you?" I ask him. "We went home and

tried to contact any one wh could help, but people are broke right now. We managed to get R500 imagine. Joy's body is still at the government mortuary. I had R2 000. I don't know what to do anymore"

"What about Mcebo?"

"He says he can't help us" "I thought he's loaded"

"Mcebo doesn't help anyone. We tried him first, he said he doesn't have money right now. He will have it next week" I don't know what to say honestly. So I just keep quiet.

"As much as I like keeping you here you have to sleep. You had a long day. I'll see you in the morning" he tells me then kisses my forehead.

"I don't want to go sleep" I tell him using my best sad face. "*Hahaha*, okay let's stay a little longer then" he tells me. He takes the nearest chair he sits down and puts me on his lap.

"I love you, you know that right?" he tells me out of the blue. "Always know that I'd never do what Bonga did to Joyce and their child. I'll always protect you".I don't know what to say. He's talking about kids, clearly he has long terms plans for us.

"I love you more Njabulo. I like the fact that you talked about kids" I feel tears and I don't want to cry over this when there are serious matters right now. "I love you Mbali, I'd never hurt you on purpose. Never forget that" I just kiss his head. He sounds tired. "Go sleep, I'll see you in the morning" I kiss his forehead one more time. I go straight to sleep. I wake up at 4am again, I wake Smanga up. We bath then cook potatoes AGAIN. I go to check on Joyce, she's not so good. How do I tell her that I'll help her, even if she doesn't pay me back it's okay. It looks like she'll take forever to pay me.

"There's something, I need to ask you. Please don't take it the wrong way." I'm scared to go on. "Mbali tell me"

"I can help with the funeral."

"Oh no Mbali you already spent so much on me"

"You can repay me"

"I can't"

"Please" I am begging her don't know why.

"Please take it. You'll repay me"

"*Eish* I don't want you to think I am taking advantage of you"

"You're not"

"Let me see how my parents go"

"Okay no problem, I'll come by later" I leave, if she won't accept cash, then she won't want me to buy food here. So I won't tell her. I ask Smanga to check what is needed. There's only rice, maize meal and potatoes. After cooking and eating breakfast, Smanga and I go shopping. She feels uncomfortable. I'm just trying to help. So we go to the nearest Mall to buy groceries. After almost 3 hours we head home. We take the groceries inside. I find Njabulo talking with his ex. I greet her and go inside, Njabulo and Mpilo bring the rest of the food. Joyce calls me to her bedroom. Her parents and in-laws are there. I greet them and wait for them to say something since they are the ones who called me here even though I know why.

"*Nkosazana* (girl or princess), we talked to Joyce and she told us that you offered to help us, and that you're the one who bought her the plane ticket and gave her the taxi fare. We decided to take the money you're offering with the promise to pay it back with interest" Njabulo's dad tells me. "*Cha* (no) I am helping Joyce because I want to. She can repay me whenever she can with no interest. I am helping out a fellow woman" I tell them. "I'm sure Joyce would do the same"

"When can you organise the money and how much" asks Bonga's father, well I'm just assuming. "How much do you need?"

"Hmmm how much do we need" he asks Joyce.

Joyce gives me some paper with a quotation. "I can go to the bank and arrange with them now" I tell them.

"Can you get all the money right now?" they all asked clearly shocked. I have been working since 2nd year and I had a bursary paying for everything, so I saved a lot of money. I earn a lot of money since I work for 3 major newspapers. My monthly expense cost R20 000. "Yes, I can" "How much do you earn" they ask really surprised. I'm not going to answer that. They need R20 000 and I'll give them. I take Njabulo with this time, he doesn't agree with this, but I really don't mind. I help them.

## Chapter 13

It's Monday, time to leave. The funeral went really well. Yesterday I helped with the blankets. Don't know why we should wash blankets the day after the funeral. I say goodbye to Njabulo and his family with the promise to tell them when I get home. Before getting in the car the whole family hugs me including Joyce's in-laws. I needed to talk with Njabulo alone but I can't tell his parents that. I leave at 10 am and I get to the apartment 7 hours later, tired as hell. I'll go home tomorrow night.

