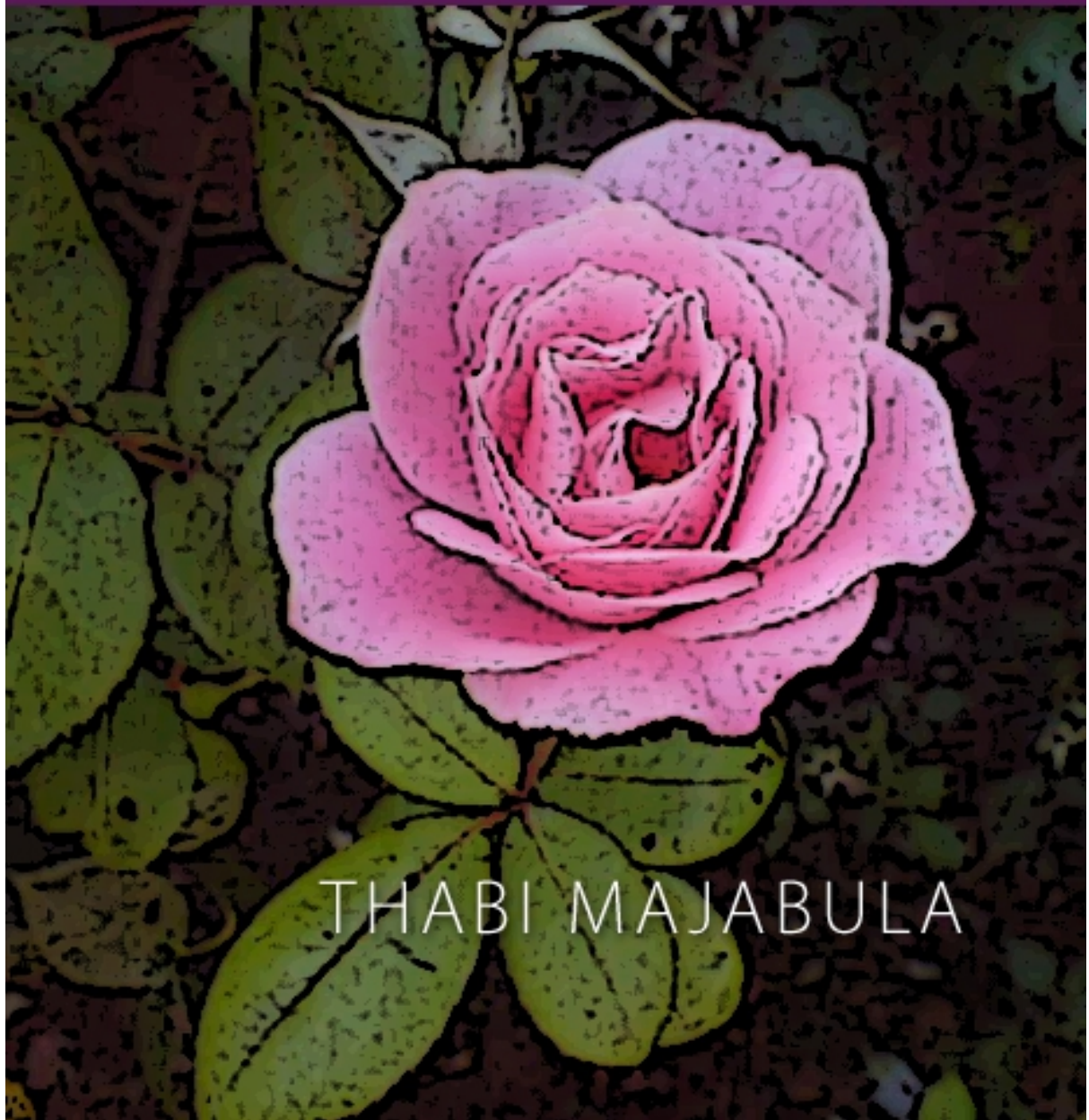


# LUNGILE'S SURPRISE



THABI MAJABULA

## **LUNGILE'S SURPRISE**

**by**

**Thabi Majabula**

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## CHAPTER ONE

Zach took off his sunglasses to get a better look at the woman at the door. She is divine, he thought. She was tall, about five foot nine, and light in complexion. Her body epitomised womanhood. She had an hour glass figure and breasts that he ached to touch. The flame red dress that she was wearing flattered her inviting curves.

He felt his body tighten as if he was a teenager again. He realised that his jaw had dropped. He closed his mouth quickly and focused on the vision of beauty before him. She had opened the door when Lwazi had rung the doorbell. Her eyes were on Lwazi. Zach noticed that Lwazi had inherited her mother's body shape, but there was no further resemblance.

His eyes fell on Ethel who was looking at the beautiful woman, with love. Zach looked from her to the woman who had inspired love in his child. She was smiling. Her mouth made him think of intimacies that he had no right to think about engaging in with a total stranger. She had beautiful white teeth. One of them was a little crooked. He smiled, it made her even more adorable.

She had beautiful dimples. If she smiled at him, there was nothing he would deny her. She was wearing red sandals. Her long hair was combed neatly in its natural state. Lwazi had told him that her parents were divorced.

He wondered if the beauty before him had found a man to replace the father of her children. He had every intention of becoming Lwazi's new father. He never rushed into relationships, yet here he was within seconds of laying eyes on Lwazi's mother, planning to be her husband.

Lu's heart warmed with love when she opened the door. She smiled at her younger child.

"Hi! How are you?" she greeted, making to hug Lwazi. Lwazi evaded the embrace. Lu lowered her arms, studying her. She looked sad and solemn, as usual. Lu always thought that the sadness marred Lwazi's young, beautiful face. Her heart squeezed in pain.

"I'm fine. How are you? I heard that you were ill?" said Lwazi.

"I wasn't ill, your sister exaggerates."

"How are you, really?"

"I'm fine," said Lu. Lwazi studied her closely and nodded.

"You remember my friend, Ethel?" she said. Lu noticed Ethel standing beside Lwazi and smiled.

"Hi Ethel," she said, hugging her.

"Hi Mama," said Ethel, returning the embrace. Lu released her and looked both girls over.

"You look like princesses. Come in," she said. She stepped back, the girls entered the house. Lu noticed a man behind them.

“Oh, hello,” she said. Her heart tripped over itself. She had never seen such a handsome man. She took a deep breath to calm herself.

“Hello,” the man returned, offering her his hand. She shook it. His handshake was warm and firm.

“Mama, that’s Ethel’s Baba, Zulu. Baba, this is Mama, MaKhumalo,” said Lwazi. Lu withdrew her hand from Zulu and invited him into her home.

She made to close the door.

“We’re going out again,” said Lwazi.

“You’ve just got here, aren’t you staying for lunch?” asked Lu, as her heart sank with disappointment.

“We are, but...”

“But what?”

“I’m sorry, I should have told you.”

“Told me what?” Lu asked as her heart thumped in fear. She would get Lwazi out of whatever trouble she was in.

“I invited some people over.” Lu felt her chest muscles start to relax.

“How many?” she asked, then she noticed Zulu watching her. He was so handsome!

“A few,” replied Lwazi.

“How can you not offer your friend’s father a seat? Sit down, Zulu. How many people did you invite, Lwazi?”

“Have a seat, Baba. Can we borrow your car?” Lwazi asked Zulu.

“Here are the keys,” said Zulu, handing them to her.

“We’ll be back now,” said Lwazi, leading Ethel out of the house.

“Lwazi, Lwazi...” called Lu, following the girls out of the house. They climbed into the car, and Lwazi drove off.

“It’s alright,” said Zulu. Lu turned to the house. The handsome man was standing at her open front door. She walked towards him.

“How can you lend her your car? What if she damages it?” she demanded. Her hand was pointing in the direction that the car had taken.

“She won’t,” said Zulu.

“I can’t afford to pay for a damaged car!” Lu could feel herself start to sweat. Her budget would be ruined and...

“You won’t have to,” said Zulu.

“I...”

“Come in, sit down.”

“What if she...” Lu felt a hand on hers. Zulu drew her into the house and led her to a seat in her lounge.

“Sit down,” he said. She sat down, then she stood to go to the kitchen. She got a glass and a drink, put them on a tray and took them to the lounge.

“Have a drink,” she said to Zulu, then she returned to the kitchen. She phoned Lwazi.

“We’re on our way back, Mama,” Lwazi said.

“How many people do I cater for?”

“Don’t worry.”

“Nolwazi!”

“About... about...twenty.”

“Nolwazi! I don’t have that kind of food here!”

“Don’t worry, it’s all taken care of,” Lwazi said, then she cut the call. Lu sighed in frustration.

“Hi,” she heard. She looked up from her cellphone. Zulu was in the kitchen with her. He was broad-built and tall, at least six foot three, dark in complexion, with a beard above and below his mouth. His cheeks were clean-shaven. The beard was black, his hair was peppered with grey. He had a beautiful mouth with full, kissable lips. His brown eyes were on her. He smelled good.

Stop it, she told herself. She forced herself to look at the pots on the stove. They did not have enough food for her guests.

”Hi,” she returned.

“Can I join you? I don’t want to sit all alone in the lounge.”

“Sit down.”

“Won’t you join me for a drink?”

“No, thanks, I have so much work to do. I thought I was only hosting Ethel and Lwazi, and now I hear I’ll be catering for half the township! I wish she would tell me these things!” Lu said, putting more meat on the stove. There was a silence as she cut tomatoes, onions and potatoes.

“Can I shell these peas for you?” she heard. She started and noticed Zulu.

“Yes, please, that would be great,” she said.

“You must be proud of Lwazi.”

“Right now, I want to strangle her. The people she’s invited will starve.”

“She’s a very good influence on Ethel.” Lu stopped what she was doing and looked at Zulu. He was focused on the peas.

“Did you just say Lwazi is a good influence?” she asked.

“If it hadn’t been for her, Ethel would have dropped out of school.”

“I see.”

“Lwazi’s pulled her through some rough patches. You and your husband must be proud of her.” Lu almost laughed at the reference to her husband and returned to work.

“I’m proud of her, but her father doesn’t know she exists,” she said.

“What do you mean?”

“If she or her sister died, he wouldn’t go to their funerals.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Maybe because I’m their mother and he hates me. Are you sure you meant my Lwazi?”

“Absolutely.”

Lu was quiet, going over Zulu’s words.

“I’m amazed that she’s a good influence...not that she’s a bad influence, it’s just that she’s so...unpredictable. I thought she was studying medicine, then I heard she’d changed to biophysics. Right now, I don’t know what she’s studying,” she said.

“She’s doing pharmacy, the same as Ethel. They’re both doing very well, mainly thanks to Lwazi.”

“How do you know that?”

“Ethel hasn’t a scientific atom in her makeup, Lwazi must be coaching her.” Lu sat down.

“Why do you look so amazed?” Zulu asked. Lu looked at him.

“I’m glad Lwazi’s helping Ethel. I’m amazed she’s capable of mentoring. She’s always been wild, but I don’t blame her. Her behaviour has always been understandable. She...she and her sister were traumatised by their father’s rejection.

“Their teenage years were hell on all three of us. Thandi calmed down some years back, but I’m afraid she’s too calm. Lwazi became wilder. I was glad she’d made the effort to apply to a university,” Lu said. She stood and attended to the pots.

The front door opened.

“We’re back! Mama, where are you?” called Lwazi.

“In the kitchen,” said Lu. Lwazi, Ethel and Thandi entered the kitchen.

“Hi Mama,” said Thandi.

“Hi,” said Lu, hugging her. Thandi returned the embrace, then she withdrew from Lu.

“This is Ethel’s Baba,” Lwazi said to her. Thandi and Zulu exchanged greetings.

“How can I help?” she asked.

“You can take Baba and Ethel to the lounge and entertain them,” said Lwazi.

“But...”

“Go. Mama and I need to talk.” Thandi looked between Lu and Lwazi, then she led the guests to the lounge. Lu turned the meat over, put the vegetables on the stove and started preparing the salad dressing. There was a long silence as she worked. Her mind was going wild.

Lwazi never wanted a moment alone with her. Was she pregnant? Had she decided to drop out of school? Was she on drugs? Was she... Calm down, Lu, let her speak, Lu said to herself. She took a deep breath.

“I’m listening,” she said. Still, there was no sound. She looked up from her work. Lwazi was seated dejectedly at the table. Lu wanted to hold her, but she knew that Lwazi would push her off.

“Your friend’s father says you’re doing pharmacy,” she said. Lwazi did not respond.

“Who else is coming?” Lu asked.

“Friends from school.”

“Will you get that stew off the stove for me?”

“Mama! You know I hate house work. I’ll go and get Thandi to help you,” Lwazi said. She took the stew off the stove, then she left the room. Lu frowned, wondering what she was upset about.

Thandi joined her, Lu sighed quietly. Thandi was on edge, she and her husband must have been fighting again.

“What can I do?” Thandi asked. Lu told her to cut the lettuce for the salad.

“You know I love you, Thandi,” she said. Thandi dropped the knife in her hand.

“Please can I move back in here?” she said. Lu looked at her, her eyes were closed and there were tears on her cheeks.

“Of course you can come back here,” Lu said. She dropped what she was doing and gathered Thandi into her arms. She wanted to take her child’s pain away, but she knew that she did not always have that power. Thandi started crying in earnest, clinging to Lu.

“What’s the matter?” asked Lwazi. Thandi cried harder. Lu noticed that Lwazi, Ethel and Zulu had joined her and Thandi.

“I’m getting divorced. He says it’s my fault that we don’t have children. I went for fertility testing, the doctors say I can have children, he thinks I paid them to say that,” replied Thandi. She raised her head from Lu’s shoulder and looked at her.

“Did you still love Baba when he sent us away?” she asked. Lu was thrown by the question.

“Yes,” she replied.

“Did you ever stop loving him?” Lu studied Thandi closely.

“Yes,” she said.

“When?”

“Thandi...”

“Tell me, please. I want to know if the pain goes away. Does it?”

“Eventually.”

“When did you stop loving Baba?”

“When he brought you back to me after you’d run away to him, and he told you...”

“He told us we weren’t his children and that he hated us.” Lu turned back to the cooking. She felt a hand on her forearm, Thandi was holding her and giving her a searching look.

“It still hurts you,” she said, then she put her arms round Lu. Lu breathed deeply, telling herself to be strong.

“It gets better, Thandi,” she said, then she returned to work.

“You know what?” said Thandi. Lu looked at her, she sounded optimistic.

“What?” asked Lu.

“The baby’s our excuse to divorce, the real reason is that I don’t like men.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you know that there are women who spend their lives with other women instead of men? And they can even get married to each other.”

“What are you saying?” asked Lu, her heart pounding.

“I’m coming to stay here until I find a place of my own. Next time I introduce you to my life partner, it will be a woman.”

“Thandi...”

“Don’t be scared, Mama, I’ll be careful.”



“Are you a lesbian?” asked Lwazi.

“Yes,” replied Thandi.

“That’s disgusting!”

“I used to think so too, till I got married to a man. I’d rather be lesbian and happy than heterosexual and miserable. I don’t know about your ex in-laws, Mama, but mine are evil. I think I’m lucky to be getting a divorce. If they’d had their way, they’d have killed me.”

“Sthandiwe!” gasped Lu.

“Please don’t disown me, Mama. You and Zi are the only family I have. Will you disown me, Zi?” asked Thandi.

“You know I won’t,” said Lwazi. Thandi looked at Lu, then she helped her into a seat.

“Don’t look like that, Mama,” she said.

“It’s my fault,” said Lu.

“Nothing is anyone’s fault,” said Thandi.

“If I wasn’t your mother...”

“If you weren’t our mother, we wouldn’t have been raised so well.”

“...your father wouldn’t have divorced me, you’d have a good image of men and your marriage would have worked.”

“That’s not necessarily true, Mama. Baba wanted that other woman, he’d have divorced whoever he’d been married to.”

“I offered to have her brought in as a second wife, he refused.”

“Don’t cry, Mama, it changes nothing.”

“I don’t want you murdered! We all know how people in same-sex relationships are treated.”

“I won’t be murdered! I know what I’m doing.”

“I failed you, both of you.”

“You did not!”

“I should have...”

“Mama, we have guests coming,” said Lwazi. Pull yourself together, Lu told herself. She stood, wiping away tears.

“Lwazi finish cooking that meat. Thandi, see to the rice. Ethel, finish making the salad,” she said, as she left the room. She cleaned her face in the bathroom. Pull yourself together, she repeated to herself firmly. She took several deep breaths then she returned to the kitchen.

“What can I do?” asked a deep male voice. Lu was startled, then she looked at Zulu.

“Take drinks to the lounge, please,” she said, as she got back to work.

The doorbell rang. Lwazi left the kitchen. Lu heard the front door open then she heard several voices all talking at once. Several people came into the kitchen in waitron uniforms, carrying food. Lu heard loud music. She was thankful that most of the food was ready. She was just waiting for the meat to cook properly, then everyone could eat.

Lwazi fetched Ethel from the kitchen. A man dressed as a chef entered the kitchen.

“Excuse us, please, we have work to do,” he said curtly. Thandi left, Lu continued to work.

“Excuse us, lady,” said the chef.

“No one sends me from my kitchen,” said Lu. She was standing at the stove, turning the meat over.

“Look, lady...”

“It's fine,” said a voice. Lu noticed Zulu beside her, looking at the chef.

“I told you that I work alone,” said the chef.

“The owner of the kitchen stays.”

“I can't work like this.”

“If you can give me a full refund, you can go.” Zulu and the chef glared at each other.

“Let's get to work, everyone,” said the chef. Lu dished up the food she had cooked into big platters, and the waitrons obligingly took them to the dining room. She followed them, and gasped. Her food and the chef's food made for a great variety, everyone would eat to their heart's content. A waitron announced the meal, everyone queued to get plates of food.

Lu stood watching the young people in her home chatting and nodding their heads to the music. She looked for her children. Thandi was talking to two men. She was in a black pant suit that high-lighted her fair complexion. Her five foot nine height and slim build kept her looking younger than she was. Lu thought that she looked as if she needed a hug.

Lwazi and Ethel were talking to the DJ. They were wearing knee-length, body hugging dresses, Lwazi's was red, Ethel's was purple. Lwazi was six foot tall and voluptuous. Ethel was just as tall and slim. She had her father's height and dark complexion. Lu wondered where her mother was.

She looked at Thandi again and smiled. Everyone was agreed that in Thandi, Lu had created her very own look alike. She had looked just like Thandi at that age. Her smile faded as she studied Thandi's sad face. Lwazi joined Thandi. She had a medium complexion and she was her father's lookalike. Lu frowned, Lwazi looked just as miserable as her sister.

Zach had watched Lwazi's mother, MaKhumalo, for some time. He had felt helpless when she had sat crying at the kitchen table. He had wanted to stop her pain, but he had not known how to go about it.

When the chef he had hired had tried to send her from her kitchen, she had stood her ground. He had been glad to help her to stay in her kitchen. He watched her watching her children. They seemed to be her reason for living. That would have to change.

She would have to add him to her list of priority people, just as he was adding her to his list of priority people. He intended to spend as much time with her as he could. He approached her.

“What will you have?” he asked. She looked at him. She had big, brown eyes, and beautiful smooth skin. He wanted to caress it.

“What will you have?” he repeated.

“I’m not hungry,” she said.

“Come and get something, we’ll both get some food.” He put a hand on her lower back and led her to join the food queue. He liked touching her and decided to keep his hand on her lower back. He was glad that she did not protest. The queue moved fast. When they were each holding a plate of food, Zach ushered MaKhumalo to the lounge, his hand still on her lower back. They sat beside each other, eating quietly.

Lu could not believe how much she had enjoyed having Zulu’s hand on her lower back. He had touched her where she had not been touched in years. His touch had made her feel cherished. She thought about how good it had felt. It was an illusion. The man was leaving, she would never see him again. It was best to stop thinking about his big, warm hand.

He was going home to his wife. I wonder what kind of woman would capture the interest of such a gorgeous man, she thought.

“Where’s Ethel’s mother?” she asked. The question caught her by surprise. Zulu looked surprised as well when he looked at her.

“She passed away,” he said.