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I leave the apartment at 7pm hoping the meeting is over, they told me to get home a week ago. But when I get home, I see so many cars. Is there a party and I wasn't invited *hahaha* as if I'd come. I walk in and judging by the looks on their faces there's something wrong here. Nobuhle's

in-laws are the funniest people ever I didn't know they knew how to be serious. Imagine going home hoping to relax but no the family decides to drop a bomb on me.

*Eeh banna* I can't believe my ears, Richard is divorcing Nobuhle and my family blames me because Richard says he sometimes wishes she was educated and independent like me, I mean what is wrong with that. Am I not supposed to be praised for studying my butt off and wanting to work hard for everything I want and have? My parents will hate me worse so I just stay throughout the meeting even though I know I'm not wanted but they were busy calling me. Can't believe they summoned me home because Richard praised me.

I miss Njabulo but I'll have to wait I hate it when people are busy on their phone while they are not alone. My phone vibrates on my pocket, I know it's a whatsapp text it must be Bobo because Njabulo doesn't have whatsapp and he HATES it.

*Bobo: Hey biatch. I haven't heard from you in a very long time. I miss you. My hubby says hi.*  
Okay I don't get why people call each other bitch and seems okay. I'm just offended. I also find it strange when someone uses the word fuck like it's a normal thing, but maybe it is. I know Bobo means well.

*Me: Can't talk righ now, I'm in a family meeting. I will call you as soon as I can.*  
I'm busy day dreaming, I don't see Nobuhle jumping at Richard cause he's been watching me the whole time. Both families turn towards me with suspicious looks. Oh no they don't think Richard and I are having an affair right? But before I can even ask what's up Nobuhle slaps me so hard I see stars. I'm just too shocked to react. I don't know what I have ever done to my parents and sisters I don't deserve how they treat me. Once I recover I take my bag and leave cause if I stay. It won't end well.

"Where do you think you're going little girl" that's my mom. I don't answer her I just walk towards the car.

*Paaaah* another slap, I unlock the car get in and drive off. I've had enough. I will stop supporting them until I get an apology plus Nobuhle will be back home. She won't have a place to stay since she's unemployed. I'm so mad, I'm even crying, never been so mad in my life. This is too much. I get to the apartment, switch my phone off then I go straight to bed. I wake up the next day, switch on my phone. There are about 7 voice messages and 56 texts, from my family, Njabulo and Bobo. I don't feel like talking to anyone, so I switch it off take a bath and go straight to bed. I wake up 5 hours later with a grumbling stomach. There's a loud knock on the door, I'm going to pretend I'm not home. So I just make the bed and walk to the lounge. I'm too tired to talk or do anything. I'm too lazy to even eat and that has never happened before. Whoever was banging on my door has stopped so I decide to listen to music. I switch on the phone there are new 5 texts and 3 missed calls from Njabulo. I don't want to talk to anyone not even him for the first time ever. When I'm

about to switch the phone off he calls. Let me just pick up so he knows I'm okay and he'll stop annoying me.

"Hello" I answer.

"My God, *maZwide* are you okay?" he asks me sounding relieved.

"I'm okay" "You don't sound okay. What's up?" he asks worried.

"I said I'm okay. What do you want Njabulo?" I ask feeling irritated now. I don't have time for this.

"*Haw Mbali*, I'm just worried about you" I know it's not fair but if my own family doesn't care about me then why would other people care. I mean I've known Njabulo, Melusi and Bobo for less than a year, they might be pretending. If my own blood hates me so much, why do they care? It doesn't make sense I don't think I can do this.

"Njabulo, I can't do this. Whatever we have going on needs to stop, we need to cut ties. It was nice knowing you" I tell him and hang up. I'll miss him but like they say time heals I hope it does. He calls me and stops after 5 missed calls. Just when I start to relax Bobo calls so I need to cut ties with them. I'm too tired to talk but let me just do it now.