“I am so sorry,” said Lu, putting a hand on his. She felt wicked for envying a dead woman.

“Thank you.” Lu removed her hand from Zulu. He was probably married to someone else, or had a gorgeous young woman tucked away somewhere. She smiled sadly. No one wanted her, certainly not a handsome man like Zulu. He had probably touched her out of politeness. He would forget her as soon as he left. Her smile faded. She picked at her food.

“The food is great, Mrs Zulu,” said a guest, as she sat opposite Lu. Lu looked at her quizzically. Her heart was pounding. Did the young woman think Zulu would even look in her direction? It was a flattering thought.

“The food is great,” the young woman repeated. Lu looked at Zulu, he was eating. She looked back at the young woman.

“Thank you,” she said. There was no harm in pretending for a while, she decided.

“It was clever to get the chef as well,” said another guest.

“I didn’t...” said Lu.

“That was my idea,” said Zulu.

“That’s so sweet! I want a husband as thoughtful as you are, Mr Zulu,” said the second guest.

Waitrons started collecting the used dishes.

## CHAPTER TWO

“Can I have your attention, everyone?” said Lwazi. Everyone looked at her, the DJ lowered the music.

“We’re here to celebrate a special birthday which has been and gone. We’re celebrating Ethel’s birthday,” she said. Everyone clapped. Ethel looked at Lwazi and everyone else with astonishment.

“Prepare your voice boxes everyone, we’ll sing Happy Birthday as soon as the chef brings in his masterpiece,” Lwazi continued. Lu went to the kitchen. She opened a cupboard and brought out the cake that she had made. She smiled proudly as she admired it, then she saw the chef’s three tier creation and her smile faded.

“I’ll take that in for you,” said a waitron, taking the cake from Lu.

“Wait,” Lu said, but the waitron had already left with her cake. She followed slowly and joined everyone else singing the last lines of Happy Birthday. Ethel blew out the candles on the chef’s creation, then she was given a knife. She cut the chef’s creation once, then the chef took over. Lu was glad to see Ethel cut the cake that she had made for her. Everyone was given a plate with a piece of the chef’s cake, and a piece of Lu’s cake.

Ethel opened her gifts as Lwazi gave a commentary that kept Ethel and everyone else laughing. Lu watched her in awe, she had not known that Lwazi could be that light hearted. She frowned when Ethel opened the gift that she had made her. Ethel put the dress against herself, then she started crying.

Lu looked at Lwazi, who had become quiet. She clearly had no idea what to do. Lu looked at Zulu, he looked as if he wanted to cry as well. She went to put her arms round Ethel and Ethel clung to her.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to upset you, throw it away if you don’t like it,” said Lu.

“Never! You didn’t upset me. I like it very much,” said Ethel, once she stopped crying. She drew back from Lu, wiping away her tears.

“Thank you, for everything,” she said.

“Okay, now?” said Lu. Ethel nodded.

“It’s time to work off all this rich food, everyone. DJ, do your thing,” said Lwazi. The DJ raised the volume again. Ethel put her dress on a chair beside her.

“Dance with me,” she said.

“What?” said Lu.

“Dance with me.” Lu smiled.

“I’d love to.” Ethel took hold of Lu’s hand, led her to the empty dance floor and started dancing.

“Move with me, Mama,” she said. Lu decided to dance. When she stopped dancing, everyone was watching her, she was the only one on the dance floor. Someone started clapping, other people joined in and Lu smiled. She bowed, then she clapped with everyone. Another song started playing. Lu made to go to her seat.

“May I have this dance?” asked a young man.

“I’m sorry, I’m tired,” said Lu.

“Please.”

“Excuse us,” said a third voice. Lu noticed Zulu beside her. He took her hand and led her to her seat.

“I didn’t know you could dance like an angel, Mama,” said Thandi, giving Lu a glass of water. Lu smiled.

“Thank you,” she said, then she gulped the water thirstily.

“You dance very well,” said Zulu.

“Thank you,” said Lu. Her heart fluttered when she caught Zulu’s eye. She made herself look away from him. Ethel was dancing happily. Lwazi was talking to a group of people. Lu looked for Thandi, but she could not see her anywhere.

“Are you looking for someone?” asked Zulu.

“Thandi.”

“She went outside to take a call.” Lu nodded and looked round at the room full of young people. She looked at Zulu, he was watching her.

“This is a very nice thing to do for Ethel. Is she alright?” she asked.

“She’s fine. The cake you made her reminded her of her mother. She always made her a heart-shaped birthday cake, as you’ve done.”

“I didn’t know.”

“I know. She’s fine, don’t worry.” They sat quietly for a while.

Zach wondered why the beauty beside him avoided looking at him. Whenever their eyes met, hers would slide away. Several times he had thought she was attracted to him, but she was resisting the attraction. Did she have a man somewhere? It had not sounded that way. He had to make her notice him. He watched people dancing. His beauty...she was not his yet, but it would come. His beauty was a fantastic dancer.

“Would you like to dance? I can’t dance to save my life, but I’ll try not to step on you,” he said. The beautiful woman beside him smiled. He helped her out of her seat and held her hand as they walked to the dance floor.

They danced to a reggae song, then a slower song came on. Zach put his arms round MaKhumalo’s waist as the first strains of Mariah Carey’s *‘I’ll be there’*, started playing.

He felt her hands on his chest as he shuffled on the spot with her. She felt good in his arms. He liked her smell. He drew her closer. He wanted her as aware of him as he was of her. He was annoyed that he did not know her name. He felt awkward every time he thought to ask her for it. He had never, ever, been tongue-tied.

He smiled to himself remembering that someone had called her Mrs Zulu. He had liked that. He intended to make her Mrs Zulu in the very near future.

The song that was playing was one of Lu’s favourites. She put her arms round Zulu’s waist, closed her eyes and leaned her head on his shoulder.

She wanted to cry. Hearing that song always reminded her of how very lonely, alone and unwanted she was. She smiled, pretending, just for a few seconds, that the man in her arms was the man of her dreams. He felt fantastic. He was built big with a broad chest and long arms that held her as if they cherished her.

The song drew to an end, her smile faded. It had felt great to hold and be held, but it was over now. She made to withdraw from Zulu, another version of the same song came on. Zulu kept his arms round her, and kept dancing. Lu subsided against him and closed her eyes.

When the song ended, she raised her head and looked at Zulu, he was looking at her with a strange expression in his eyes. She took his hand, and as they returned to their seats, she realised that they had been the only ones on the dance floor. The young people around them were watching them.

“This is the last dance, everyone,” shouted Lwazi. The dance floor filled with people. Lu watched them dancing and smiled. She noticed Thandi, Lwazi and Ethel dancing together and her smile grew wider. She pointed them out to Zulu.

“They look great,” she said. He did not respond.

She looked at him, he was watching her. She returned his look, then she leaned back in her seat to watch the dancers. Some of the waitrons were also dancing. Someone was filming everything and there was a photographer as well. Lu looked at the three girls again and smiled. The song ended.

“Thank you for coming everyone. Drive home safely,” said Lwazi. The music had stopped playing, the DJ was packing up. Lu watched the young people as they formed small groups, talking and laughing. She stood and left the house through the front door.

It was dark outside, there were stars in the sky. She switched on the outside light and walked away from the house. There were several cars in her driveway. She smiled. It had been a long time since there had been one car there, let alone several cars.

Nkulunkulu, thank you for giving the girls some joy, she prayed.

“Thank you for the party,” she heard.

“Drive safely,” she returned.

“Thank you, Mrs Zulu, and goodnight,” another voice said.

“Goodnight,” Lu returned. She met the chef as she returned to the house.

“Goodnight, Mrs Zulu,” he said. Lu smiled. The only place I’ll ever be Mrs Zulu is in my dreams, she thought.

“Goodnight,” she said.

“Sorry I was tense when we met. Your husband didn’t tell me we’d be sharing your kitchen. What did you think of our service?”

“It was great.”

“So you won’t tell your husband to cancel his contract with me?” Lu smiled. I would be so lucky to have him for a husband, she thought.

“No, I won’t,” she said.

“Thank you, and goodnight,” he said, then he left.

“Mrs Zulu, I can’t find your husband. Would you please tell him that I’ll have the DVD ready on Tuesday, as we arranged? My name is Alfred,” said the film maker.

“Okay,” said Lu.

“Goodnight, Mrs Zulu, and thank you,” several voices said.

“Goodnight,” said Lu. She turned to go to the kitchen and bumped into someone. It was Zulu, she could tell by the smell of his aftershave.

“Sorry,” she said, as she stepped back to look at him.

“Goodnight, Mr and Mrs Zulu,” someone said.

“Goodnight,” Lu and Zulu said together. Lu smiled at Zulu.

“You seem to have acquired a wife. I hope you don’t mind that I didn’t correct any of them. They’re not likely to see us under one roof ever again,” she said. He watched her quietly. She made her way to the kitchen and stopped just inside the doorway.

“This is great,” she said. The chef and his team had cleaned her kitchen and left it spotless. She heard a sound and turned. Zulu was behind her.

“Tell the chef thank you for me. It was nice of his team to do my dishes. He asked me to ask you not to cancel your contract with him. The film maker says he’ll deliver the DVD on Tuesday,” she said.

“Mama, this is for you,” Lwazi said, joining them. She was followed by Ethel and Thandi. Lu took the envelope that Lwazi was holding out to her and looked at it.

“It’s not mine, it’s for you,” she said, holding it out to Zulu. He watched her in silence.

“It’s addressed to Mr and Mrs Zulu,” she said.

“It’s about the party,” said Ethel. Lu looked from Ethel to Zulu, then she took a card out of the envelope. It had a big Thank You printed on the front in many colours. She smiled and showed it to the girls. She opened the card and read out loud, *‘Thank you, for the party. We enjoyed the food variety, and the two vastly different cakes. Please invite us to Lwazi’s party.’* She laughed.

“It’s signed by the pharmacy gang,” she said, smiling at the girls as she put the envelope on the table.

“I’m making tea, does anyone else want some?” she asked. She filled the kettle with water and switched it on, then she took the teacups out of the cupboard. She was putting them on the table when she noticed everyone sitting round the kitchen table, watching her. She looked at all the people watching her and focused on Lwazi.

“What is it?” asked Lwazi.

“How can I help you?” asked Lu.

“Help me?”

“To feel better.”

“I’m fine.”

“When you arrived...”

“I’m fine.”

“You always say that, but we both know that you want, or need something. Tell me what you need, maybe I can give it to you.”

“You can’t.”

“You don’t know that.” They shared a long look.

“I want a Baba,” said Lwazi.

“Oh!” said Lu, then she sat down slowly. Lwazi’s words had thrown her completely. She looked from her to the cups on the table, then she bit her lower lip and looked back at Lwazi.

“I’m sorry, I can’t give you that,” she said.

“I know.”

“If I was younger, I’d ...”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“It does. When you have children, you’ll understand how important it is to give them what you can.”



“I’ve found a Baba.”

“You have?”

“Ethel shares hers with me.” Lu looked from Lwazi to Zulu, feeling tears in her eyes. She was glad that there was at least one man who was there for her child. She wanted to hold him and do something big for him to show him how much she appreciated what he was doing for Lwazi.

“Thank you,” she said. He did not respond. The kettle boiled. Lu stood and brought it to the table. She poured water into all the cups and put a cup in front of each person, then she sat down. She put a teabag and sugar into her cup and stirred the mixture slowly. She looked up from her cup, everyone was watching her.

“Aren’t you drinking your tea?” she asked. No one responded.

“My lawyer says a court date has been set for next week,” said Thandi.

“A court date?” said Lwazi.

“For the divorce.”

“So soon? When did you file for divorce?” asked Lu.

“Eighteen months ago.”

“You didn’t tell me.”

“I hoped we could work things out.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I’m not. I’m only sorry I wasted five years with him instead of waiting for my true love in peace.”

“Is there such a thing as true love?” asked Lwazi.

“Yes, Mama and Baba had it,” said Ethel.

“True love is for the lucky few, everyone else is blundering in the dark.”

“True love is for everyone. Sisi, you and I will find it, Mama will find it, and...Baba’s found it again,” said Ethel, looking at her father. Lu’s hopes fell to the ground. Ethel would not have said that unless her father had a woman somewhere. She looked at him, he was looking at Ethel.

“Mama, can Ethel and Baba spend the night? Baba’s too tired to drive home,” said Lwazi. Lu’s heart fluttered. She would like nothing better than to wake up to his handsome face, but that was not going to happen. She had no intention of getting into trouble with his woman.

“Baba will have no place to sleep,” she said.

“He’ll sleep in our room, we’ll sleep in the lounge.” Lu looked at Zulu. He was yawning. He looked tired. She could not let him drive in that state.

“Alright,” she said.

“Come, E, let’s get the room ready for Baba,” said Lwazi getting to her feet. She and Ethel left the room, Zulu followed them.

“Mama,” said Thandi.

“Yes,” said Lu.

“Are you ready to get married again?” Lu laughed in disbelief.

“Whoever heard of a woman my age getting married?” she asked.

“You’re only forty-six years old, Mama, it could happen.” Lu watched Thandi.

“Won’t you give men a chance?” she asked.

“I will if you will.”

“It’s not the same. You have your whole life ahead of you. You need to be happily married and to make babies, and fulfil your destiny as a woman.”

“I don’t want a husband. I’ll bring you a makoti and we’ll adopt some children.”

“Thandi...”

“Don’t worry, Mama. I’m going to sleep now.” Thandi stood and turned to the door. She stopped, then she returned to the table and sat beside Lu.

“How are you?” she asked.

“I’m fine,” replied Lu.

“You were ill.”

“I had a cold, it was nothing.”

“Did you ever go for HIV testing?”

“No!” gasped Lu.

“Why not? Didn’t Baba sleep around?”

“Yes, but...”

“Go for testing, you need to know the status of your health. Goodnight.” Thandi kissed Lu’s cheek and left the room.

Lu frowned, it had never occurred to her to go for HIV testing, but what Thandi said made sense. She sighed, then she went to the girls’ room. Ethel and Lwazi had made Lwazi’s bed with the best blankets in the house.

“Baba should be fine here,” said Lwazi. Lu nodded and went to her own bedroom, thinking about the party. It had been great having guests and the party had been a huge success.

After her bath, she wanted to watch a DVD, but the girls were asleep in the lounge. She took a book from her bedside and went to read it in the dining room. She smiled as she read.

She looked up, Zulu was leaning against the dining room door, dressed in trousers and an unbuttoned shirt, watching her. She smiled, thinking that she had never had a half dressed, gorgeous man in her home before.

“Can’t you sleep? Do you want some milk?” she asked. She stood and led the way to the kitchen. She had to do something to stop herself from staring at him like an idiot. She was taking milk out of the fridge when she felt a hand on her forearm.

“Leave it,” said Zulu.

“Don’t you want...”

“Leave it.” Lu returned the milk to the fridge and straightened. Zulu closed the fridge door and looked at her.

“I came to say goodnight,” he said.

“Oh. Goodnight,” said Lu. They stood watching each other.

“I enjoyed dancing with you,” he said. Lu smiled.

“It was nice,” she said.

“That song we danced to, it’s my favourite.”

“Me too...well, see you in the morning,” Lu said, then she left the room before she drooled all over him. So he’s tall, dark, gorgeous, and a great father, that has nothing to do with me. I am past attraction, at least, I should be, and I am definitely past being accused of stealing other people’s men. Zulu is off limits and I will not think about him, Lu said to herself as she climbed into her bed. She read for a while, then she fell asleep.

Zach watched his beauty leaving the kitchen. Her hips swayed in a way that made him want to watch her forever. He had enjoyed dancing with her. When the dance had ended, he had felt dazed. The only thing that he had been certain of was that he was in love with the woman he had danced with. MaKhumalo had looked at him with concern after the dance and led him to their seats. He had sat in stunned silence beside her, unable to utter a single word.

She must have thought that he was unsociable, or that he was ignoring her. He had been trying to recover from the shock of his feelings. The shock and the fatigue combined had slowed down his mental processes. He had been exhausted when he had arrived at her home.

He had driven from Durban that day after spending a week sorting out a labour dispute at one of his factories. He was relieved that the factory was fully functional again. He and Lwazi had planned Ethel’s surprise party over the phone. He had picked the girls up from the bus depot when he had arrived in Johannesburg as they had arrived from university that same day.

They had driven straight to Lwazi’s mother’s home. He felt bad that she had been ambushed. He would apologise to her. He had freshened up after the party and felt better after his

shower. Wanting to see his hostess one last time before going to sleep, he had searched the house and found her in the dining room.

She had looked adorable in her negligee and robe. She had been smiling at whatever she had been reading. He returned to his room, glad to have a change of clothes, he wanted to look good to MaKhumalo in the morning.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

When he woke up, he was disappointed that his beauty was not in his bed. He had dreamt that she had been kissing him passionately as he had run his hands over her luscious curves. Frustrated, he went to shower, then he dressed. He was the first person to be up.

The girls were sleeping in the lounge. He decided to make some phone calls in his car, then he returned to the house. The girls had woken up. The lounge was empty, the windows had been opened and the TV was on. He sat down and heard his hostess talking to the girls. She had a low pitched, sexy, voice.

Lu found the girls in the kitchen, cooking.

“Hi, girls,” she said.

“Hi, Mama,” all three of them returned.

“Off you go, Mama, we’re busy,” said Lwazi. Lu found Zulu in the lounge. She wondered where he had acquired a change of clothes.

“Hi,” she said.

“Hi,” he returned, watching her as she sat down.

“Did you sleep well? I hope the bed was comfortable,” said Lu.

“The bed was fine. How long have you known Ethel?”

“This is the third time I’m meeting her. How long have you known Lwazi?”

“I met her at the end of February this year, that’s about...seven months ago. I visit Ethel at least once every two months at university, she’s always with Lwazi.”

“Is this Ethel’s first year?”

“Yes.”

“This is Lwazi’s fourth. Do you know what year of pharmacy she’s doing?”

“This is her second year.”

“She didn’t tell me...she never has been big on telling me anything...she’s probably afraid I’ll mess up her life the way I messed mine,” Lu said to herself.

“Ethel thinks the world of you,” said Zulu. Lu smiled.

“She’s great, you must be so proud of her.”

“I am. After her mother died she lost interest in life, but since meeting Lwazi, she seems to be well on the mend.” They were quiet for a while.

“Thank you,” he said.

“For what?”

“For letting us use your home for Ethel’s party. I only realised once we were here that Lwazi hadn’t spoken to you about it. I had offered to do it, but she said she’d do it. I should have been more responsible and talked to you myself. I’m sorry.”

“No harm done.”

“I don’t think the party would have had such a homely feeling anywhere else. It was great, thank you, for everything, but especially for the cake and for the dress.” Lu smiled.

“Breakfast is ready,” said Ethel from the lounge door.

“It fits,” Lu said excitedly of the dress that she had made for Ethel.

“It’s a perfect fit, anyone would think you’d measured me before sewing it. You have a very good eye, Mama,” said Ethel. Lu walked round her and nodded, very pleased with her work.

“Come and eat. Lwazi says you like pancakes,” said Ethel, putting an arm through Lu’s arm.

“I do,” said Lu, amazed that Lwazi knew anything about her.

“I made some.”

“I can’t wait to taste them.”

In the dining room, Thandi and Lwazi were putting the last few dishes on the table.

“Sit down and eat,” said Lwazi.

“It smells good in here,” Lu said as she sat down. Ethel put a pancake on her plate. Lu cut it into small pieces, then she put a piece in her mouth. She chewed, and looked at Ethel.

“This is great,” she said. Ethel smiled and looked at her father.

“Would you like some, Baba?” she asked.

“I’ll have one if I must,” Zulu sighed in resignation. Ethel hugged him quickly.

“You know you love them,” she said. Lwazi put a pancake on his plate and he started eating. The girls sat down. Lu looked round the table as she ate.

“Is something wrong, girls? Why aren’t you eating?” she asked.

“Nothing’s wrong,” said Thandi.

“So why aren’t you eating?”

“We ate while we were cooking.” Lu looked at the girls in turn, they were looking at her and Zulu in turn.

“This is great, girls. Feel free to cook for us any time,” said Zulu. The girls smiled at each other. Lwazi looked at Lu.