"Hello" I answer.

"What's up. Njabulo just called. I thought you were okay? Why did..." he doesn't even get to finish the sentence. I disturb him.

"Bobo I'm sorry I can't do this. I need to cut ties with you guys. It's for the best" I tell him and hang up. I switch off my phone because I know they will call. I call in one of the guards and ask them not to let anyone in. Not even my parents he nods and leave. I don't have enough food, but I'll make a plan.

I decide to go to sleep. I fall asleep as soon as my head hits the pillow. I wake the next day. I don't know whether to switch my phone off or not. I really want to see if Njabulo tried to contact me but then I'm scared what if he didn't. I need to change my number. I call one of the guards and ask him to buy some groceries for me. He agrees I give him the list and money. Varsity opens in 3 weeks, I don't need to go out before then. An hour later the guy whom I don't even know his name comes back with everything on the list. I thank him and give R500 to say thanks. Oh I just remembered I need to cancel the debit order for the DSTV at home plus the money I send my parents every month. I can't be supporting them when they always make feel small and not good enough.

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For the 3 weeks I don't leave the apartment, but I need to go to campus, I'm scared I might bump into Njabulo or Bobo even though they live a little far from here. I changed my digits so we don't communicate. I lost so much weight but I'll have to be strong. I ran out of food. I decide to go out, I'll need to go out at some point. So I get into the car and leave. I buy food as quickly as I can so that I don't bump to anyone. I'm relieved when I get into the car and I haven't bumped to anyone. I miss Njabulo so much it hurts, but I need to be strong, it's not the end of the world. I just think

I'm not meant to be happy. At the robots I see Bobo and Mel in their car on my right, they just ignore me. I know I cut ties with them but it hurts. I roll down the window, the robot is red. "Hey guys" I greet them with a smile, really happy to see them. They just nod and continue with their conversation. This is really my fault hey, but it hurts so much. When the robot turns green they drive off like nothing happened. I messed up, I'll go home and sleep like I've been doing for the past 3 weeks.

## Chapter 14

It's been a month and I haven't spoken to anyone not even my family. The guard told me that a lady came by looking for me. When I asked what she looked like. He described Nobuhle. I hope she doesn't want to move in with me. I'm used to my own space and after she accused me of having an affair with Richard I can't have her here. Well she didn't really say that but her actions told me that. I don't want anyone here. I just want some peace and quiet. I miss Njabulo but I have to live with my decision. Let me just sleep. That's all I ever do lately I just sleep.

*Ping ping* who's sending me an email now? I'll check it when I wake up.

I'm waken up by my phone. There's an incoming call, who could be calling me? I take the phone, it's my editor. Something is up she usually send an email.

"Hello"

"Hello, Mbali, I hope you're well I sent you an email earlier you haven't replied. You missed 2 deadlines in the past 2 weeks. So I'm calling to check if you're okay?"

Oh shit I totally forgot about the 2 research articles I had to submit. My God I'm in shit.

"Eeh. I'm so sorry I haven't been feeling well for some time. Work totally slipped my mind." I reply.

"It's okay I'll let it slide because you've never missed a deadline before"

"Thank you so much"

"You welcome. Got to go" she hangs up. I decide to check my emails and there's nothing new. I decide to go out. I need some air. But when I'm at the gate, Nobuhle is standing there with her 3 year old annoying daughter. I just pass them. I don't need drama right now. I just want to go out. I've been driving around for some time now, not looking where I am going and I find myself at Njabulo's place. He's sitting outside with Bobo and Melusi they are laughing so hard, I wonder what they are discussing. They stop laughing when they see me. Their faces turn sour, Bobo the dramatic one says something to Njabulo he nods and he goes inside Njabulo's house. I don't know what to say. I get off the car and walk towards them, they are busy discussing whatever as if they didn't see me coming.

"Hello guys" I greet them. They just nod in return. I didn't plan on coming here so I don't know what to say to them and by the looks of things, they don't want to say anything either. Bobo comes out and sit down never acknowledging my presence it hurts.