“Finish up, Mama, we’re all going to church,” she said. Lu choked on her tea.

“Are you alright?” Zulu asked her. She nodded, her eyes on Lwazi.

“Church?” she said.

“Church,” smiled Lwazi. Lu’s heart melted. Lwazi seldom smiled.

“Why are you going to church?”

“Don’t you think it’s time?”

“Yes, but...”

“That’s why we’re going. We’re all ready, except you, Mama.” Lu looked from the girls to Zulu, feeling cornered.

“Baba might not want to go,” she said out of desperation. She almost smiled as the girls looked at Zulu in panic. He looked up from his food.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Will you come to church with us, Baba?” asked Ethel.

“Of course,” he returned.

“Mama, we need to leave in fifteen minutes,” said Lwazi.

“I’m not done,” said Lu.

“You can eat in the car.”

Lu went to her room, disappointed that Zulu had agreed to go to church. She looked through her wardrobe and decided to wear an outfit she had never worn to church. It was an African print dress in green and black. It was full length, with three-quarter sleeves. She found the matching head scarf and tied it round her head. She wore black shoes and carried a black handbag. When she was dressed, she went to the lounge.

“Everyone’s waiting in the car, let’s go,” said Lwazi, putting an arm round Lu’s waist and leading her out of the house. She locked the door. Lu looked at her closely, marvelling that do-not-touch-me Lwazi was touching her, and insisting that they all go to church. She had sworn off church several years previously. Lu wondered what was making her go back now.

The car they were going to was a big, navy blue Mercedes Benz sedan, with tinted windows. It must be the latest model, Lu thought. Once she was seated in the car, she looked at Zulu beside her, he was wearing sun glasses that added to his appeal.

He looks like a very sexy movie star, she thought, then she made herself look away from him. Lwazi climbed into the car. Lu looked into the back seat, the girls were whispering to each other.

“Seat belts on, everyone,” said Zulu. Lu put on her seat belt, then Zulu drove off.

“Let’s go to a church in extension fourteen, the mfundisi there’s said to be more interesting than our local one,” said Lu.

“We’ll be late, we’ll go to the local one,” said Zulu. Lu closed her eyes, praying for a miracle that would save her from having to go to the local church.

They arrived at the church safely, and on time. Lu cursed under her breath. Everyone would have time to see her and whisper about her. She had thought that part of her life was over. She took a mirror out of her hand bag.

She looked at her head scarf, wondering how to tie it in a way that would hide her face. She should have worn a hat, she could have hidden under a hat, there was no way of hiding under her head scarf.

Her car door opened, startling her. Zulu was standing beside her. She put away her mirror and climbed out of the car. She looked about as Zulu locked the car. People were staring at her, and talking about her. She looked for the girls, they were talking to a group of young people.

“Ready?” said Zulu. Lu looked from the girls to him, praying that he would say, let’s go home.

“Let’s go in,” he said. Lu groaned and closed her eyes.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“MaKhumalo, it’s good to see you. We haven’t seen you in a long time,” a voice said. Lu opened her eyes and looked into the eyes of MaNzimande, the biggest gossipmonger that had ever lived. She tensed, then she started, feeling a hand on her lower back. She noticed Zulu beside her, looking at her with concern.

“Mama, Baba, let’s go in,” said Lwazi, putting an arm through Zulu’s arm. Ethel appeared beside Lu and put an arm through hers. Lu was surprised when her feet carried her past MaNzimande, with the help of Zulu and Ethel. She made herself smile at Ethel and put an arm round her waist.

“We didn’t know you’d found a friend,” said MaNzimande, who was directly in front of her, looking at Zulu. Lu felt her blood boil. How dare MaNzimande question her about her life, and how dare she look at Zulu!

“It was thoughtless of me, I should have invited everyone to our wedding,” she said. MaNzimande gasped, Lwazi giggled.

“The girls were going to school, we wanted to do it before they left, so very few people know about it,” Lu continued. MaNzimande looked from Lu to Zulu, then she left.

“You told her, Mama!” said Lwazi. Lu looked at Zulu, appalled with herself.

“I shouldn’t have done that, I shouldn’t have lied about our relationship without consulting you. In three minutes, everyone will know that we’re married. Let’s go before your name’s tainted,” she said.

“Tainted?”

“Everyone will pity you for being married to me.”

“I doubt that.”

“Let’s go.”

“We came to worship Nkulunkulu and that’s what we’re going to do.”

“But...”

“Come on, nkosikazi, we’ll be late,” Zulu smiled. Lu nodded, bowled over by his smile.

They all sat together. Lu greeted people around her group. The service began, and she sighed with relief. No one could talk to her, or at her during the service. Mfundisi Skhosana was on the pulpit. Lu started agreeing with Lwazi that church was boring.

She looked about, she was not the only one wishing Mfundisi would finish up.

“Is he always this boring?” Zulu whispered to her. She put a hand over her mouth to stifle a giggle.

“Now I know why Lwazi gave up church,” Zulu continued. Lu slapped his knee playfully and looked at him, he was smiling like a naughty school boy.

The service eventually ended. Lu sighed with relief and stood quickly. Her group members stood, and made their way to the church exit. When they were almost at the door, Zulu excused himself, gave Lu the car keys and left.

Lu groaned as MaMkhize approached her.

“Relax, Mama,” said Lwazi.

“MaKhumalo, you finally found your way to church?” said MaMkhize. Lu smiled thinly and made to walk away.

“Don’t you think it’s great that your girl and my boy have seen the light and gone their separate ways? That marriage was never going to work. I told him that children from broken homes make broken homes, but would he listen? Where would your child have learned to maintain a home when she doesn’t come from one?” asked MaMkhize.

“Ready to go?” said Zulu. Lu almost kissed him for arriving just then.

“Oh, hello,” said MaMkhize eyeing him curiously.

“This is MaMkhize, soon to be Thandi’s former mamazala. This is Zulu, the father of our children,” said Lu.

“Can we go, nkosikazi?” prompted Zulu.



“Nkosikazi? So it’s true that you’re married?” asked a shocked MaMkhize.

“Can I have the car keys?” Zulu asked Lu. She gave them to him. Lwazi put an arm through one of his arms and walked off with him.

“Baba’s waiting, let’s go, Mama,” said Ethel.

“Goodbye,” said Thandi to MaMkhize, then she ushered Lu and Ethel to the car. Zulu was on the phone. His call ended.

“We’re going to lunch at a restaurant, is that alright with all of you?” he asked. Lu smiled as all three girls made consenting noises.

“Is that okay with you?” Zulu asked her. She started, surprised that he was interested in what she wanted. He was looking at her above his sun glasses, out of his beautiful brown eyes.

“It’s fine,” she said.

“Seatbelts,” said Zulu.

“We know,” said Lwazi and Ethel.

Zach had found being around MaKhumalo relaxing and exciting at the same time. He was not very big on church going, but it had given him an excuse to spend more time with his beauty.

He had been surprised, then pleased, when she had told that busybody that they were married. It confirmed to him that he did want to marry her. He knew nothing about her, but he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. He had never been as certain of anything as he was about living the rest of his life with her.

During church, he had sat thinking about how he could prolong the time he spent with her. He had finally decided on lunch at a restaurant. He would have wanted time alone with her, but he did not think she would agree to that. She was doing her best to resist her attraction to him.

He spent most of his time at the restaurant watching her. She spent most of her time talking to the girls. Whenever he caught her looking at him, she would quickly look away. She was definitely attracted to him. He would have to make her see that she did not have to resist the attraction.

Lunch was a relaxed meal. When the dishes had been cleared away, a man approached the table and greeted Zach.

“This is my family, Hadebe. You’ve met Ethel, those are her sisters, Lwazi and Thandi, and this is the girls’ mother,” said Zach.

“Hello, Mrs Zulu, hello, girls,” said Hadebe. Zach watched his beauty and the girls look from Hadebe to him, surprised that MaKhumalo had been called Mrs Zulu. He did not correct Hadebe. MaKhumalo looked away from him.

“Hello,” she and the girls said to Hadebe.

“Was everything to your liking, Mrs Zulu?” asked Hadebe.

“Everything was fine,” said MaKhumalo. Hadebe left.

“Let’s go. Here are the car keys, I’ll be with you just now,” Zach said to his beauty. He watched as she followed the girls out of the restaurant. He paid for the meal, then he went to greet an associate who was also having lunch there.

He was walking out of the restaurant when his cell phone rang. He cursed after the call. He did not want to see the crazy woman who was determined to be his wife. Perhaps he could get his beauty to help him out.

Lu walked slowly behind the girls. She had enjoyed having lunch with Zulu. He was witty and charming and so gorgeous. She smiled remembering the times when she had felt him watching her. The meal was over and they were going their separate ways. She would have to forget all about him.

“Ready to go?” he said, appearing beside her.

“Yes. Thank you for lunch,” said Lu.

“We need to go home.”

“Yes.”

“My home. Do you need to go to your home right now?”

“We’ll catch a taxi.”

“Do you need to be home now?”

“No.”

“Do you mind coming to my home for a short while?”

“No, I don’t mind.” Zulu took her hand and they caught up with the girls.

“Let’s go,” he said.

His home was in the posh suburb of Houghton. Lu stopped herself from gasping out loud when he stopped the car in front of a walled property with a huge black electric gate. They waited for the gate to open, then he drove in.

The house was slightly raised on a rock and looked down at them. It looked like Nkulunkulu’s mansion. It had green, well-maintained lawns, manicured trees and bushes, and beautiful flowers. It was painted white and stretched out over the land. There were obviously many rooms in it.

“Come in,” said Zulu, climbing out of the car. The girls followed him into the house. Lu climbed out of the car slowly, looking about in admiration, then she approached the open front door.

“There you are, I wondered where you’d got to. Come,” said Zulu, taking her hand and leading her to a lounge. She stopped, looking at the splendour of the room. Zulu drew on her hand and helped her into a seat, then he sat beside her.

“This is MaKhumalo, she’s Ethel’s new mother. There’s no need to worry about Ethel. MaKhumalo, these are the Ngcobos, my former in-laws,” said Zulu. Lu looked from him to his guests. They were all silent, watching her.

“Hello,” she said. The three men returned her greeting, the two women did not respond, they were looking at her as if they hated her.

“I’ll go and see about tea,” she said, then she left the room.

“Who is she? Where did she come from? I’ve never heard Ethel talk about her,” one of the women said.

Lu looked into each room that she came across as she searched for the kitchen. There were three lounges, a dining room and a kitchen, all very well furnished, with beautiful paintings on the walls.

She found the girls in the kitchen, with two women. Ethel introduced her as Mama, then she introduced the two women as MaDube, and MaDlamini.

“They look after Baba, the house and me,” she said. Lu and the women greeted each other, then Ethel told Lu to go and sit down.

“I can’t go back there,” said Lu. Ethel put an arm through hers and led her out of the kitchen and out of the house. They sat at a lay-by under a tree, looking at the house.

“This place is like heaven,” said Lu.

“That’s Mama’s family,” said Ethel.

“Baba told me,” said Lu.

“They want Baba to marry Mama’s younger sister so she can look after me. Don’t let them, Mama, please! I’ll die if Mamncane marries Baba.”

“How can I stop them? If Baba wants to marry her...”

“He doesn’t! You must act like the madam here. MaDube and MaDlamini will help you, they don’t want Mamncane either. Please act like we’re a family. Please, Mama,” begged Ethel. She was almost in tears.

“Okay, Ethel, okay,” said Lu, putting her arms round her.

“Thank you,” said Ethel, holding Lu tight, then she withdrew from the embrace.

“Go and sit with Baba, he needs your support,” she said.

Lu returned to the lounge and sat beside Zulu. MaDlamini was pouring the tea.

“Here’s your cup, Mama,” she said, giving Lu a cup. Lu smiled at her.

“Thank you, MaDlamini,” she said, as she took the cup. MaDlamini smiled back and looked at one of the guests maliciously, then she left. Lu helped everyone to sugar and biscuits. She

put biscuits on Zulu's plate and handed it to him as if she did it every day. She sat down, sugared her tea and sipped it appreciatively.

Zulu put his plate of biscuits between them, she picked one up and nibbled on it. Zulu introduced the guests as Ethel's two Malumes, Mkhulu, Mamncane and Mamkhulu. Lu looked at Mamncane, she was looking at Zulu covetously.

When everyone had finished their tea, Lu collected the cups and saucers and put them on a tray. MaDube came to collect the tray. Lu sat down. She took one of Zulu's hands in hers, he laced his fingers with hers. She noticed Mamncane looking at their joined hands, before looking at her. Lu looked at Zulu, he was watching her. She smiled, he smiled back.

Ethel came into the room and sat on the arm of Lu's seat.

"Mama, MaDube says to ask if she should cook chicken or beef for supper," she whispered aloud. All conversations had stopped.

"I don't want chicken," said Zulu.

"Tell them to cook beef and to get peas from the garden before they get dry," said Lu.

"Okay," said Ethel.

"You and your sister must pack tonight, we'll leave early tomorrow," said Zulu.

"Okay," said Ethel, as she left the room.

"Where are you going?" asked Mamncane.

"The girls are going back to school," said Zulu.

"What girls are you talking about?"

"We have three girls in total. The eldest works, the other two are in university."

"Ethel's the only girl you have."

"MaKhumalo gave me another two."

"She's making you look after the children of another man?"

"Isn't she looking after the child of another woman?"

"I can look after Ethel, she's my sister's child, after all."

"MaKhumalo's doing fine, ask Ethel."

"Where's this MaKhumalo from?" asked Mamncane, glaring at Lu.

"That's immaterial," said Zulu.

"Are you staying for dinner?" asked Lu.

"Are you sending me out of my sister's home?" returned Mamncane.

“No one has asked you to leave,” said Zulu. Mamncane stopped glaring at Lu and looked at Zulu.

“You didn’t tell me you’d found someone,” she said.

“I wasn’t aware that I had to report to you.”

“You wouldn’t have been reporting, you’d have been informing me.”

“You and I don’t have that kind of relationship.”

“I hoped...” Ethel ran into the room.

“Excuse me. Mama, MaDube’s asking for you,” she said, then she left. Lu made to stand, Zulu tightened his grip on her hand. She looked at him, he was looking at the cell phone in his other hand.

“Thandi, Thandi,” she called. Everyone was quiet. Thandi entered the room, knelt beside Lu and gave a general greeting.

“I can’t come to the kitchen right now, could you attend to MaDube for me?” asked Lu.

“Yes,” said Thandi, then she left the room.

“Who’s that?” asked Mamncane.

“Our eldest child,” said Zulu.

“What’s she doing still living with her mother? You’ve brought her here so you can take food from Ethel’s mouth and give it to your fatherless brats. How dare you come here and disadvantage Ethel!” Mamncane hissed at Lu.

“I don’t tell you how to run your home, please don’t tell me how to run mine,” Lu said coldly. She and Mamncane glared at each other. There was a long silence.

“I’ve seen my mzikulu, she’s not looked this good since her mother died. Zulu, I want to see her from time to time, will that be alright?” asked Mkhulu.

“Of course, she’s your mzikulu after all,” said Zulu.

“We’ll be off now.” The men stood and Zulu with them. He kept a hold on Lu’s hand. She had to stand with him and see the men out.

Outside, the men were surprised to see her with Zulu. They looked behind her. Mamkhulu and Mamncane were walking out of the house with Ethel between them. Ethel moved quickly to take Lu’s other hand.

“Call your sisters, did you introduce them to your Mamas?” asked Zulu. Ethel returned to the house. Everyone was quiet. The girls came out of the house.

“These are our other children, Thandi and Lwazi. Girls, this is your other Mama’s family,” said Zulu. The girls greeted the guests, the men returned the greetings, the women were silent, looking at Lu.

“Thank you for coming to check on Ethel, Babazala. As you can see, she’s better than she’s been in four years. Have a safe trip,” said Zulu. The Ngcobos climbed into their cars and left.

“Are you alright, Mama, they didn’t tear you to pieces?” asked Ethel.

“She fought back,” said Zulu.

“Good for you,” said Ethel. All the girls returned to the house.

“Thank you for doing this. That woman who claims she’ll mother Ethel would destroy our family. I should have warned you about this, but I was just so furious when MaDube phoned to tell me that the Ngcobos were here,” said Zulu.

“I’m glad I could help,” said Lu.

“It sounds like supper’s on the stove. Can I take you home after we eat?”

“That’ll be fine.”

After the meal, Zulu and Ethel took Lu and her girls back to their home.

“Can I spend the night, Mama?” asked Ethel.

“Sure, if Baba says it’s alright,” said Lu.

“It’s fine, if your bags are packed,” said Zulu.

“They are,” said Ethel.

“I’ll fetch you girls at five in the morning,” Zulu said then he left.

Lu fell into bed exhausted. She was woken at a quarter to four by her ringing alarm clock, then she woke Lwazi and Ethel up at four o’clock. By five, she and both girls had bathed and dressed.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

Zulu arrived at five o’clock on the dot. Lu accompanied Lwazi and Ethel to the car.

“Hello, join me, let’s take the girls to their bus,” Zulu said to her. She looked at Lwazi, she was looking at her with a blank expression on her face. Lu looked at Ethel, she thought her father’s idea was brilliant.

“I’ll just lock up,” said Lu. They were all quiet to the bus depot. They waited a while before the bus arrived.

“Have a safe trip, and keep up the good work, girls,” said Lu.

“You heard your mother, work hard and don’t let any boys disturb your studies,” said Zulu. They all climbed out of the car. The girls took their bags out of the boot and approached the bus. Zulu locked the car, then he and Lu followed the girls.

Once the girls had checked in and seen to it that their bags were loaded in the bus, they went to Lu and Zulu.

“We’re off,” said Ethel. She hugged her father, then she hugged Lu. Lwazi hugged Zulu, then she nodded at Lu. Lu nodded back, smiling hard to hide her pain. She looked at Ethel, who had taken her hand and was leading her away from Lwazi and Zulu.

“She doesn’t mean to hurt you, she loves you,” said Ethel. Lu hugged her hard, feeling tears in her eyes.

“Take care,” she said. She released Ethel and turned to walk away. Ethel held back.

“What is it?” asked Lu.

“Can...can I call you sometimes?”

“Of course. My number is...”

“I know your number. The bus will leave me if I don’t get on. Bye,” said Ethel, kissing Lu’s cheek and hurrying to the bus. Lu joined Zulu.

“Is everything alright?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied Lu. She located Lwazi and Ethel in the bus and waved at them. Lwazi looked away, Ethel waved and blew Lu a kiss. Lu smiled, and blew the kiss back to Ethel. The bus drove off.

“Let’s go,” said Zulu, putting a hand on Lu’s lower back.

He liked touching his MaKhumalo and intended to touch her at every given opportunity. He had watched her with Lwazi and felt her pain when Lwazi had not hugged her. He had wanted to take the pain away. He was glad he had invited her to see the girls off with him. She did not say a word as they drove to her home.

“Are you alright?” he asked. She looked at him.

“Are you alright?” he repeated.

“I’m fine,” she said.

“You’re very quiet.”

“This is the first time I’ve seen Lwazi off anywhere since her father...since then, only Thandi’s been allowed to see her to the buses, or to go to her games and plays, or to know what she’s studying at which university. She can’t even stand for me to touch her.”

“We all handle stress in different ways.”

“Why would she reject me? I’m not the one who said those horrible words to her!” She sounded as if she was going to cry.

“She’s not rejecting you,” said Zach.

“Yes, she is.”

“She worships you.”

“You at least talk to someone you worship.”

“She quotes you as if you’re her bible.”

“She wishes I’d drop dead.”

“You’re her anchor, if you dropped dead, she’d fall apart.”

“You’re just saying that.”

“I’m telling you the truth.” Zach glanced at her, she did not believe him.

They arrived at her home.

“Thank you for inviting me,” she said brightly as she climbed out of the car. He hooted and drove off.

She entered her home and found a note in the kitchen from Thandi.

*‘Hi, Mama. I’ve made you breakfast. My furniture’s been delivered. Thanks for letting me come back. I love you. Thandi.’* Lu’s eyes watered.

“Oh, thank you, Thandi. Find a good man and be happy,” she said. She went to sweep her garage then she started working. In a short while, her staff arrived and the work day really got under way.

She locked up her garage when her staff left at the end of the work day and continued to work. She gasped when the electricity went off then she lit several candles and continued to work. She wanted to work really late, but her head began to ache because the lighting was inadequate. She found Thandi sitting in the lounge with a candle burning feebly.

“Hi, Mama,” she said.

“Hi. How was your day?”

“Long. Thanks for letting me stay, I’ll pay rent.”

“Don’t, this is your home.”

“But...”

“I don’t want your money. I need a bath, I’ll see you later,” Lu said, going to the bathroom. She was disappointed that the geyser water had already gotten cold, she could not have the long soak that she very desperately needed. She wondered if she would have money to buy electricity vouchers the next day.

She sat on the edge of the tub with her eyes closed, wondering if she had the energy to boil water for her bath. She would need to use her four big pots, and the water would not even fill a third of the tub. She opened her eyes when she heard a knock on the bathroom door.

“Mama, someone’s here to see you,” said Thandi. Lu went to the lounge.



“Hello,” said a deep voice. Lu stopped in her tracks.

“Hello, what are you doing here?”

“Thandi told me that your electricity’s been cut off. I’ve come to take you both home for a hot meal.”

“She shouldn’t have troubled you.”

“Let’s go,” said Zulu.

“I’ve packed your overnight bag, Mama,” said Thandi. Zulu took the bag from Thandi and put a hand on Lu’s lower back, ushering her out of the house.

“What about you, Thandi?” asked Lu.

“I want to be alone tonight. Goodnight, Mama, goodnight, Baba,” said Thandi, then she closed the front door. Lu found herself outside her home with Zulu.

“Let’s go,” he said. All the way to his home, he was on the phone.

At his home, he carried her bag into the house and led her to a bedroom.

“Your bathroom is through there,” he said, pointing at a closed door, then he left. Lu took a long, hot bath. When she was dressed, she decided to go and look for food in the kitchen.

“Supper’s in here,” called Zulu. She found him in the dining room. They ate quietly.

“Thank you, that was great,” said Lu. Her cell phone rang.

“Hello,” she said.

“Hello, Mama.”

“Who’s this?”

“Ethel.”

“Hi, are you alright?”

“We arrived safely.”

“Thank you for telling me.” Lu was smiling when the call ended.

“Is everything alright?” asked Zulu.

“Yes. Ethel was telling me that they arrived safely. That’s the first time in four years I’ve been afforded that courtesy, and it’s all thanks to your Ethel,” said Lu. She stood and started clearing the table. Zulu helped her. She started washing the dishes.

“Leave them, the staff will do them in the morning,” said Zulu.

“Thank you, for everything. Goodnight,” said Lu.

“Goodnight,” Zulu returned. Lu could feel him watching her as she left the kitchen.

She was woken by a loud noise. It was daylight. She sat up quickly. She needed to go and open her workshop. She climbed out of bed, wondering why her staff had not woken her.

She started, realising that she was in Zulu’s home. She cleaned herself up quickly and dressed, then she made her way to the dining room. On the big clock there, she saw that the time was a quarter to nine. She gasped in horror.

“Hello, Mama,” said a voice. Lu turned.

“Hello, MaDlamini,” she said.

“Baba said to give you these car keys so you could use the car to get to work,” MaDlamini said, holding out keys to her.

“It’s fine, I’ll use public transport.”

“No! No, please, Mama, take the keys.”

“I...”

“Please! Baba will fire me if he thinks I don’t follow his instructions. The car’s this way.” Lu looked at the time, and followed MaDlamini.

She drove home quickly in a corolla. She was surprised that her staff were not milling about outside her gate. They had obviously gotten tired of waiting and left. The order that had to be delivered the next day would have to be postponed.

She climbed out of the car to open the gate, then she parked the car in the driveway. She closed the gate, then she went to her garage. It was open, her staff was working. She stopped, looking on in disbelief.

“Hello, Mama. Thandi explained that you’d be late when she left the keys with me,” said MaPhiri, Lu’s chief tailor.

“Yes,” said Lu. She went into the house for breakfast, then she joined her staff. The outfits due for delivery the following day were finished by lunch time. Lu delivered them. Afterwards, she had money to go and buy electricity vouchers.

She arrived home after dark and frowned. Zulu’s mercedes benz was in front of her house. She went into the house. Zulu was coming out of the girls’ bedroom.

“Hi. Thandi’s just fallen asleep,” he said.

“Hi,” Lu said slowly, wondering if he and Thandi were an item.

“I didn’t want to eat alone so I came to join you and Thandi. I found her crying, her divorce went through today.” Lu gasped.

“She’ll be fine, I think,” Zulu continued. Lu went into the girls’ room. Thandi was asleep on her bed, fully clothed, with a blanket covering her. Lu caressed her cheek and put another blanket on her feet, then she left.

“Thank you for being here for her,” she said to Zulu.

“I’m sorry to rush you, but please, can I have something to eat?” he returned.

Lu led the way to the kitchen and gave him some tea and scones, then she started cooking.

He started yawning half way through supper. Lu went to make the sofa bed for him, then she invited him to spend the night.

“Thank you,” he accepted tiredly. Lu cleaned up the kitchen, then she went to check on Thandi. She was still asleep.

Lu sat on Lwazi’s bed and watched her. She stood with the intention of going to bed when she started falling asleep.

“Mama,” said Thandi. Lu looked at her, she was watching her.

“How are you?” asked Lu, sitting beside her. Thandi made a face.

“If I’d known, I’d have been in court with you,” said Lu.

“I didn’t want you there. It was quick, then I came home. MaPhiri told me that you’d gone out.”

“I’m so sorry, I’d have wanted to be here for you,” Lu said, putting her arms round Thandi.

“Go to sleep, you’re getting cold,” said Thandi. Lu kissed her cheek, then she went to her own bedroom.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

She was woken by a loud noise. It was incessant and very irritating. It was the doorbell. She groaned and covered her head. The ringing stopped. Lu opened her eyes, wondering why the noise had stopped. She heard voices and concluded that Thandi had opened the door. She put a robe over her negligee and left her room.

A few steps outside her bedroom door, she stopped.

“Hi, Lungile. Whose cars are those? Do you have guests?” Lu looked at her buti Richie, who was standing before her, looking at her quizzically. Their parents joined him.

“Hello,” Lu said. She watched as her parents and Buti looked behind her. She turned her head. Zulu was standing at her bedroom door, looking as if he had come out of there. He looked fabulous in his trousers and an unbuttoned shirt. It was clear he had just freshened up. Lu turned back to her guests, they looked at her, at Zulu again, then they turned to the lounge as one.

Lu followed them hastily and opened her mouth to speak.

“When did you take up with men? You dare to flaunt their cars in the driveway so everyone can see they sleep here? Where do their wives think they are? Are you so morally bankrupt that you sleep with two men?” demanded Mama. Lu gasped in shock.

“Have you forgotten that you’ve been accused of husband-stealing before? I thought those were malicious rumours, but what am I supposed to think when I see with my own eyes that you...” continued Mama.

“Mama!” exclaimed Thandi, entering the room. She ran at Lu and put her arms round her, crying.

“Hawu, Lungile, what have you done to the child?” asked Baba.

“I’m divorced,” Thandi said, through her tears.

“What?” shouted Mama, Baba, and Buti, at the same time.

“I’m divorced,” Thandi repeated.

“Is this true?” asked Baba. Lu nodded.

“You see! If you’d stayed in your own marriage, your child would have learned to stick things out in her own marriage. And now that you’re a double sfebe...” Mama said to Lu.

“It’s not her fault,” said Thandi, drying her eyes.

Zach could hear that his beauty was in trouble. Whoever her guests were, they were giving her a hard time. He decided to make tea. Her name was Lungile. Lu. He smiled. He was going to enjoy spending time with his Lu.

He took the tea things to the lounge on a tray. Lu had her arms round Thandi.

“Hello everyone, I hope you drink tea,” he said. Everyone turned to look at him. He put the tray on the table and ran his eyes over everyone. Lu was in shock. He focused on Thandi.

“How are you?” he asked.

“Fine,” she said, as she approached him. She stood beside him, facing Lu and the guests.

“That’s Mkhulu, that’s Gogo and that’s Malume. This is Baba Zulu,” she said. She looked at Lu and left the room.

“Hello, won’t you sit down?” invited Zach. The guests sat down, watching him as if they were mesmerized.

“I put hot water in a pot for porridge,” he said to Lu.

“Thanks,” she said, then she left the room.

In the kitchen, she cooked the porridge quickly, then she left it to simmer as she went to get cleaned up. She needed to explain about Zulu to her parents. She had to talk to them before they said things to him that would make him see her in a bad light. She wanted him to think well of her, regardless of the fact that she was unlikely to ever see him again.

When she returned to the kitchen, the porridge pot was at the sink. She followed the sound of spoons meeting bowls to the dining room. Everyone was seated round the table, eating in silence.

“Eat your food before it gets cold,” said Zulu. Lu sat down to eat.

“Are you ready to go, Thandi?” Zulu asked.

“Go?” returned Thandi.

“To work. I’ll give you a lift.”

“I’m not going to work, I took the week off.”

“What will you do with all that time?”

“I don’t know.”

“Come with me to Pretoria, I’m checking on some of my interests there. We’ll be back in time for supper,” he said to Lu. Thandi went to get dressed and returned quickly.

“I’m ready,” she said. Zulu made his goodbyes to Lu’s family.

“Can I have the car keys?” he asked Lu. She fetched the keys from her bedroom and took them to him. He was waiting beside the corolla. She handed him the keys, he gave her the keys to his Mercedes Benz.

“We’ll see you later,” he said. She watched him and Thandi driving off.

Her staff arrived. She spent as much time as she could with them, then she returned to the house.

The dining room was empty. Sighing with relief, she fetched the porridge bowls from the table and took them to the kitchen. She stopped just inside the kitchen door, noticing her parents and brother seated round the kitchen table.

“Lungile, what’s going on here? Is that child divorced?” asked Mama.

“Yes,” replied Lu, as she took the bowls to the sink.

“How many men spent the night here?”

“Mama!” gasped Lu.

“How many?”

“One!”

“This man, this...Zulu...is he with you, or with Thandi, or with both of you?” Lu gasped and looked at Mama in shock.

“You’re both very familiar with him. Don’t go teaching that child to steal other people’s husbands...” Mama said.

“I don’t!” gasped Lu.

“...she may not be as lucky as you are, and some woman might kill her over a man.” Mama continued. Lu was glad to hear the doorbell ringing.

Buti left the room and returned with her guest. Lu’s heart sank, then she introduced MaNzimande to her family.

“I saw your husband and child driving past my house and thought to come and say hello,” said MaNzimande.

“Husband?” repeated Mama, Baba and Buti.

“Zulu and MaKhumalo are married. Don’t you know? We found out on Sunday. He must have moved in here. There’s more furniture and his cars are parked outside all night long. You didn’t say, MaKhumalo, exactly how long have the two of you been married?” asked MaNzimande.

“How could you get married without telling us? Who received amalobolo from that man? Why do we know nothing of this?” demanded Mama. Lu closed her eyes, unable to watch MaNzimande mentally recording every single one of Mama’s words.

“Is it true that you’re married, Lungile?” demanded Baba. Lu opened her mouth to reply.

“A man wouldn’t leave a car that big and that fancy with a woman if she wasn’t his wife,” said Buti.

“At least you’re not stealing someone else’s husband,” said Mama.

“I have to go to work,” said Lu.

“We’ll be back for supper,” said Baba. MaNzimande asked for a lift and left with the guests.

Lu freshened up after work, then her family arrived. She gave them supper then she said that she had to go.

“Where are you going at this time of night?” asked Mama. Lu ran out of the house and into Zulu’s car, then she drove as if she was fleeing for her life.

Once she was away from her neighbourhood, she slowed down and used her cell phone to phone Thandi on her cell phone.

“Are you still with Zulu?” she asked.

“Yes,” replied Thandi.

“Can I speak to him?”

“Just a minute,” said Thandi.

“Hello,” said Zulu.

“Hello, this is...”

“I know who it is.”

“I’m going to your home, I hope you don’t mind,” said Lu.

“I don’t mind. We’re on our way there too.”

When Lu arrived at Zulu’s home, the headlights of the Mercedes Benz fell on a group of people standing outside his open front door. Thandi was looking on as several people talked to Zulu. Everyone turned to look at the car once the lights had fallen on them. Lu stopped the car and switched off the lights. She climbed out of the car and closed the door.

“That’s Buti’s car! Who’s that woman driving your car, Buti?” a female voice asked. Lu’s heart sank. She had left a mini interrogation at home and walked straight into the mother of interrogations. She looked at Thandi and nodded at the car.

“Come,” said Zulu. She had not seen him approach. He took her hand and led her to the house.

“It must be true that he remarried. No man trusts a car like that with just anyone, she must be his wife,” said a male voice. Lu and Zulu reached the group of people at the front door.

“Everyone, this is MaKhumalo, the mother of our children. MaKhumalo, that’s Mama, MaMbambo. This is Baba. That’s my younger brother David, my youngest brother Zeblon, and that’s our sister, Esther. Thandi, come...this is our eldest child, Thandi, she’s followed by Lwazi, and Ethel’s the youngest,” said Zulu. He was holding Lu’s hand in one hand, and Thandi’s hand in his other hand.

“Mama, you’re back, supper’s ready,” said MaDlamini.

“Thank you. Let’s all go inside,” said Lu. She led the way into the house and to the dining room. Everyone sat down in silence.

“Zachariah, are you married to this girl?” asked Mr Zulu. Zulu opened his mouth to reply.

“It’s clear that they’re married. He wouldn’t have introduced her and her child unless they were married. And the staff is obviously used to her. They must be married,” said Zeblon.

“I can’t believe you’d do this without telling us! Do you know who told us about your marriage? The chief! He came to congratulate us on our having a new daughter-in-law. We went straight to Zeblon’s and told him to bring us to you, so we can find out exactly what’s going on,” said Mr Zulu. MaDlamini entered the room.

“There are visitors for you, Mama,” she said. Lu frowned, wondering who would look for her at Zulu’s home. She gasped when her parents and her brother entered the room. They had obviously followed her!

Zulu stood and introduced the Zulus and the Khumalos to each other, then he invited the Khumalos to sit down, then he sat down. Lu looked at him, he was looking at her. His gaze left her, she realised that he was looking between her Baba, and Mr Zulu.

“Zachariah, you know better than to introduce me to your in-laws in such an informal manner. Have you forgotten everything we taught you? It’s not as if this is your first marriage,” Zach heard his Baba say.

“Zulu, let’s not cry over spilt milk. The thing to do now is handle the situation we find ourselves in,” said Khumalo.

“And how do we handle it? Has anyone in my family approached you about this boy marrying your girl?”

“No.”

“I am so embarrassed! I don’t know where to look. How could you steal someone’s child, Zachariah? You know that you have to ask for permission. What’s the rush, boy? Is MaKhumalo pregnant?” Zach was startled by the question. He was still reeling from hearing that the chief had told his parents about his supposed marriage. He had not known that the news had spread that fast.

He could correct everyone’s assumption, or he could go with it and convince Lungile to go along with it until they married for real. He chose the second option and looked at Lungile. She had gasped at his father’s question. Everyone was looking at her.

“Is that what’s going on, Lungile?” asked Khumalo. Lu looked from Zach’s Baba, to her own, in shock. Her phone rang before she could respond.

“Excuse me,” she said, then she left the room. She was surprised that her legs had carried her out of the front door. She could not believe that her lie had taken things that far. She had never intended for her family to hear about it, and now, Zulu’s family had also heard about it. She had to put a stop to it. She answered her phone.

“Ethel?” she said. Ethel did not respond.

“Ethel? Tell me what’s going on,” said Lu.

“I think I’m pregnant.”

“What?” asked an incredulous Lu. She sat on the ground, her legs had given out on her.

“I’ve missed two periods, I must be pregnant.”

“Did you see a doctor?” asked Lu. She was breathing heavily, trying to stem the panic that she was feeling.

“I used a home pregnancy test, it confirmed that I’m pregnant.” Lu closed her eyes in horror. They were both quiet. Think of something, Lu told herself. She wanted to hold Ethel and tell her that everything would be alright. She opened her eyes.

“What do you want to do?” she asked.

“I don’t know.”

“Does the father know?”

“He said I should stay away from him.”

“I am so sorry.”



“So am I.”

“Go to the clinic, then we’ll talk.”

“But...”

“Go, Ethel. Be sure about what’s going on.” Lu could hear Ethel crying.

“Whatever happens, I’m with you,” she said.

“Don’t tell Baba, please don’t tell Baba. He’ll be so disappointed,” said Ethel.

“I can’t say anything now, but...”

“Please, Mama, don’t tell him.”

“We’ll see. How are your studies? Ethel?”

“I don’t know. I can’t focus.”

“Go to the clinic. Do you want me to phone you, this time tomorrow?”

“Okay.” Lu returned to the dining room.

“Is everything alright?” asked Zulu.

“Yes, that was Ethel,” said Lu, as she sat down.

“Why is she phoning you and not her father?” asked Esther.

“MaKhumalo is Ethel’s mother now,” said Zulu.

“MaKhumalo, I won’t have my grandchild discriminated against in favour of your children. Zachariah, things haven’t been done properly. Send this woman back to wherever you found her and we’ll find you a good woman. We’ll find you a young woman who’ll give you children that have your blood in their veins. Ethel needs siblings and this gogo you’ve brought into this home can’t provide them,” said MaMbambo.

Lu gasped in outrage then she stood to leave. Zulu stood too and went to stand beside her, a hand on her lower back.

“We’re having our church wedding in a few months. We’ll have dealt with amalobolo and other formalities by then,” he said. Everyone looked at him as if he was crazy. Lu looked at him in shock.

“Is she using a love potion?” asked MaMbambo. Zulu looked at Lu.

“She doesn’t need a love potion. I fell in love with her the moment I met her, the more I know about her, the deeper the love grows,” he said. Lu felt her heart pounding. He was looking at her as if he meant what he was saying. She looked away from him before she could hoodwink herself into believing him.

“You know nothing about her,” said Zeblon.

“I know enough,” said Zulu.

“Where’s she from?” asked Mr Zulu.

“Newcastle,” said Baba.

“Has she ever been married, or is she one of these immoral women who have children with different fathers?” asked MaMbambo. Lu gasped.

“The children have one father,” said Zulu.

“How would you know? No man can know for sure if he’s the father of a woman’s children. These girls of today have no morals whatsoever. Get rid of her, Zachariah.”

“Why didn’t you tell us about her?” asked Mr Zulu.

“The children were going to school, we promised to keep it quiet until they return,” replied Zulu. Lu opened her mouth to speak.

“What was the rush? You could have done it after the children return,” said Mr Zulu.

“We couldn’t wait. We’ve both been lonely for too long. We’re not getting divorced and as with my former wife, I won’t have MaKhumalo maligned. She’s lost her appetite because of the talk going on here. I want it to stop now. If you must talk in a way that hurts my wife, do so away from me, my wife and our children.”

“Hawu! We thought the first one had bewitched you, this one clearly uses stronger medicine,” said MaMbambo.

“Excuse me, I’m taking my wife and child some place where they won’t be insulted. Let’s go, Thandi,” Zulu said, as he led Lu out of the dining room.

He took the keys for the mercedes benz from her and helped her into the passenger seat. He and Thandi climbed into the car, then he drove off. Outside Lu’s home, Thandi said goodnight and went into the house.

“I am so sorry,” said Lu to Zulu. He did not respond.

“I’ll tell MaNzimande that we got divorced and this whole thing will go away. I shouldn’t have lied about being married to you, but I did, and now, I’m going to fix this. I promise you that by Monday, it will be gone and forgotten. Go home, send my family away and...” she said.

“Let’s sleep,” he said.

“I’ll...” He climbed out of the car. She followed suit. He locked the car and walked into the house. She hurried after him, but she had to stop when he went into the bathroom. She made the bed in the lounge then she sat on an armchair beside the bed, waiting for him.