"Njabulo can I talk to you" I ask him hoping Mel and Bobo will give us some privacy. Since when did they become so close? Njabulo doesn't say anything. I wait for him to say something, he doesn't say anything. This is embarrassing and awkward I want to leave but I want to stay. I honestly don't know what to do. They chat as if I'm not there.

"Njabulo please"

"Mbali I have nothing to say honestly, you decided to cut ties with me. I tried to call you but you changed your digits. Joyce was trying to reach you for the past 2 weeks. She found a way to repay you. Can you please contact her as soon as you can" he replies not looking at me.

"Bobo can we talk" I turn to Bobo if he forgives me then I'll ask him to talk to Njabulo for me.

"I have nothing to say to you Mbali. You decided you wanted nothing to do with us. Why change now?" he asks also not looking at me. Melusi is my last hope.

"Mel..." I don't even get to finish his name. Bobo jumps in.

"No, Melusi is not going to talk to you. You said what you wanted and we respected your wish. Please respect ours" Bobo replies looking at me this time. I must've touched a very sensitive spot by talking to Mel. So I leave, with the hope that they will stop me, like they do in movies, but I'm afraid this isn't a movie. I keep turning but they are busy laughing at whatever it is they find funny.

I drive home, Nobuhle is still by the gate with her child. I pass them, she keeps calling my name I ignore her. I can't deal with her, not now when this whole thing is still fresh. I walk to the apartment and I make a cup of coffee. I take my phone out of the pocket and the cup to the couch. I call Joyce.

*Ring ring* she picks up after 2 rings.

"Joyce hello" she answers.

"Hello sisi, this is Mbali"

"Oh Mbali, thank you for calling me back. I have been calling you for the past 2 weeks. Njabulo also said he doesn't know where you are. I find a way to pay you back but I'm afraid I'll have to pay you in installments" she tells me.

"Oh no it's okay sisi. Whenever you can. I'll wait" I tell her.

"How are you by the way" she asks sincerely.

"I'm okay thanks. How have you been?" I ask.

"Been good thanks. The family sends their love. Please send me your banking details"

"Okay I will"

We say our goodbyes and hang up. I sms her the banking details. Few seconds later there's a message it must be the banking notification sms. I read it, R2 000 was deposited to my account by Njabulo. Just seeing his name makes my heart sore. I made my bed and now I got to lay in it. I still have his pictures and our pictures. This is torture but I can't delete them. It will be a reminder of what I lost.

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Since I called Joyce three months ago I was hoping Njabulo will text or call me but he hasn't. They have made 3 payments. They have paid R6 000. I still cry over what I threw away. I haven't been

in contact with my family. Nobuhle stopped coming over 3 days ago. The guards would call and say that she's asking for me. My parents came by the other day, when I was going out for groceries, I ignored them. I've had enough. I miss Njabulo, Bobo and Mel so much but I'm scared to contact them. Maybe Njabulo has moved on, that thought breaks my heart. I must've hurt them. Today is Saturday they are probably home. I need to talk to Njabulo then I'll go to Bobo's place. I take a bath and wear the dress Njabulo bought me with my white sandals. I drive to his place, there's a 3 room house, the shack is no longer there. I go to the door and knock. Some lady answers, I don't know her my heart feels heavy. But I hear Bobo laughing and then I hear Smanga's voice. How I missed her. I walk in all Njabulo's siblings are here. He looks so happy without me.

"Hey guys" I greet them. As soon as Smanga sees me her face brightens, she rushes over to me and pulls me into a tight hug. "I missed you" she tells me.

"I missed you too" I hold her tight imagining it was Njabulo not her. Joyce also comes over for a hug and the next thing I know all the siblings hug me even Mpilo and Simon Njabulo's brothers. But Bobo, Mel, Njabulo and the new girl are watching TV. So Njabulo bought a TV, I thought he doesn't like it. But here he is watching and laughing totally ignoring me. He must've told the siblings because they are acting awkward. Oh no this can't be his new girl. It's been what 4 months and he has moved on?

"Who are you?" I ask the girl. She looks to shock to answer.

"I asked you a question. Who the fuck are you?" I didn't know I could swear until now. Everyone is starring me like I'm crazy or something.

I turn to Njabulo. "I've been gone for like what 5 months and you replace me like I was never there" I raise my voice something I've never done before. Njabulo just ignores me. Making me super mad. I turn to Smanga hoping she'll answer me but she looks scared, or maybe guilty.

"Smanga who's this?" I ask her pointing at the girl. She just shakes her head indicating that she doesn't know her.

"Joyce who's this?" she also shakes her head. I ask the whole house. They all go mute.

"I've had enough of your drama. You decided to leave me no one forced you. You can't come here and question us like that. We don't owe you an explanation. You can leave now like you did 4 months ago" that's Njabulo. His words hurts so much I came here to fix things not to ruin them forever.

"Guys I'm sorry you guys know what I've been through. It's just that sometimes it's hard to believe that someone cares" they still ignore me. Discussing the movie they are watching like I'm not even there.

Njabulo finally answers. "You can't use that excuse forever. We never treated you like your family. We were always there. I told you every day that you're beautiful. I fought for you, stood up for you when you couldn't we all did. But you decided to turn your back on us. So what if I moved on. Maybe I found someone who'll love me enough to stick with me like I always stick with her. I never gave you a reason to doubt me. I almost lost my brother because I chose you over them.

Remember that day at the Zoo I was ready to walk out because they mistreated you. But now I'm happy you talked some sense into me. Sometimes love is never enough I guess that's why you left me hanging like that"

"Can I have one more chance guys?" I ask them after some times. "I'm sorry for the way I acted" "Those are the words we've been waiting for you stupid girl" Bobo stands up and walk towards me with a smile. We hug, Mel joins us. Njabulo also walks towards me taking my hand leading the way to other room.

"Don't do anything I wouldn't do" Bobo calls from behind. We walk into the room he locks the door.

"I have something to show you. That girl is not my girlfriend. I only have eyes for you." he tells me while opening a safe. He takes out some cash." I was waiting for you come back so I can send delegates to your house. I want us to get married as soon as possible"

Am I dreaming. What is he saying to me? I jump sending him to the floor. We just laugh I can't believe this is happening. Hope my parents won't cause any drama.

"Thank you so much" I tell him planting kisses all over his face. My God this is really great.

### **One year later**

Two months ago there was *umemulo* and *umkhehlo* ceremonies that are done by the husband to be, before the actual wedding ceremony.

Today is my wedding day.

"Never thought we'd live to see this day" that's my mom. I just ignore her. I am just happy that I am getting married. Njabulo is a traditional person. There won't be a white wedding. We'll have a Zulu Traditional Wedding. So it means I have to be bare breasted I didn't like that part but Njabulo insisted I'm so uncomfortable. But because I'm a virgin I have to be bare breasted. I just hope *ngeke ngigide* more than 2 hours

It's going to be a long day. So much has happened in the past year. Nobuhle moved back home even though my parents didn't want her to because she disgraced them. She wanted to stay with me but I said no. She's a cashier at PnP at Lenasia. There's nothing with being a cashier but I told her about the importance of Education she didn't want to hear anything, she just wanted to get married. They are no longer close with Nonjabulo. She's been trying to get close to me since that day but no thank you. We hired a venue Njabulo has the biggest family ever. We drive to the venue and the wedding ceremony starts.

*There goes my heart.*

I never thought this day will come. I've never been so happy. Finally met my prince charming and I'm now I'm getting married to him. I'm just happy they didn't give up on me. Nobuhle says it's wrong to marry during the honey moon stage in a relationship, cause they got married during that stage with Richard this is not Richard.