Zach freshened up, then he went to the lounge. He smiled. Lu was seated in an armchair, asleep. He caressed her cheek. Her skin was as soft as he had imagined it would be.

“Lungile. Lungile,” he said. She opened her eyes. He took one of her hands in his and helped her to her feet.

“Come,” he said. He put an arm round her waist and led her to her bedroom, where he helped her onto her bed. She snuggled into her pillow and fell asleep immediately. He opened cupboards until he found a duvet. He put it on her, then, he sat on the bed, watching her. He was going to convince her to marry him, he had to.

## CHAPTER SIX

Zach woke early and freshened up. When he was dressed, he went to the kitchen. He made some phone calls, then he put his cell phone on the table and looked up as Lu entered the room. She looked gorgeous and she clearly had something on her mind, as did he.

“Hi,” he said.

“We need to talk,” she said.

“Sit down.” He watched as she sat down. She opened her mouth.

“I think we should register to get married,” he said.

“What?” she gasped. He could see he had shocked her.

“I know a magistrate who can help us, and I have a team in place to talk to your father about amalobolo,” Zach continued.

“Zulu! Marriage is out of the question!” she gasped.

“Why?” he asked calmly.

“Because it’s crazy! We know nothing about each other and...”

“Think of the children.” She looked at him, thrown by his words.

“What do they have to do with anything?” she asked.

“They need us.”

“Yes, of course...”

“Your girls need a father, mine needs a mother. Our getting married will give them what they need.”

“We don’t need to be married!”

“All three girls need two parents who live under one roof. I’m not living with you unless we’re married.”

“I don’t want to be married! And we don’t need to live together!” she shouted, distressed. He had to stay calm and convince her.

“I want to be married, to you,” he said, watching her with great focus.

“You don’t know me.”

“I know enough.”

“I don’t know you.”

“Ask me anything, I’ve no secrets.”

“But...”

“This needs to be sorted out soon. I’m going away and I’d like you to look after things for me while I’m gone.”

“Don’t you have an assistant or...”

“I prefer to run things myself, or to have someone I trust implicitly take my place.”

“You can’t trust me after so short an acquaintance.”

“I do trust you.”

“Why?”

“My gut tells me to.” He watched her open and close her mouth in a bid to say something.

“I have my own affairs to look after,” she said.

“Thandi can look after them for you. When I return, we need to amalgamate our lives. You and the girls will move in with me and Ethel.”

“This is my home, I’m not going anywhere! My business...”

“I have premises you and your staff can move into. Right now, I need you to come with me so I can show you what you’ll be in charge of, and introduce you to the people who’ll be reporting to you.”

“Hello, Mama, hello, Baba,” said Thandi, entering the room.

“Hello,” Lu and Zach said together.

“Your mother’s going to be very busy over the next few days, can you look after the workshop for her?” asked Zach.

“Okay,” said Thandi, looking from him to Lu. The gate squeaked.

“That’s the staff, I’ll open up for them,” said Lu.

“I’ll do it,” said Thandi, as she left the room.

“We’ll be getting married very soon. I suggest we keep our families out of this until we’ve done things legally,” said Zach.

“I haven’t said I’ll marry you!” said Lu. Zach gave her a long look. He knew that he was not playing fair, but he was not about to let her slip away from him.

“Your choices are not many, sthandwa. We either get married, or we move in together without marriage. Sooner than later, it will come out that we’re unmarried. What will your family say? What kind of talk will the girls be subjected to if we do that?” he asked.

“Who says we have to move in together? Divorced parents or parents who never married meet with and talk to their children without living with them.”

“How has that worked for your girls?”

“That’s different! Their father...”

“I want Ethel to be part of a whole family. I get the feeling Lwazi also needs a whole family. Are you going to deny her what she needs?” Lu gasped.

“We can talk about this later. Right now, we need to go to my home so I can change, then I’ll take you round to my businesses. I’ll tell Thandi that we’re leaving while you get what you need,” Zach said. He stood and left the room before she could argue.

Lu watched him leaving the kitchen. She wondered if he was insane. He had not spoken a single sensible word. He talked of marriage between them as if it was possible! She had not seen him drinking any alcohol, perhaps he was on drugs? Whatever it was, he had to stop talking nonsense. She went to get her handbag, then she joined him in his car.

At his home, MaDube told her that the Khumalos and Zulus had left after supper the night before. She also told her that there would be guests that evening and asked what she should prepare for supper.

“We have to go,” said Zulu.

“I need to talk to Mama,” said MaDube.

“Phone her. Give her your number, MaKhumalo,” Zulu said to Lu. Lu gave MaDube her number then she and Zulu left. They spent the morning meeting his managers at his different businesses. He had very varied interests, from hospitality to transport, to flea market stands and grocery stores.

Lu made note of the business names, their locations, her contact persons and the details that she needed to get from them. In the early afternoon, she was startled by the ringing of her cell phone. MaDube was asking what to prepare for supper. They finalised the details and when the call ended, Lu and Zulu were in the car, he was driving them to their next destination.

“Who you have in your home is none of my business. You should tell MaDube to talk to you about your domestic arrangements, or to use her discretion,” Lu said crossly.

“She’s talking to my wife about it, what’s wrong with that?” he returned.

“I am not your wife!”

“We’ll take care of that detail soon.”

“Zulu...”

“My name is Zach! I don’t want you calling me Zulu when we’re married. My lawyer will be my witness at our wedding, who’ll be your witness?”

“I don’t know! I’m not marrying you!” shouted Lu. She was hungry, tired and stressed.

“Bring your lawyer,” Zach said calmly.

“I don’t have one.”

“Bring the one who handled your divorce.”

“That was twelve years ago, he’s probably dead.”

“You have to bring someone.” Lu closed her eyes.

“I can’t go through another divorce,” she said tiredly.

“You won’t have to.”

“You don’t know that. There are no guarantees or certainties in marriage.”

“Life has no guarantees.”

“I’m not marrying you.”

“Do you want to be blamed when the girls fail to get married?”

“Of course not!”

“Then we can’t live in sin, we have to get married.”

“We are not going to live in sin! We are not moving in together! We are not getting married!”

“Don’t get upset, sthandwa, everything will work out just fine. When we’re married...”

“I’m not marrying you!”

“...we’ll make things work between us. I’ve arranged with the magistrate to...”

“Is that legal? I wasn’t there when you registered and...”

“I haven’t registered for us to marry, we’ll have to do that together. We’ll have a good marriage.”

“Haven’t you heard a word I said?” she asked. He smiled at her. She looked away from him, feeling her heart fluttering.

“I’ll die if I have to go through another divorce,” she said.

“There’ll be no divorce.”

“Any number of things could go wrong.”

“I know. We’ll handle them.”

“Some things can’t be handled.”

“Everything can be handled. We have to decide to pull together, at the same time, in the same direction.”

“Men and women aren’t capable of pulling in the same direction.”

“Then how do marriages last? How long have your parents been married? How long, Lungile?”

“Forty nine years.”

“They wouldn’t have come this far without pulling together. My parents have been married fifty four years. We can make our marriage work.” Lu did not respond. Zulu stopped the car outside an upmarket building.

“Let’s go. This is our last stop,” he said. They took the lift to an office on the top floor. Zulu asked the receptionist to lead Lu to the managing director’s office. Alone in the office, Lu started dozing as soon as she sat down.

She was startled when the door opened, a man entered, reading a document. Her heart pounded furiously and her eyes opened wide.

“Absolom?” she said. The man stopped and looked at her.

“Lungile? What are you doing here?” he demanded.

“I...”

“Do you know how embarrassing it is to be asked to return amalobolo? The Malingas have asked for theirs back because you didn’t raise your child properly. If you’d raised her properly, she’d never have been sent away. You’re still good for nothing. Didn’t you love Thandi enough to teach her never to be sent away by her husband?”

“I...”

“How dare you come here, Lungile! I owe you and those brats of yours nothing! Get out of here,” he said.

“What did I ever see in you? And why did I bother to tell you when Thandi got married? You threw the children out like dirty water, you skipped all maintenance payments, yet you had the audacity to accept amalobolo when Thandi got married. You’re an unprincipled gold digger.”

“You still use language from the gutter. Stay away from me, I never want to see you again.”

“Are you prepared to resign?” asked Zulu. Lu and Absolom turned to look at him, he was standing just inside the open door.

“Are you prepared to resign?” Zulu asked again.

“No!” said Absolom.

“The only way to avoid seeing Mrs Zulu is by resigning. She’ll be here from time to time to check on things for me.”

“Who’s Mrs Zulu?” Zulu entered the room and stood beside Lu.

“This is Mrs Zulu. Do you have a problem working with her in a professional manner?” Zulu asked. Absolom gave Lu a long look, then he looked at Zulu.

“No,” he said.

“Let’s get to work.”

Zulu and Absolom sat down. Zulu fired questions at Absolom as Lu made notes. The meeting ended. Zulu stood, took Lu’s hand in his and led her out of the office. Lu could feel the anger emanating from him. Everyone cleared the way for him, no one dared to say goodbye, although they had been happy enough to greet him on his arrival.

He gave Lu the car keys and told her where to drive to. He made several phone calls as she drove, bawling people out. Lu stopped the car outside a restaurant.

“Is this one of your businesses?” she asked.

“We’re here to eat.”

“Let’s go home.”

“I want to eat here.”

“I don’t want to watch you hurting people’s feelings. What are you so mad about? Everything was fine until you came into Absolom’s office. What’s gone wrong? Did someone embezzle money from that company?”

“Is he the father of the girls?” demanded Zulu.

“What?”

“Is that...person...the father of the girls?” he asked, through clenched teeth.

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Is he their father?” he shouted.

“Yes!” replied Lu.

“Why?” he roared.

“What are you so mad about?”

“How could you let him touch you?”



“What does that have to do with embezzlement?”

“What embezzlement?”

“The embezzlement that you’re mad about.”

“No one has embezzled any money!”

“Then why are you shouting at me?”

“Because you let that...that...person, touch you.”

“He was my husband!”

“Don’t ever let him touch you!”

“I won’t! He and I are divorced.”

“Keep it that way,” he said. They glared at each other, then he looked away from her. She looked unseeingly in front of her.

“We should go in,” he said quietly.

“I’m not hungry.”

“You looked like you were going to faint.” Lu looked at him.

“Why are you angry about my former marriage?” she asked.

“Because you’re mine! I’m the only one with the right to touch you. If I ever catch that man or any other man with his hands on you, I’ll kill him, then I’ll deal with you,” he roared. Lu looked away from him.

“I want to go home, can I do that now, or is there something else we need to do?” she asked.

“We’re done.”

“I’ll see you later,” she said, picking up her handbag.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Home.”

“I’ll take you.”

“No.”

“How will you get there?”

“Don’t worry about it,” she said, opening the car door. She felt a hand on her forearm and looked at Zulu.

“I’ve never been treated as property before, I am not about to start now,” she said.

“I’ll never treat you as property.”

“You already think of me that way.”

“I don’t!”

“Then how do you get to say I’m yours, as if I’m a car or a jacket?”

“I...”

“I’m getting out of your car, and I’m going home. I’m going to forget that I ever met you, I suggest you forget ever meeting me or my children,” she shouted, wrenching her arm free, then she climbed out of the car, banged the door and hurried off.

Zach cursed as he watched her storming away. He had not expected her to react that badly to his words. He had not been thinking of her as property, he had been thinking of her as his woman, and he had been furious with Mthethwa for sleeping with his woman. He had to convince her to see things his way.

He drove off and ended up at a park he and Ethel had frequented. He had not intended to go there. He climbed out of the car and went to sit where Ethel liked to sit. He looked about. He would bring Ethel, Lwazi, Thandi, and Lungile here. He knew a great picnic spot for his family. His family. Unless he convinced Lungile to marry him, the only family he had was Ethel.

He smiled. She was very astute and had noticed his fascination with Lungile. She had seen him to his car on the night that she had slept at Lungile’s home.

“Baba?” she had said.

“What is it, baby?”

“You like Lwazi’s Mama, don’t you?” Zach had been surprised by the question.

“Yes, I like her,” he had said. She had nodded.

“She’s nice, I like her too.” They had watched each other.

“Are you going to marry her?” she had asked.

“Ethel!” he had said. Yes, he wanted to marry Lu, but he had to get her to agree first, and he had not wanted to get Ethel’s hopes up for nothing. She had smiled.

“You should marry her. I won’t mind if you make her my Mama,” she had said. Zach had been rendered speechless.

“I want a Mama. Lwazi’s will be much better than Mamncane. Are you going to marry Mamncane? Please don’t marry her, please, Baba.”

“I’m not marrying Mamncane,” he had said. She had hugged him.

“Lwazi’s Mama doesn’t have a boyfriend,” she had said.

“How do you know that?”

“I asked Sis Thandi.”

“Ethel!” She had kissed his cheek and run into Lu’s house. She would be glad to hear that he intended to give her the Mama she wanted.

He stood and walked back to his car. Lu had been furious. He understood fury. When he was angry, he needed time before he was willing to be reasonable. He was going to give Lu a little time, then he would go and talk to her. He went to work for a while then he went home and phoned Ethel. She and Lwazi were together.

“Are you in a relationship now, Baba?” asked Ethel.

“A relationship?” asked Lwazi.

“Baba’s got his eye on someone,” said Ethel.

“Someone?”

“A woman.”

“What woman?” Zach thought Lwazi was shocked by the thought of him having a woman in his life.

“Someone special, isn’t that right, Baba?” said Ethel.

“Is this true, Baba?” asked Lwazi. Zach did not know how to reply.

“Be careful, Baba. Choose a woman who’ll be good to E,” said Lwazi.

“She’ll be good to all of us,” said Ethel.

“How do you know?”

“I just do.”

“Baba, do you have a girlfriend?” asked Lwazi.

“Well...she’s not my girlfriend right now, but I’m working on it,” said Zach.

“Do I know her?” asked Lwazi. Ethel laughed.

“What’s so funny?” asked Lwazi. Ethel laughed harder.

“It’s Mama,” she said.

“Mama?” said Lwazi.

“Your Mama.”

“What?”

“Baba likes your Mama.”

“Is this true, Baba?”

“Yes,” said Zach.

“Oh! Oh.”

“I hope it works out. How do you feel about it, Lwazi?” asked Ethel. Lwazi seemed to be speechless. Zach changed the subject. He was ending the call, when she said,

“Baba?”

“Yes, Lwazi,” he said.

“Be kind to Mama.”

“I will,” he said, then he sighed with relief. He had not wanted to alienate Lwazi by being interested in her Mama. He was glad two out of the three girls that he and Lu had were receptive to his intentions regarding Lu. He showered, then he went to sleep.

Next morning, he woke early because he wanted to talk to Lu before either of them went to work.

When Lu left Zulu in his car, she walked about a while, then she realised she had a customer in the neighbourhood and went to see her.

“MaKhumalo, it's good you are here. This last garment you made me...” the customer said.

“Mrs Nare, I have never had the displeasure of working with someone as unpleasant as you. Keep your money and stay away from me, I never want to do business with you again,” said Lu. She turned on her heel and left. She was walking to the taxi terminus when she remembered that she had another customer nearby and decided to visit her, too.

“MaKhumalo, it's not month end yet,” the customer said.

“It hasn't been month end in six months. I'm not leaving without my money. If I leave without it, I'm taking your car,” said Lu. She grabbed the customer's handbag, the customer tried to get it back. They tussled for it, Lu moved away from the customer with it.

“Pay up, in cash, or with the car,” she said.

The customer moved to her desk, took out a petty cash box, and counted out money. Lu picked up the money, counted it out loud, took what she was owed, put the handbag on the desk and left.

At work, she was sharp with the staff, they left before knock off time. When she went home, Thandi took one look at her furious countenance and made her goodbyes, saying she would spend the night out.

Lu closed her eyes and admitted to herself that the only person she was furious with was herself.

I only met Zulu a few days ago and already, I like him. Was Absolom not lesson enough for me? I knew him three years before I married him and look how that turned out! I don't even know this new man and I already had my hopes up! I'm losing my mind, she thought.

When she came out of the bath, she could neither eat nor sleep. She went to work in her workshop. When she tired, she locked up and went to sleep.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

After her bath next morning, she heard sounds in the house.

“It’s me, Mama,” Thandi called, Lu sighed with relief. After dressing, she went to the kitchen. She had just put milk on the stove when she heard footsteps. She frowned, they were not Thandi’s footsteps. She looked at the doorway.

“What are you doing here? Who let you in? Thandi! Sthandiwe!” called Lu. She could not believe that Zulu had had the audacity to come to her home after their last encounter.

“Lungile...” Zulu said.

“Ma,” said Thandi, entering the room.

“Did you let this person into the house?” Lu demanded of her.

“I...”

“Show him the way out unless you have another home.”

“He said he needs to talk to you.”

“Ouuuuut!” shouted Lu.

“I’m sorry,” said Zulu.

“Not as sorry as you will be if you don’t get out of my sight right now.”

“I didn’t mean to make you out to be a possession.”

“Go away!”

“I was jealous.” Lu drew back, thoroughly taken off guard.

“Jealous? Jealous of what?” she demanded.

“Excuse me,” said Thandi and she left the room. Lu watched her leave, then she looked at Zulu.

“You should go,” she said.

“I was jealous, because I love you,” said Zulu. Lu closed her eyes. She would not allow her mind to deceive her. She was obviously hearing things. It was best to ignore what she thought she had heard. She opened her eyes.

“I don’t want to fight with you,” she said.

“I don’t want to fight with you either. I want us to have a loving relationship, not a fighting one.”

“We’re not having any relationship.” Zulu moved further into the room. Lu turned to the milk on the stove. Zulu switched the stove off and took the milk off the heat.

“What are you doing?” she asked. He looked at her.

“You and I are already in a relationship. I parent your girls, you parent mine. You said you don’t want a divorce, neither do I. I know for a fact that the girls don’t want a divorce. Let’s commit to making a loving home, for our girls and for ourselves.

“I want to be married, to you, and I’ll do whatever I have to to make our marriage work. The girls want a home, with you and me as their parents. The only one who still needs to decide whether or not this marriage works, is you. Think about what you want, for you and for the girls,” he said. They stood watching each other.

Lu's staff arrived, she went to open the garage. When she returned to the house, Zulu and Thandi had left.

She went to her room and lay on her bed. Her eyes fell on a photograph of Thandi and Lwazi that was beside her bed. They both looked very sad. Lu closed her eyes. She remembered Lwazi with Zulu. She was a very different person when he was around, she was happy and young. She talked to him about things that bothered her and things that mattered to her.

Lu gasped, remembering her last conversation with Ethel. She sat up and phoned her. The phone went to voice mail, she left a message. After the call, she sat thinking about Ethel. She liked her. Ethel treated her the way she wished Lwazi would treat her, with trust. If Ethel needed a mother, Lu was prepared to be that mother.

She would marry Zulu, Thandi, Lwazi and Ethel would get what they needed and when the marriage ended, she would still have her own home, her own business and hopefully, she would not be as mentally, emotionally, and financially devastated as she had been when her first marriage had ended.

She changed into a pretty lime dress. It highlighted her bosom and small waist. She picked up her handbag and left the house.

She had just closed the gate when a car stopped beside her. It was Zulu’s, she climbed in beside him and greeted him.

“Are you violent?” she asked.

“What?” he returned looking at her out of wide open, shocked eyes.

“Do you think it's okay to beat your wife?”

“No! Why would you feel the need to ask me that?”

“You said if I was unfaithful, you'd deal with me. Did you mean you'd hit me?”

“I'd make love to you till you associate only me with pleasure, and want only my touch. There is no room for violence in my home. Are you violent? Will you hit me?”

“Of course not!” They watched each other in silence.

“Will you marry me?” he asked.

“Yes,” she replied, putting on her seatbelt.

“I’ve got two witnesses for the ceremony.”

“That’s good,” she said, as she settled down. When he did not drive off, she looked at him, he was watching her.

“Why are you marrying me?” he asked. She drew back.

“You asked me to!”

“Yes, and I told you why I asked you. Why did you accept?” She looked away from him.

“I love the girls and I want to give them a loving home,” she said.

“A loving home.”

“Yes.”

“People must love each other to make a loving home.”

“What’s your point?” she asked, looking at him.