It's really sunny. I'm ready I walk out with my cousins since I need to be accompanied by someone. I was never part of my sisters' wedding so they're not part of mine, simple as that. *Isidwaba* is so heavy but I'll do this for my handsome and loving husband and my supportive in-laws. Joyce managed to pay back all the money, divorced her stupid husband, she moved back home. Smanga is currently staying with Njabulo, I'm also moving to his place. But first I'll go to his parents place for *ukukotiza* (to perform my bridal duties, like cooking and cleaning) he was against that but I honestly don't mind. His parents seem like good people. It's time for *ukugida*. I am carrying *icansi* (Zulu mat) and *ihawu* (buckler or shield) *ngiyagida* (traditional dance) towards *umnikazi wesgcawu*. I am enjoying this now forgetting that I am not wearing anything to cover my breast. People are cheering, Njabulo is grinning at me like I'm the most beautiful girl in the world. He's been telling me that but I still find it hard to believe till now. When I am done, we go back to the tent I am so tired but it was worth it. This is not the first time I've done this. This is like the second traditional wedding.

It's 5PM now the ceremony ended an hour ago. I was with my mom, grandmom and Nonjabulo are giving me advice on how to handle things in my household stuff I should've googled all of that they are just waiting my time. I want to be with my husband. I sat for an hour listening to them just rolling my eyes. They think they know it all. It's time to go to Hammarsdale to his parent's house, where he grew up. I can't wait. I hope his parents will love me. I am so tired can't even drive I have to beg Njabulo to drive my car. We leave at 6:30PM we get at his place just after midnight. I am so tired and I need a bath. This is our wedding night, we all know what's about to go down, but ey Njabulo doesn't even touch me. He puts me to bed kisses my forehead and tells me that he needs to fetch my stuff in the car. I feel rejected but I don't say anything. I just cry myself to sleep silently.

I wake up after 10 the next day. Shit I was supposed to be up before everyone. I take a quick bath in cold water no time to warm up the water it will take forever because I have to use the stove. I wear a long dress and a doek. I make the bed and rush off to the kitchen. I find everyone around the table eating and laughing. This is really embarrassing.

"*Sanibonani*" I greet them shyly.

"*Sawubona makoti*" they reply in unison with smiles on their faces like they practiced all of this. I just stand there.

"Don't just stand there, come sit down. I made you breakfast" says Njabulo opening a chair for me. I'm still mad at him for rejecting me like that. But I smile and sit down.

"How was your night" his mom smiles with a naughty smile. Oh My God did she really think I'd tell her if we have actually did that. This is really embarrassing but Njabulo comes to my rescue.

"Mom, you can't be asking Mbali that" he replies dead serious.

"Okay sorry. I'm just curious. I don't want to die before meeting my grandchildren. Be quick guys" she tells Njabulo and she winks at me.

Oh God I'm going to die. I was ready but I guess my husband wasn't. I feel tears in my eyes. I'm staring at my hands, Njabulo puts his large hand over mine and asks what's wrong. I just shake my head. Joyce passes me a bowl of porridge while eyeing Njabulo with an evil eye. I eat my breakfast and I excuse myself. They all think it's because his mom questioned me about my night. I assure them it's not. I walk to Njabulo's room to unpack I'll be spending 3 weeks here. Njabulo and I both took leaves. I unpack and clean the room, it's a little messy because of the boxes. After unpacking I boil water for another bath. Njabulo walks in just as I'm putting my shoes. "MaZwide what's wrong?" he asks me.

"Why didn't you touch me yesterday?" I ask looking at him in the eyes. I'm no longer that shy girl. I learnt to say things directly. That caught him off guards, because he choked on his saliva.

"I just thought you tired and needed to rest" he tells me.

"Okay but you should've asked" I tell him.

"I will next time" he walk towards me with a smile.

"Just how many children do you plan on having" he asks out of the blue.

Damn I didn't expect that. "As many as possible" I reply.

"Mind starting now" he asks out of the blue again.

"No, but aren't they going to hear us"

"Nope" he answers then he kisses me.

Three hours later, I wake up with a sore body and Njabulo's big hand over my waist. I'm just glad I waited for marriage.

**The End**



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