“We’ll have to learn to love each other.”

“Yes.”

“Are you prepared to do that?”

“Yes.” He smiled, she looked away from him feeling her heart melting.

“We need to go for HIV/Aids tests,” she said.

“Yes.” As Zulu drove, Lu phoned her doctor and made an appointment at the end of the business day that day. She and Zulu went to register to get married, then Zulu drove Lu back to her workshop.

They went to test for HIV/Aids and other STIs that evening, and they were told they had to wait several weeks for their results as there was a back log at the lab.

Zach had to leave town the following day on business. He hoped to return before his wedding day as he wanted to spend time with Lu before they married. The labour dispute he was attending to escalated into violent protests and kept him very busy. Whenever he phoned Lu, her phone went to voicemail. He wondered if she was fine and hoped that the time apart had not changed her mind.

He returned home the day he was getting married and phoned Lu. She said she would meet him at home affairs. He was relieved.

Lu had been relieved that Zulu had been called out of town, it gave her time to focus on her work and less time on wondering if marrying him was a mistake. She did not take his calls when he phoned. She was surprised when he phoned her on their wedding day. She had hoped he would forget. When he asked her if she needed a lift to home affairs, she said she would meet him there because she was not ready to see him.

She took a cab there. Her heart pounded with excitement when she saw him. She had forgotten how very handsome he was. She tried to tell herself to stop being excited, but her heart did not listen. They greeted each other, then they were called to get married.

The marriage ceremony was brief and small, unlike Lu's first wedding. There had been many people at that one. There had been two receptions and...and it had led her to misery.

Afterwards she sat beside Zulu in his car, telling herself to stop imagining the end of the marriage and a repeat of the misery that had ended her first marriage.

"Where do you want me to take you?" Zulu asked. She looked at him.

"Home, I need to oversee the completion of a very important order. What will you do?" He gave her a long look.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"We live together now."

"Oh, yes."

"In Houghton." Lu frowned.

"I'll organise a van to take your things to our home," said Zach.

"I'll take care of the move."

"We're not having two homes." Lu looked away from him.

"Think of the children," he said. She nodded.

"I have to leave town," he said. She closed her eyes, unsure if she was sad or relieved to hear that.

"When do you leave?" she asked.

"First thing tomorrow morning. I'm going to Namibia, I'll be back next Friday."

"Okay."

"Can you take me to the airport?"

"Yes."

"We'll go home so you can get a car, then you can take care of your business. I suggest you move your workshop tomorrow, you don't want your machines and other things sitting on uninhabited property. Here's the address of the warehouse and this is the caretaker's name.



He's expecting you," he said, giving Lu a piece of paper. She took it and looked at the address.

"This must be a very expensive place. I can't afford the rent," she said.

"You'll be accessible to more customers so you'll make more money, and the rent will be reasonable, because I'm the owner. Get a few more machines and use the space properly," he said as he started the car.

After work, Lu told Thandi that they were moving in with Zulu. Thandi could not hide her shock. Lu did not blame her. She had not had a man in her life since her divorce.

"Get packed," she said, as she went to her room. She packed some clothes in several bags and packed them into the car. Thandi joined her with her own suitcase.

"Is this all you're taking?" asked Lu.

"I'll get the rest later," said Thandi. They climbed into the car and Lu drove to Zulu's home. MaDube and MaDlamini helped them to unpack. Lu was glad they knew which room to put Thandi in. She gave herself a quick tour of the house.

It was enormous. There were seven bedrooms, all of them with ensuite bathrooms. There were three guest bathrooms, and she had already seen the reception rooms. She also saw the study and the bar. It had been converted into another TV lounge. Zulu obviously did not drink because the bar was stocked with magazines and tool boxes of several sizes. Lu was relieved.

She had not liked Absalom when he had been drinking. He had been a social drinker, but a little alcohol in his system had turned him into someone she had wanted nothing to do with.

After her tour, she went to soak in a hot bath. After her bath, she found Zulu in her bedroom. Her heart pounded. She had not thought this far ahead. She was not ready to be intimate with him.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Waiting for you," replied Zulu.

"Why?"

"So I can show you to our room. We're married, we sleep in the same room. Take essentials and let's go."

"I..."

"You said you wanted to make a loving home."

"I do, but..."

"But what?"

"If I move into your room, you'll expect sex from me."

"Eventually, yes, but not right now."

“You don’t expect sex from me tonight?”

“No! I doubt either of us is up to it tonight, and anyway, we don’t have our test results yet.”

“I’ll get my things.”

In his room, Zulu showed her where to put her things, then he went to shower in the ensuite bathroom. Lu dressed, then she went to the kitchen. MaDube was putting finishing touches to dinner and sent Lu away.

Lu found Thandi channel surfing on the TV in one of the lounges. She touched her shoulder briefly, then she went to phone Ethel.

“How are you?” she asked.

“Fine,” replied Ethel.

“I left you a message.”

“I got it.”

“Did you go for the test?”

“Yes.”

“What was the result?”

“Negative.”

“That’s great! Isn’t it?”

“If you say so.”

“Are you mad at me?”

“You promised to phone me!”

“I’m sorry. I’m really sorry, I’ll never forget to phone you again. I’ll put a reminder in future.”

“I waited and waited.”

“Please forgive me. I won’t do it again.”

“Okay.”

“Are you happy about the result?”

“Yes. Will you tell Baba?”

“There’s nothing to tell.” Ethel sighed, relieved.

“How are your studies going?” asked Lu.

"I'm changing to fine art or drama next semester."

"Good luck."

"Thank you, and thank you for phoning me. I love you." Lu was surprised.

"I love you, too," she said. Ethel ended the call, and Lu looked at her phone wishing Lwazi was the one she had been speaking to. Knowing how wishing solved nothing, she decided to drop that train of thought.

"Who do you love?" asked Zulu.

"Ethel," replied Lu, surprised that she really did love Ethel. Zulu was dressed, sitting beside her on their bed.

"How is she?" he asked.

"She's fine."

"Good. Can we eat now?" After dinner, Thandi went to her room, Zulu went to make some calls.

Lu knocked on Thandi's bedroom door and entered when she was invited in. Thandi was lying in her bed. Lu smiled, the room and the bed were bigger than the ones in her home. She sat beside Thandi.

"How are you?" she asked.

"Okay."

"Even with the divorce?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"You know you can talk to me."

"Yes." Lu kissed Thandi's cheek, then she went to the room she was sharing with Zulu. She sat on the bed beside him as he talked on his cell phone.

"What's the matter?" he asked. Lu looked at him. His call had ended, he was watching her.

"I don't know if Thandi's alright. Divorce isn't the easiest thing to get over."

"She'll be fine."

"I hope so. I know how Ethel and Thandi tell me they are, but Lwazi won't take my calls, or respond to my text messages. Do you know how she is?"

"She's fine. I speak to her and Ethel at least once a week. We have to leave early tomorrow," he said, then he stood and went into the dressing room.

“Aren’t you changing into your sleep clothes?” he called.

“I am.”

“Come and change.”

“I...I...need to check on something,” Lu said, then she left the bedroom quickly. When she thought Zulu had finished changing, she returned to the bedroom. He was lying in bed. Lu crept into the room, assuming he was asleep.

“Where did you go?” he asked. Lu started violently and put a hand on her chest.

“I don’t mean to scare you,” he said. She nodded.

“Where were you?” he asked.

“In the lounge.”

“Why?”

“Er...um...”

“You felt shy.”

“Yes,” she said, looking down. Zulu sat up, she looked at him. His chest was bare, she quickly looked away.

“I’ll go and get changed,” she said, rushing to the dressing room. When she returned to the bedroom after changing, Zulu was still sitting up. She averted her eyes and walked to her side of the bed. She lay down and covered herself quickly, keeping her back to Zulu.

“Good night,” he said.

“Good night,” she returned, then she heard him settling down.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

She was woken by hearing her name called. She opened her eyes, then she sat up, Zulu was standing at the foot of the bed.

“Is everything alright?” she asked.

“It’s time to wake up, we leave for the airport in a few minutes,” he said.

“Oh, yes.”

“Hi.”

“Hi,” she said. She followed the direction of his gaze and saw that the strap of her negligee was off her shoulder, revealing most of her breast. She gasped and raised the strap. When she looked at Zulu, he was smiling, then he left the room.

Lu went to shower. She was dressing when she finally figured out that Zulu had smiled at her with fondness. She stilled. It had been a long time since anyone had looked at her with fondness. The bedroom door opened, she finished dressing quickly.

“Ready?” called Zulu. Lu joined him in the bedroom. He looked her over and smiled. Her heart missed a beat.

“Let’s go,” he said, leading the way out of the room. Lu followed him, he drove them to the airport. He parked the car, then he looked at her. She was struck again by how very handsome he was.

“Go home, it’s cold here,” he said, kissing her cheek. She put a hand on it and watched him climb out of the car. She heard him fetching his bag from the boot and moved into the driver’s seat. The boot closed, Zulu came to stand by her window.

“I’ll call you,” he said. She nodded. He waved. She put the car into gear and drove off. In the rear view mirror, she could see him watching her.

She supervised the move of her workshop from her garage to Zulu’s building before office hours, then she spent the rest of the week attending to his businesses.

“Can I ask you something?” asked Thandi the next evening.

“Yes,” said Lu.

“Are you and Baba an item?” Lu had been expecting the question, but she was taken by surprise when Thandi asked it.

“Why do you ask?” she returned.

“Because we’re here. Have we moved in, or are we house-sitting?”

“We’ve moved in.” Thandi gave Lu a long look.

“He’s nice. I hope this works out for you,” she said. Lu smiled, relieved.

“I hope so, too,” she said.

“Can I tell Zi and Ethel?”

“Yes.”

Lu was driving home one evening when her cell phone rang. She found a place to park the car.

“Hello,” she said.

“Hello, Lu, this is Zach.”

“Hello,” she said, as her heart pounded. That deep voice always got her excited.

“How are you? How are things?” asked Zach.

“Alright.”

“Have you moved into our home?”

“Yes.”

“What will you do with your house?”

“Right now, I have a house sitter.”

“Rent it out, or sell it.” Lu’s determination not to sell her home was confirmed.

“Don’t worry about it,” she said.

“I just wanted to find out how you’re doing.”

“I’m doing fine thanks, and so are the girls.” They were both quiet for a while.

“I’m on my way home,” said Lu.

“Drive safely.”

“Thank you for calling.”

“Take care.”

“You too.” Zach. The name suited him, Lu thought as she drove home.

Next evening, she worked late. It was after ten when she unlocked the front door of her new home.

“What are you doing here?” a voice demanded.

“Hello, Auntie,” said Lu to Zach’s sister, Esther.

“What are you doing here?”

“I live here.”

“I sent that child of yours away and I’m going to do the same to you.”

“You sent Thandi away? You had no right to do that! If anything has happened to my child...” Lu said. She was dialling on her cell phone when it was tossed out of her hand. Esther grabbed her wrist and made to yank her out of the house. Lu freed her wrist and walked further into the house.

“You don’t belong here, this is my house,” another voice said. Lu turned, Ethel’s Mamncane was behind her. She and Esther were walking menacingly towards her. Her eyes darted from one to the other as she tried to think of a way to escape whatever the women had in mind for her.

“Lu, I’m home!” a voice called. All the women looked at the open front door, Zach was taking Lu’s key off it. Lu moved quickly to his side.

“Welcome home,” she said.

“Don’t I get a hug?” he asked. She smiled and put her arms round him. He was taller than her, she had to stand on tiptoe to put her arms round his shoulders. She realised again how tall and broadly built he was. He’s a whole lot of man, Lu thought, then she told herself to behave.

“We have guests,” she said, withdrawing from the embrace. Zach put his hands on her waist.

“Who is it?” he asked.

“Hello, Buti,” said Esther. Zach looked from Lu to her.

“Hello, Buti,” said Mamncane.

“Hello,” said Zach unenthusiastically. Lu picked up her cell phone and phoned Thandi.

“Are you alright, Thandi? Where are you?” asked Lu.

“I’m fine, I...” said Thandi.

“I heard you were sent away from home.”

“I...”

“Were you beaten? Have you seen a doctor?”

“Mama! I’m fine. I’ll see you tomorrow. Bye.” Lu looked at her phone when she realised that the call had been cut.

“What’s this about? Who sent Thandi away?” asked Zach.

“I sent her away, and I’m here to send this gold digger away as well. Don’t you know that she has a reputation as a man-hungry and unprincipled sfebe? What are you doing with her? I’ll get rid of her for you and...” said Esther.

“No one is sending MaKhumalo anywhere! How could you send Thandi away? This isn’t your home! You had no right to send her away. If anything’s happened to her, you’ll answer to me. How dare you come here to destabilise my home! Get out of here.”

“Buti...”

“Ouuut!” shouted Zach. He was clearly unhappy with their guests. Esther and Mamncane left quickly through the front door.

“What did they say to you?” asked Zach.

“Who?” asked Lu.

“Them!” said Zach, nodding at the front door.

“They said I should leave,” said Lu.

“Don’t even think about it.”

“Okay.”

“The only person with the right to send you away is me, I’ll never do that to you. If anyone who isn’t me sends you away, ignore them.”

“Okay. Come, I’ll get you something to eat,” Lu said to Zach.

“I’m not hungry.” Lu took his hand in hers.

“How can I help you feel better?” she asked. Zach did not respond.

“I didn’t expect you back tonight, is everything alright?” asked Lu.

“Everything’s fine.”

“Do you want a bath, or do you want to sleep?”

“I want you to hold me.”

“Oh! Okay, come,” Lu said, putting an arm round Zach’s waist.

“I need to get my things from the cab,” he said. The cab driver brought Zach’s bags into the house, Zach paid him, then he closed and locked the front door. Lu took his bags to their bedroom. He joined her, carrying her handbag.

“Did you just come in?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Is everything alright?”

“Everything’s fine. I worked late. I’ll help you with that,” she said, helping him to take off his jacket.

“I’m going to shower,” he said, going to the bathroom. She sat on the bed waiting for him. When he came out, she asked him if he wanted to eat, he said no as he climbed into bed.

“Aren’t you joining me?” he asked, as she covered him with the bedding.

“I’m going to change, I’ll be right back,” she said. She changed quickly in the dressing room, then she joined him in their bed. She put her arms round him. They shifted until they were comfortable. In a short while, she could tell by his breathing that he was asleep.

She came awake slowly and looked at Zach. He is so gorgeous, she thought. She kissed his cheek, then she went to freshen up. When she was dressed, she found Thandi in the kitchen.

“Are you alright?” she asked.

“Yes,” replied Thandi.

“Did your new aunt scare you?”

“No.”

“That’s good.”



“I’ll be moving out.”

“Why?” asked Lu, looking at Thandi out of wide eyes.

“Dina’s asked me to move in with her.”

“Oh.”

“I’ll be leaving tonight.”

“So soon?”

“It’ll be fine, Mama.”

“Don’t feel you have to move out.”

“I want to. I want to stand on my own feet.”

“Good luck.”

“Thank you.”

They finished making breakfast and took it to the dining room. Zach joined them for the meal, then they all left for work.

In the evening, Lu took a long soak in a hot bath. When she came out of the bathroom, Zach was in their dressing room. She felt self-conscious, with only a short towel around her.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hi.” They stood watching each other, then Lu turned to the cupboards. Zach stood in her path.

“How was your day?” he asked.

“Long...and yours?”

“I missed you.” Lu gulped nervously as Zach watched her. He leaned towards her and kissed her lightly. She touched her lips, watching him after the kiss ended.

“Let’s go and eat,” he said.

“I’ll be with you just now,” she said, as she turned to her cupboard. She dressed quickly, then she gasped when she noticed Zach leaning against the door, watching her.

“I thought you’d left,” she said.

“I was waiting for you. Ready?”

“Yes,” said Lu. He held his hand out to her. She looked from him to his hand, then she put her hand in his. As they walked to the dining room, Lu’s phone rang.

“Hi, Mama. I’m at your home fetching my things, I hope that’s alright,” said Thandi.

“It’s fine. When can I come and see your new home?”

“This weekend some time, I’ll tell you when.” The call ended, Zach helped Lu into her seat.

“Is everything alright?” he asked.

“Yes. That was Thandi, she’s moving into her new home tonight.” Zach frowned.

“You didn’t tell me,” he said.

“I only found out this morning.”

“She’s my child too, I have a right to know,” he said, taking Lu completely by surprise. She watched him as he went to his seat. He sat down and looked at her with displeasure.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“It didn’t occur to me that you’d be interested.”

“She’s my child! Of course I’m interested.”

“I’m sorry, it won’t happen again.”

“Why would you think I wouldn’t care? Why?”

“Her own father doesn’t care, why should you?”

“Because I’m her father, now that I’m married to her mother!” Zach was looking at Lu as if she was refusing to see the obvious. She looked away from him, feeling tears in her eyes.

“What’s the matter?” he asked. She shook her head and stood. She meant to leave the room, but she bumped into Zach.

“Tell me what the problem is,” he said, putting his hands either side of her face. She looked at him through her tears.

“I haven’t had anyone to help me care for the girls in a very long time. It’s just so unexpected to have someone else care for them as much as I do,” she said. He looked deep into her eyes, then he wiped away the tears.

“I’m sorry,” she said. He kissed her gently.

“Let’s eat,” he said.

“I’ll be back soon, don’t wait,” she said, leaving the room. She went into the nearest bathroom to wash her face, then she returned to the dining room.

“Why aren’t you eating?” she asked as she sat down.

“I was waiting for you.” She smiled, feeling tears again in her eyes.

“Thank you for waiting, let’s eat,” she said.

“Where’s Thandi gone?” he asked.

“She’s moved into a flat with a friend.”

“Who’s this friend?”

“You’ll meet her soon, we’re going to their home over the weekend.”

“Where’s your stuff?”

“What stuff?”

“Your furniture and other things. You live here now, your things need to be where you are.”

“I’m taking care of that.”

“I offered to help you.”

“I don’t need help!” They glared at each other.

“I’m taking care of it, don’t worry,” said Lu. Zach gave her a long look, then he nodded and started eating. He glanced at Lu and did a double-take.

“Aren’t you eating?” he asked.

“I’m not hungry.”

“You normally eat well.”

“I don’t like this food.”

“Tell MaDube what you like to eat. You should eat what you like in your own home. Do you want sandwiches or...”

“I’m fine, I had a big lunch. When I went to get reports from Absolom, he took me to lunch.”

“He did what?” demanded Zach.

“We had a lunch meeting.”

“Did you, now?” said Zach, putting down his eating utensils.

“He was very pleasant. I can’t remember the last time he was pleasant to me. I looked over what he gave me, it seemed to be in order,” said Lu.

“I’m glad to hear that. Does he always take you to lunch?”

“No. I was surprised when he did. He’s very stingy. I suppose he used his allowance.”

“Allowance?”

“Doesn’t he have an allowance for wining and dining clients?”

“Yes.”

“He must have used that. Are you full? Do you want me to get you something from the kitchen?”

“I’m not hungry anymore.”

“Why?” Zach stood and started clearing the table.

“Zach...” she began.

“Go put your feet up, I’ll join you now.”

“I can do it.”

“I said I’ll do it!” he said angrily. Lu left quickly, wondering what he was suddenly angry about.

Zach put the dishes in his hands back on the table. He gripped the back of the chair nearest to him, forcing himself to take deep breaths. He had to calm down. He did not want to alienate Lu by showing how angry he was about the fact that her ex-husband had taken her to lunch. He had to trust that she would not fall for whatever trick the man was trying to pull.

He calmed down and cleared the table. In the kitchen, he opened the cupboards, there was no new crockery or cups. He had not seen any of her furniture, plants and other possessions in the rest of the house. She had not moved in. No wonder she had become defensive when he had asked about her belongings.

Zach sat down, his head in his hands. He was feeling very unsure of Lu and he did not like it, at all. He was afraid her ex-husband was making moves on her. Her not moving her property with her made him think she was keeping her options open, she would probably leave at the first sign of trouble.

He felt sick to his stomach at the thought of losing her. This time would be worse than when Liza had died. He had not known Lu long, but he knew that he did not want to be without her. The first step in keeping her was to spend as much time with her as he could.

He stood and went to look for her. He found her in the lounge. She stood as he entered the room.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hi. Are you alright?” she asked.

“Yes. Are you going somewhere?”

“I was coming to help you clear up.”

“We can do that later. Sit down.” She sat down, then he sat down. They watched each other in silence. He smiled. She smiled back.

“The only thing I know about you is that you have two girls, and that you worked hard to raise them. I don’t know how many siblings you have, or what your favourite colour is, or what your favourite thing to do in the world is,” he said.

“I have an older brother, you met him, and two younger sisters. We were all close until I got divorced. Everyone was ashamed of me, even I was ashamed of me. I was the first person in my family to not maintain a home. I’ve never done anything right in my family’s eyes since then.

“As far as they’re concerned, the divorce was my fault. It wasn’t, not completely. Absolom found himself a woman who was sexier, more sophisticated and more beautiful, and wanted out. Nothing I did pleased him. I’m surprised we lasted twelve years. The last seven years were hell. I stuck things out hoping he would get over her, he didn’t.

“I should have known my family would call me names, but I thought they’d support me in my time of need. All they did was call me and the girls names for wrecking my marriage. I wish...Let’s talk about you. Have you always lived in this beautiful home?” she asked, feeling a lump in her throat.

“We lived in Cape Town, we moved there eight years ago from Durban. Ethel and I moved into this home three years ago. I hoped a change of scene would help her, it didn’t. The only thing that helped her was meeting Lwazi.” He shook his head.

“Liza was young and healthy. I dropped her off at a hospital to visit her sick aunt. I was told that as she had walked in the corridor to her aunt’s ward, a nurse had run at her, screaming and shouting. She had injected Liza, Liza had fallen to the floor, convulsing. She died there and then,” he said. Lu gasped, a hand on her chest.

“The nurse said she had been told to inject a patient wearing a purple dress, who was discharging herself without her doctor’s approval,” Zach continued.

“Don’t they have uniforms for the patients?”

“The hospital phoned me not long after I dropped Liza off, telling me that my wife had died. I told them they had the wrong person. They insisted, I went to the morgue. I found Liza there, cold.” Lu gasped again.

“As if that wasn’t bad enough, I had to tell Ethel. She had a play on that night, she was the lead character. She was waiting for Liza and me at her school. When I arrived, she hugged me and demanded to know why I had not come with Mama. Phone her and tell her to hurry, she kept saying. I had to tell her there, at the car park. She looked at me in disbelief, then she screamed. I hope I never hear a scream like that as long as I live,” he said.

Lu had tears in her eyes. She wiped them away.

“Liza’s family blamed me,” he continued.

“For what?”

“Negligence, carelessness, wanting to get rid of her so I could be with another woman. The wake was terrible. It was three days of her family calling me a murderer. The funeral was worse. The priest was a cousin of Liza’s, he sentenced me to hell. In a way, it’s understandable. Her family was against her marrying me. They seldom visited with us.

“They wanted things done their way at the wake. I let them get away with that, but I put my foot down about the funeral. They wanted a cheap casket so they could buy lots of food, and

have plenty of leftovers to take to their homes. I almost came to blows with one of her brothers.

“His mother and sisters surrounded Ethel from the moment they arrived and kept us apart. They had only met her twice or thrice and suddenly, they knew what was good for her. When the casket was lowered into the ground, Ethel jumped on it. I punched the men trying to keep me from her and got her out. I don’t know which of us was crying the hardest.

“After that, I was able to stay close to her. Liza’s family stayed for a week then they left. Ethel stopped crying after the funeral and became distant. I paid for her to get counselling, it didn’t help. As I’ve said, meeting Lwazi’s the best thing that’s happened to her.”

He was quiet, thinking. Lu went to sit beside him and she put her arms round him. He was stiff in her embrace. She made to withdraw thinking she had annoyed him, he held her tight.

“I don’t know where Millicent gets the idea that she can come and mother Ethel. If anyone in that family bothers you, tell me,” he said. He released her, stood, and walked away from her. After a silence, he turned to her.

“Tell me about a happy time in your life,” he said. Lu sat back, thinking.

“Five years ago, Thandi graduated from university. I couldn’t go to the graduation, so I held a party for her at home. I was so proud of her. She was glad to be done, and for the first time in a long time, I saw admiration in Lwazi’s eyes. I knew on that day that she would settle down and emulate her sister,” she said, smiling.

“Your turn to tell me about a happy time in your life,” she continued.

“Ethel’s last birthday party.”

“What happened there?”

“She was happy, she was laughing, and your girls treated her like one of the family. She’s always hated being an only child. She hasn’t wanted to acknowledge her birthday since her mother died. I was glad she let herself enjoy the party.” He sat down. They were quiet for a while.

“Why had you gone to Namibia?” asked Lu. He gave her a long look.

“I’m sorry, it’s none of my business,” she said, looking away from him. He took hold of her hand.

“Of course it’s your business. I’m your husband, you have every right to know what I get up to. I was submitting a construction tender,” he said.

“Oh.”

“I doubt I’ll get it, they want their own people, understandably.”

“Then why did you tender?”

“For the experience. I have several businesses in the region. I’m looking to expand my interests. With the world economy in its current form, I want as many sources of income as

possible. I refuse to watch my wife and children do without the things they want and need. I've become accustomed to providing abundantly for my family, and I have no intention of returning to a life of living from hand to mouth. We moved to Cape Town to get a better life, and it worked. It's time to try other things."

He sat back, keeping a hold on her hand. She looked at their hands and smiled slightly.

"What is it?" he asked. She looked at him.

"This is the first time in a long time that my hand is being held by a man who has the right to hold it...That sounds terrible," she said, as she laughed mirthlessly.

"I was so naive! After the divorce, I spent a lot of time at church helping out where I could, hoping Nkulunkulu would forgive me," she continued.

"For what?"

"Whatever wrong I had done to be punished with a divorce."

"You did nothing wrong!"

"I attended prayer meetings a lot. Some of the pastors volunteered to pray for me in my home. I was thankful to have people embrace me instead of blaming me for the divorce. The pastors would come individually, and they would say we should hold hands as we prayed. I didn't think anything of it, after all, we held hands as a group at the prayer meetings.

"Suddenly, the women at church started shunning me, I didn't know why. None of them would speak to me, except MaNzimande, who told me that no one trusted me because I was out to steal their husbands. Maybe the pastors had seduction in mind, but I didn't, and all we had done was hold hands as we'd prayed. I declined further offers to pray for me at my home, but it didn't help me.

"The women wanted me out of the prayer meetings. The pastors intervened saying no one had a right to send me away. The women ignored me at the prayer meetings. I was overlooked when volunteers were needed for certain tasks. Do you know, a children's day play was cancelled because I had made the costumes for it. My so-called filthy hands and heart had touched the costumes, and the children would be polluted as a result.

"I tried so hard to win the women's favour. I explained that nothing had happened, but they didn't believe me. Married men at the church would help me with my car when I had one. At home, my married male neighbours would help me when delivery vans brought furniture or machines. I didn't ask for the help, but I couldn't refuse it, I couldn't manage on my own. Some of the men came onto me, but I always said no. My reputation as a husband-stealer grew.

"The girls and I stopped going to church some years ago because of it. That's why I was so shocked when Lwazi said we should go the day after Ethel's party. All the way there, I hoped something would happen to ensure we didn't get there. When I saw MaNzimande, I lost my head. I shouldn't have lied to her."

"I'm not complaining. Come on, it's time to sleep."

Lu was at work next day when her cell phone rang.

“Zach?” she said.

“Are you free to meet me for lunch?”

“When?”

“Whenever you’ll have time.”

“I can meet you in an hour.” Lu was exhausted when she arrived at the restaurant. She walked in, looked round, spotted Zach, and started walking to him.

“MaKhumalo, is that you?” a voice called loudly. Lu stopped, though she wanted to run away. The woman talking was from church. She had accused Lu of adultery and several other unsavoury things the last time they had met.

“It *is* you,” the woman said. She was at a table to the right of Lu.

“Whose husband have you come to meet?” she demanded.

“I...” said Lu.

“You wrecked your own marriage and now you’ve come to wreck someone else’s. Adultery should be made illegal, then women like you would be put in jail, away from other people’s husbands.”

“Hello, sthandwa. You’re late, is everything alright?” asked Zach. He was beside Lu, a hand on her lower back as he looked at her with concern.

“I’m fine, sorry I’m late,” she said. He kissed her cheek. The woman beside Lu gasped.

“You didn’t introduce me to your friend,” said Zach.

“I don’t want to be introduced to someone who cheats on his wife,” the woman said.

“Then it’s a good thing I’m not cheating on mine. I’m Zulu, MaKhumalo’s husband.”

“MaKhumalo’s what?”

“Excuse us. Come, sthandwa,” Zach said, leading Lu away.

“Are you alright?” he asked, once she was seated.

“I’m fine, thanks.”

“What will you have to eat?” They looked at their menus, then they ordered. Zach was watching Lu. She closed her eyes and sighed, moving her head from side to side. She started, and opened her eyes when she felt hands on her shoulders. Zach was no longer sitting in front of her. She made to turn her head.

“Be still,” he said. He was behind her, rubbing her shoulders.

“Relax, I can’t work if you raise your shoulders that way,” he said. She made herself relax. His hands felt so warm, so big, so good. She closed her eyes and sighed with relief. A few



seconds later, she opened her eyes wide because she was starting to feel aroused! In a restaurant! And all that Zach had done was touch her shoulders!

“Thanks, I feel much better now,” she made herself say.

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely.” He released her and returned to his seat.

“That was nice, thank you,” she smiled. The waitron arrived with the food, and Lu tucked in enthusiastically. She looked up, Zach was watching her. She smiled at him, he smiled back, and they continued to eat.

“This was nice, thank you,” she said after the meal.

“You’re welcome. Do you want dessert?”

“No, thanks, I’m fine.” Zach paid for their meal, then he looked at her.

“Where are you going now?” he asked.

“To the workshop.”

“How long will you be there?”

“Until close of business.”

“Can I come?”

“Of course,” she said, very pleasantly surprised.

“I have a short stop somewhere, then I’ll join you.”

“Okay,” she smiled. Zach stood and took her hand. She wanted to go out through one exit, he wanted to use a different one.

“We’re going this way,” he said firmly. She followed him with her heart in her shoes. He stopped by the church woman’s table, which was full of women from church.

“Hello everyone,” he smiled.

“Hello,” said the women, looking at him as if they were wondering what he wanted.

“I’ve come to assure you ladies that MaKhumalo will not be messing with your sons or husbands, I’m keeping her too busy to have time for anyone else,” he continued. Lu and the women gasped.

“Good day,” concluded Zach, then he led Lu away. At first she was shocked, then she started laughing. She laughed hard enough to need Zach to hold her up. She put her arms round him and continued to laugh.

“What’s so funny?” he asked.

“The expressions on their faces. They didn’t know whether to be disgusted, or envious,” she said, then she sobered.

“Thank you. I’ve never had a man stand up for me before,” she continued. He kissed her forehead, his arms round her.

“See you at the workshop,” he said.

“Okay,” she said cheerily. She unlocked the car door, kissed his cheek quickly and climbed into the car, her heart pounding. She hooted at Zach as she drove off, humming.

At the workshop, she found a completed set of garments and went to deliver them to the customer. She smiled on her return to the workshop. Zach’s car was parked outside the building.

She entered the workshop and looked for him. He was sitting at her workstation. She was walking towards him when MaPhiri intercepted her with a question. They talked, then Lu was able to go to Zach. She smiled at him, he was watching her.

“Hi,” she said.

“Hi. I was expecting to find you here.”

“Sorry, something came up. Would you like some tea or...”

“No, I just want to be where you are.” Lu felt herself falling in love with him.

“I have to finish a garment,” she said.

“Go ahead.”

“What will you do?”

“I’ll sit here.”

“Do you want a magazine or...”

“I want to sit here. Do what you have to do, don’t mind me,” he said. I’ll stop minding you when I stop breathing, she thought. She put down her handbag then she sat down. She picked up the garment she was working on, looked at it, set it under the machine’s needle, and glanced surreptitiously at Zach. He was watching her.

She looked at the garment and started sewing. When she was done with one part of it, she glanced at him, he was watching her. She continued to work, glancing at him often, finding him watching her.

If he keeps this up, I might start to think he likes me, she thought. She did some more sewing, then she glanced at him, he was still watching her. She told herself not to look at him. It would be setting herself up for disappointment, she was not going to do that. She frowned, telling herself not to get her hopes up.

“Don’t do that,” he said. She started, then she looked at Zach.

“Don’t frown,” he said. She stopped frowning and returned to work.

“You’re not looking at me anymore,” he said. She looked at him.

“I like it when you look at me,” he said. She smiled, then she returned to work, looking at him whenever the urge took her, and all the time, he was watching her.

“We’re off,” said MaPhiri. Lu looked up from her work. Her staff was gathered round her work station, looking at Zach. Lu could identify with the urge to look at him.

“Thank you, everyone, have a good weekend,” she said. No one responded.

“This is Mr Zulu, he’s my husband,” she said.

“Oh!” gasped everyone, looking between her and Zach. They made their goodbyes then they went towards the door, turning often to look at her and Zach. Lu smiled when the last one had left.

She was startled to feel a mouth on hers. The kiss ended as quickly as it had begun. Zach was looking at her mouth. He looked into her eyes.

“I wanted to taste your smile,” he said. Lu’s heart pounded with pleasure. She forced herself to return to work.

“Aren’t you knocking off?” Zach asked.

“Yes, as soon as I’m done with this,” she replied.

“How long will it take you?”

“Most of the night.”

“Here?”

“Where else? I don’t have a machine at home.”

“Why must you finish it tonight? Can’t you finish it tomorrow?”

“I promised to deliver it first thing in the morning.”

“You should ask for more time.”

“It’s for a wedding, I can’t have more time.”

“You should have told them that it was short notice.”

“I had plenty of time, but I spent last week looking after things for you instead of doing this. I’ll be done soon.” She looked up at him when he did not respond.

“I’m not complaining,” she said, seeing the look of guilt and anger on his face.

“Can you move the machine?” he asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Can we take the machine home? Will you be able to work on it there?”

“Yes.”

“Pack it up, let's go.”

“Go?”

“Disconnect it and we'll take it home.” Lu packed the machine into its case.

“Pack everything you need, you won't be driving out here in the middle of the night,” he said, as he carried the machine out of the workshop. She stared after him, then she packed everything that she thought she would need into a box. She made her way outside.

Zach took the box from her and told her to lock up. She closed windows, switched off appliances and locked the main entrance.

“Ready?” said Zach.

“Yes.”

“Let's go home. Drive safely. I'll be right behind you.”

At home, he carried the machine to the dining room. Neither of them was hungry. Lu took a quick shower then she went to sew. After a while, she raised her arms above her head. She gasped, feeling Zach's hands on her shoulders.

“I thought you'd gone to sleep,” she said.

“I don't want to sleep without you.”

“This will take a long time.”

“I'll wait.”

“It's better if you go and sleep.”

“I said I'll wait.” Lu felt a lump in her throat. It had been a long time since a man had wanted to be with her enough to wait while she did what she had to do. Zach rubbed her shoulders until she asked him to stop. She felt cold without his hands on her.

She finished the gown and sewed the head-dress, gloves and veil. When she was done, she looked everything over, she was finished. She fetched the iron and ironing board into the dining room, and the electricity went off. She gasped. Zach lit the room with his cell phone and brought candles out of a drawer. He lit them.

“What's the matter?” he asked.

“I need to iron this outfit. I can't deliver it un-ironed.”

“Is that any reason to look like the end of the world is here?”

“This is for a very good customer, I can't let her down.”

“Wait here,” he said, then he left the room. He returned minutes later, just after the electricity had come back.

“That was a quick power cut,” she said.

“It wasn’t a power cut. There was something wrong with the solar panels, I’ve fixed them.”

“Solar panels?”

“We use solar power, that way, I know we’ll never be victims of power cuts.”

“That’s very clever.”

“Now you can iron.”

“Thank you.” She hung the clothes and put them in a clothes bag after ironing them, then she packed away the machine and tidied the place where she had worked.

“Can we sleep now?” yawned Zach.

“Yes.” Lu followed him to the bedroom. He was already in his pyjamas and climbed into bed. In seconds, he was fast asleep. She caressed his cheek, kissed him and climbed into bed beside him.

## CHAPTER NINE

Lu covered her head with her pillow as the alarm clock rang on and on. It stopped ringing, she removed the pillow from her head. Zach was sitting beside her, blinking sleepily at her, her cell phone in his hand.

“Why is your phone ringing?” he asked.

“It’s time for me to get up.”

“It’s the middle of the night!”

“The sun’s up.”

“Go back to sleep,” he said, lying down. She sat up and climbed out of bed.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“I have to go and dress a bride.”

“A bride?”

“The one I made the gown for.” She showered quickly and dressed just as quickly. She had just put her handbag and the clothes bag in the car when she saw Zach standing by the passenger door.

“I’m coming with you,” he said, scowling sleepily at her. He was barefoot, in trousers and an unbuttoned shirt, carrying his shoes, jacket and socks. A tie was hanging round his neck. He looked so sexy! She opened the door for him and he climbed in, dressing as she drove.

At their destination, they climbed out of the car together. The door was opened as soon as Lu knocked on it. MaPinky, the bride’s mother, greeted Lu and invited her in, then she looked enquiringly at Zach.

“This is Zulu, he’s my husband,” said Lu.

“Oh! Welcome Zulu. Come in,” said MaPinky, then she closed the door when Lu and Zulu were inside her home.

“I’ll take your wife to the bride, then I’ll send someone to show you where the other men are,” she said to Zach. Lu gave him a last look, then she followed MaPinky out of the room.

The bride, Zandi, loved her gown. She put it on and Lu started making the necessary adjustments. Ninety minutes later, the bride and her team were happy.

“Thank you so much, Aunty. You are coming to the wedding, aren’t you?” asked Zandi.

“I’d love to, but I have other arrangements in place,” said Lu.

“I’ll save you some cake.” As Lu collected her work tools, MaPinky sent someone to go and tell Zach that his wife was waiting for him. Lu sat with her eyes closed as he drove them home.

“What do you have planned for today?” he asked.

“Sleep is the only thing I have on my agenda.”

“Thandi phoned inviting us to lunch at her new home.” Lu groaned.

“Don’t you want to go?” asked Zach.

“I do, but I’m so tired.”

“Take a nap, I’ll wake you when it’s time to go.”

“Okay.” She was woken by the opening of her car door. Zach helped her out of the car, locked it, took her hand and led her to their bedroom.

He undressed her and tucked her into bed. She fell asleep immediately.

She tossed and turned after waking up, keeping her eyes closed.

“Are you awake?” asked Zach. She opened her eyes and turned to face him. He was lying beside her.

“I didn’t mean to wake you,” she said.

“You didn’t, I’m done sleeping too.” They watched each other.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hi.”

“How are you?”

“Fine, and you?”

“I’m hungry, let’s go and eat.”

“I wouldn’t advise that. Thandi loves to cook, she’ll kill us if we eat her food as if we don’t appreciate her efforts.”

“Do you like cooking?”

“I detest it.”

“I like to cook. Why do you look at me that way?”

“I don’t know any men who go into the kitchen of their own free will.”

“You must tell me your favourite foods, I’ll cook them for you. What’s the matter?” he asked, seeing tears in her eyes.

“The only person who’s ever cooked for me, is Thandi,” she said.

“You don’t want me to cook for you?”

“I’m touched you’d think of doing it.” He kissed her lightly. The alarm clock rang. She switched it off.

“Do you want to use the bathroom first?” he asked. She nodded.

She had just finished dressing in the dressing room when Zach joined her, fresh from his shower. He dropped the towel that had been round his waist, Lu put a hand on her mouth, shocked to see him naked, but her eyes studied his naked body keenly.

“Is something wrong?” he asked. She shook her head, then she walked quickly to the bathroom. She closed the door and leaned on it with her eyes closed.

Nkulunkulu, if you’re going to take him away from me, then make him mean, make him horrible so parting with him won’t hurt me. If he continues to be nice and keeps walking about with so much bare skin on display, I’ll assume you mean for me to have him. Help me not to fall for him completely until you’ve given me a sign, one way or the other, she prayed.

She opened her eyes, washed her face and went to the bedroom. Zach was sitting on the bed, wearing his trousers and socks, and tying his shoe laces. He looked up at her and smiled. She smiled back.

“Could you help me with this?” he said.

“With what?”

“The shirt.”

“What about it?”

“Could you help me to put it on?” She looked at him enquiringly.

“I think I hurt my shoulder when I was carrying the machine last night,” he said. She became concerned until she saw the smile in his eyes as he raised a shoulder and winced. She smiled and approached him. He handed her his shirt. She helped him to put it on, he stood, she stepped back.

“I can’t reach my buttons,” he said. She smiled and did up his buttons. His aftershave smelt great. She picked up his jacket and helped him into it too, then she put her hands under his jacket, pretending to smooth the shirt onto him. Her hands ran down his chest then she put her arms round him, feeling his broad chest against her breasts. He was muscular and firm, touching him was exciting her.

She released him and drew away from him, then she gasped, feeling his hands on her waist.

“Don’t stop,” he said. She looked into his eyes, he was as excited as she was. Their breathing was accelerated.

“Thandi...” Lu panted, in an effort to get her mind off Zach’s sexy body. He closed his eyes then he released her.

“Let’s go,” he said.

Zach had enjoyed having his wife’s hands on him. He wished she would touch him more often. He had watched her face as she had touched him, she had seemed to enjoy it. He was looking forward to spending time alone with her. He glanced at her as she sat beside him in the car. She was very quiet. He wondered what she was thinking.

He stopped the car outside a block of flats in Bryanston. He pressed the intercom and identified himself. The gate opened, he drove into the complex and parked the car where Thandi had told him to park. He looked at Lu. She was looking about.

“It looks like a nice place,” she said.

“Thandi said they live on the second floor,” he said. They alighted. Zach went to the back of the car and opened the boot. He took a box from it, then he locked the car.

“What’s in there?” asked Lu.

“Our house warming gift.”

“I completely forgot about that.”

“This is from both of us.”

“I didn’t contribute anything to buy whatever is in there.”



“Whatever either of us does for our children represents both of us. Come,” he said, leading the way. Lu was surprised by his words. Thandi met them with hugs at the door of her new home, then she introduced them to Dina and her parents.

She had outdone herself cooking. Zach was glad he had not eaten at home. Thandi was watching him and Lu. Lu had been right, Thandi wanted her food appreciated, she was pleased by the way that he and the rest of the guests were eating.

Dina’s parents left immediately after lunch.

“Dina and I have an appointment,” said Thandi.

“We’ll be off,” said Lu. Thandi saw her and Zach to their car, then she waved them off.

“I’m going to have to learn to stop being nosy,” said Lu, as Zach drove them home.

“What do you mean?”

“Thandi asked us to leave because she didn’t want me asking her millions of questions.”

“Would you have asked?”

“Yes.”

“Ask Ethel.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ethel probably needs you more than Lwazi and Thandi. She and Liza were very close. She really missed being mothered. She’ll love having you ask her questions and give her advice. You can talk to her about things I can’t relate to because I’m not a woman, and about things that scare me, things like birth control.

“She asked me about it once, I told her the best form of birth control is the knobkerrie I keep under the bed. The thought of your child having sex in these days of HIV/Aids is very frightening. I got scared that some boy was trying to get her out of her clothes.

“While we lived together, I thought I knew what was going on, but now, she’s so far away, I don’t know what she’s up to. I don’t want to have to bury her, it would kill me. Talk to her, please.”

“Okay.”

“Let Thandi come to you. And as you know, Lwazi comes to me...there’s also me.”

“You?”

“You can ask me anything, you can touch me, invite me to go places with you, and you can go places with me.”

At home, Lu made a light supper then Zach invited her to watch a football match on TV.

“I’ll do the dishes, then I’ll join you,” she said.

“You watch women’s soccer?” she asked when she joined him in the lounge.

“Yes.”

“Why? No one admits to watching women’s soccer.”

“Someday Ethel will be playing for some big international team.”

“How do you know?”

“She’s been captain of every team she’s ever played with.”

“Does she get that from you?”

“Yes. Watch.” Lu looked from Zach to the screen.

“Lu. Lu,” said Zach. She opened her eyes. She was lying beside him, her head on his lap. She sat up quickly then she stood.

“That was a great game,” she said. Zach laughed. She looked at him then she went to sit beside him.

“I’m sorry, I can’t watch football. Even if I was paid, I’d fall asleep within three seconds of kick-off,” she said.

“Don’t worry about it.” She studied him carefully.

“You’re not mad at me,” she marvelled.

“I’m not mad.” She kissed him and broke the kiss when she realised what she was doing.

“Why did you stop?” he asked, his hands on her forearms. She looked from his eyes to his mouth and kissed him again.

The kiss was gentle and exploratory, then it heated. The ringing of a phone startled them both. Lu broke the kiss and realised that she was straddling Zach’s lap. His hands were on her thighs, under her skirt. His shirt was undone, her hands were in the act of undoing his belt buckle. She climbed off his lap, gasping in shock at herself, then she went to hide in the bathroom.

She had almost stripped him and had her way with him, all because of a kiss. Absolom had told her time and time again to control herself, she really needed to learn to do that unless she wanted Zach to divorce her too. She knew she would die if he divorced her. She had to keep her hands and mouth to herself.

When she came out of the bathroom, Zach was sitting on the bed in their bedroom.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Why did you leave? My call didn’t take long. I’ve been waiting for you so we can carry on from where we left off.” Lu gaped at him.

“Don’t you want to?” he asked. She could not respond.

“I liked having you touch and kiss me, and I definitely liked touching and kissing you,” he said. Her heart pounded in her chest as they watched each other. He looked away from her and started taking off his socks.

“What do you have planned for tomorrow?” he asked.

“Nothing.”

“Do you mind visiting a friend with me?”

“I don’t mind.”

“We’ll leave after lunch.”

“Okay.”

It took Lu a long time to sleep. She was falling for Zach, hard. She went over the day’s events. In that one day alone, he had made her fall for him several times. There was no way she could resist him while she lived under the same roof with him. Should she wait for a sign, or should she go ahead and fall for him?

She wanted to fall for him. She wanted to feel giddy with excitement when she saw him, or heard his voice. She wanted to make herself new outfits that he would tear off her body, eager to touch, kiss and caress her. She wanted to touch him and know she had pleased him. She wanted that and more, but there had been no sign. She decided to wait for a sign.

They were quiet on the way to Zach’s friend’s house. Lu fell asleep. She woke when the car stopped.

“Are you alright?” Zach asked. Before she could reply, Zach’s car door was opened.

“Hi, Babomkhulu,” said a little girl as she climbed into the car and held him tight.

“Hi, Emma,” Zach returned, hugging her.

“Hi, Babomkhulu,” another voice said. Lu noticed a boy standing beside Zach.

“Who are you?” the girl asked, looking at Lu.

“Say hi to Mamkhulu, she’s Ethel’s new Mama,” said Zach.

“Hi, Mamkhulu,” the children said together.

“This is Luke, and this is Emma,” said Zach.

“Hi Luke, hi Emma,” said Lu.

“Are you coming out of that car, or did you just come to pick my children up?” asked a man. He was behind Luke, bending to see into the car.

“Hi, Nsi,” said Zach.

“Hi,” said the man.

“This is Ethel’s new Mama,” said Emma, pointing at Lu. Nsi looked at Lu, shocked.

“Hi,” said Lu.

“Hi,” he said.

“This is my MaKhumalo. MaKhumalo, this is my friend, Nsibande,” said Zach.

“You didn’t tell me,” Nsi said to Zach.

“Luke, Emma, can you help me get some things out of the boot?” invited Lu.

“Are they for us?” asked Emma.

“Yes, they are.” Emma scrambled off Zach’s lap and she and her brother went to the boot. Lu took her handbag and went to join them. She opened the boot. The children took the two light boxes of grocery into the house, Lu closed the boot. She felt a hand on her lower back. Zach was beside her, he and Nsi were watching her.

“Come in,” said Nsi, leading the way into the house.

The three of them sat in the lounge, talking about the latest political scandal. Luke brought drinks for them then he left. Zach and Nsi got into a heated debate about the economy. Bored, Lu stood and left the room. She smelt something burning and let her nose guide her to it.

She found Luke and Emma in the kitchen, cooking. She quickly attended to the burning pot, then she asked the children what they were doing.

“We’re making food for you and Babomkhulu. Mama always said we must feed our guests,” said Emma.

“Where’s Mama?” asked Lu.

“She’s dead,” said Luke. Lu gaped at the children who were both focusing on their tasks. Luke was about ten years old, his sister could not be older than seven years old. Lu’s heart went out to them. She taught Emma how to cut onions without hurting himself and taught Luke how to test if the meat was cooked without hurting himself.

The food was ready in a short while, and the children looked at each other, pleased with their work. Emma took the washing water to the men, Lu and Luke each took a tray of food to them.

“This food looks great. Your cooking keeps improving,” Nsi said to the children. They smiled at him.

“Mamkhulu helped us,” said Luke.

“I just supervised, you two did all the work,” said Lu. After lunch, the children collected the dishes and took them to the kitchen. Lu told them to go and play. When she had washed the dishes, she noticed a pile of books and looked through it. She picked out a few books then she sat down, leafing through them.

“There you are. Come, your husband’s worried something terrible’s happened to you,” said Nsi. Lu stood and put the books away. Nsi took her hand, she freed it. She turned to the door and bumped into Nsi.

“I didn’t see you there,” she said, making to draw back. Nsi approached her. She moved away, then she side-stepped him quickly. She gasped as he took a hold of her forearm.

“Come and see me sometime, leave your husband somewhere and come and see me,” he said. She wrenched her arm free, totally disgusted by his words and the look in his eyes. He looked her over and licked his lips. She left the room quickly. She was glad to find Zach in the lounge. He looked up from the television and smiled at her. She smiled back.

“Are you alright?” he asked. She nodded and sat beside him. Nsi entered the room. Lu avoided looking at him and moved closer to Zach, then she took one of his hands in hers.

“You’re making me jealous. I have no one to touch me,” said Nsi. Lu tightened her hold on Zach’s hand.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“No,” she replied.

“What’s wrong?”

“I think I’m going to be sick.”

“What is it? Where does it hurt?”

“In my stomach.”

“I’m a doctor, I can look you over,” said Nsi.

“No! No. Can we go home? Or, I can take a cab,” said Lu.

“You’re not going alone,” said Zach.

“I’m sorry, I don’t mean to spoil your outing.”

“There’ll be other times.”

“I’ll get my medicine box and...” Nsi said.

“I have to lie down,” said Lu.

“I have beds here.”

“I need to lie down at home,” said Lu, getting to her feet.

“Thanks for everything. Please say bye to the children for me,” she continued, then she left the house quickly.

She leaned against Zach’s car. I don’t need problems. I will never come here again and if Nsi visits, I’ll go out until he’s gone, she thought. Zach joined her. He unlocked the car, opened her door and helped her into her seat. Lu closed her eyes as he drove.

“How are you feeling?” he asked. She looked at him, stuck for what to say.

“We’ll go to a chemist and get you something,” he continued.

“No, I’ll be fine.”

“Lu...”

“It’s nothing, I’ll handle it.”

“Is it period pain?” Lu started in surprise, then she looked away, embarrassed by the question.

“Do you have tablets for the pain?” Zach asked. Lu did not reply.

“Sometimes, a hot water bottle on the belly helps,” he said. Lu was surprised to feel a warm hand on hers, which was on her lap. She looked at Zach.

“You’ll be fine,” he said. I hope so, I really hope we’ll all be fine, Lu thought. At home, she went to shower. She had just finished dressing when Zach joined her in the bedroom.

“How are you?” he asked.

“Fine.”

“Did the bath help?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want to lie down?”

“No, I’m fine now.” He moved close to her, watching her carefully. He bent suddenly, and Lu watched him, wondering what he was doing. He surprised her by kissing her belly through her clothes. She closed her eyes, touched, and put her hand on the spot he had kissed. She started when her hand touched his head.

She opened her eyes, he was resting his head against her belly. She caressed his hair then she caressed his face. He straightened and looked deep into her eyes, moving his head closer to her, then he kissed her.

She kissed him as deeply as he was kissing her. Feeling his tumescence against her belly, she broke the kiss as her body bloomed to receive his. He kissed her cheek, her throat, then she felt his hand on her breast.

She closed her eyes and gasped, feeling his hand on her bare skin. She opened her eyes and looked at him. He was looking at her breast. She looked down. His big hand was caressing her. She held onto his waist with both hands as her knees turned to jelly.

She closed her eyes and heard herself moan as her body experienced the kind of pleasure that she had never experienced from just having a hand on her breast. Zach kissed her. When he broke the kiss, she was topless, he was caressing both her naked breasts. She watched his hands working and started undoing his shirt buttons. She stilled.

In her mind, she heard Thandi advising her to go for HIV/Aids testing. She withdrew from Zach and turned her back on him.

“Lu? Come back,” he said. She started as he covered her breasts with his hands from behind her. She felt the front of his body all the way down her back, his erection digging into her. He caressed her nipples, she moaned.

“Test results,” she said weakly, in an attempt to stop herself from doing what they both wanted. Zach’s hands stilled on her breasts. He turned her in his arms and held her tight. She put her arms round his waist and held him as tightly as he was holding her.

“Absolom used to have affairs. We never used condoms, I might have caught something from him. I haven’t been with anyone since him,” she said. Zach withdrew from the embrace and looked at her.

“No one?” he said.

“No one.”

“Why not?”

“For obvious reasons.”

“What obvious reasons?”

“I’m a divorcee.”

“So?”

“So, no one wants second hand goods, and I didn’t want to sleep with anyone I wasn’t married to.”

“You’re not property, and you’re not second hand.” Lu shivered and looked about for her clothes. She turned her back on Zach as she put her bra on. She felt his hands on her back as he helped her to put it on, then he helped her put on her blouse and jersey. She held him briefly after he had done up her buttons.

“Do you want something to eat?” she asked.

“No, thanks. I have to make some calls,” he said, then he left the room.

Give me a sign Nkulunkulu, give me a sign one way or the other. It’s becoming harder and harder to wait for the sign when he keeps doing and saying things that make me want to be with him for the rest of my days, she prayed.

A while later, she was cutting out a shirt for Zach in the dining room.

“It’s late, come to bed,” he said. She packed up her sewing equipment and followed him to their room. He fell asleep immediately. She tossed and turned, then she climbed out of bed and returned to finish cutting his shirt. She decided to buy a machine that she would keep at home as she did not want to carry her work machine between her home and the workshop. She started sewing Zach’s shirt and she was pleased with the progress she had made when she went to sleep.

Zach dropped her off at work next morning as her car had to go in for a service. During her lunch hour, she went to buy another machine, then she bought material to sew clothes for her family. She was very excited to have Ethel and Zach to sew for as well. She started walking to the taxi rank.

“Hi, MaKhumalo. How are you? How’s your stomach? Have you forgotten me already?” a voice asked. It was Nsi. Lu walked quickly, he kept up with her.

“Where are you going? Can I give you a lift somewhere?” he asked.

“I’m fine.” In a desperate attempt to be rid of him, Lu went into a building. Nsi followed her. She joined other people in a lift. There was no room for Nsi and the lift left without him. Lu went into an insurance office and made herself ask many questions about products that she was not interested in.

When she thought Nsi would be gone, she took the lift to the ground floor and walked out of the building. Nsi was still there.

“You’re not my friend, I don’t want to talk to you or to walk with you. Leave me alone,” she said, walking away.

“A fighter like you must be great in bed,” he said. Lu gasped and walked faster. She was glad when she could no longer hear his footsteps beside her. She returned to work, praying that she would never see Nsi again.

At the close of business, the staff left.

“You didn’t tell us, MaKhumalo,” MaPhiri said. Lu looked up from her work. She had thought that she was alone.

“Tell you what?” she asked.

“That you were getting married.” Lu did not respond.

“Was it a big wedding?” MaPhiri continued.

“No, not even the children were there.”

“Why not?”

“We decided to have a big feast at a later date. You’ll all be invited, of course.”

“I should hope so. I consider myself part of the family, I thought you considered me that way too.”

“You know I do.”

“Then why wasn’t I part of the wedding party?”

“It was very small, MaPhiri. I’m sorry. It all happened very quickly. As I said, even the children were not part of it.” MaPhiri did not look mollified. Lu gave her a long look.

“Have you never done anything on impulse?” she asked.



“Yes, I have.”

“Our marriage happened like that.”

“How could you do that? Marriage is very serious.”

“We wanted to be together. I’ve been alone a very long time.”

“Yes. Is he good to you? I don’t want to see you get hurt again.”

“I’ll be fine. Thank you for caring.”

“You’re like a sister to me.” Lu stood to hug MaPhiri.

“I hope it works out for you,” said MaPhiri, then she left. Lu locked up after MaPhiri’s departure and returned to work. Her phone rang. She looked at it and smiled.

“Hi,” she said.

“Open up, I’m outside the workshop,” said Zach.

“Okay. How are you?”

“Hungry.”

“I’ll be right there,” smiled Lu. She picked up her new machine, the packet full of new material and her handbag, then she went to the door. She unlocked it, opened it and stepped outside.

“There you are!” said Zach. She smiled at him. He took the machine and the packet of materials from her.

“What’s this for?” he asked as she locked up.

“I need all that so I can sew at home.”

“Can we go?”

“Yes. Wait.” Zach turned to her. She looked round quickly, then she kissed him lightly before drawing back.

“Let’s go,” she said.

“Is that the best you can do?” he asked.

“No, but we’re in public.” He put down the things that he was carrying, then he put his arms round her and kissed her thoroughly. When he broke the kiss, they looked at each other, panting.

“I’m glad you missed me as much as I missed you,” he said. She put a hand on her mouth as he picked up her things, then she followed him to the back of the car as he put them in the boot. He closed the boot then he walked with her to her side of the car, where he opened the door and looked at her. She smiled at him and climbed into the car. He closed the door and she watched him as he walked to his side of the car.

“You did that to make me jealous,” Nsi said from behind her. Her blood went cold. Zach climbed into the driver’s seat.

“Are you surprised to see Nsi here?” he asked, as he started driving.

“Yes,” said Lu.

“He says you told him he’s not your friend.” Lu looked at Zach, then she looked out of the window.

“Yes, I did. He’s your friend, not mine,” she said.

“I’d like to be your friend too,” said Nsi.

“No! No, that would never work. Men and women can never be friends,” said Lu.

“That’s not true. I have many female friends.”

“I’ve never had a male friend. Where I thought we were friends, I found out the man wanted to sleep with me.”

“I’m different.”

“If you say so. But I’m not prepared to find out one way or the other.”

“You’re being a coward.” Lu was thoughtful.

“I want my marriage to last. I might take something you say to be a come on, and vice versa. We’ll tell Zach and he’ll have to get rid of one of us. For his sake, you and I should stay apart, then he can have us both in his life,” she said.

“Your wife is very clever with words,” said Nsi to Zach. Zach changed the subject.

Lu was relieved when Zach stopped the car outside Nsi’s home. Nsi made his goodbyes and climbed out of the car. Lu and Zach were quiet as he drove them home.

“You don’t like him,” he said.

“No, I don’t.”

“Why?”

“I can’t say...he just rubs me the wrong way.”

“Did he make a pass at you?” Lu looked at Zach, surprised by his words.

“He makes passes at every woman he comes across,” said Zach as he parked the car outside their home.

“Please, don’t ever bring him here and don’t ask me to visit him with you,” Lu said. Zach did not respond. Lu climbed out of the car and went to freshen up.

Dinner was quiet then Zach went out. Lu sat a long time, asking Nkulunkulu to protect her marriage. She set up her sewing machine in the dining room and continued to sew Zach’s

shirt. Late in the night, she heard him parking the car. A few minutes later, he was standing at the dining room door.

“What are you still doing up?” he asked.

“I was working.”

“It’s time to sleep, come.”

## CHAPTER TEN

Next evening, as Lu came out of the bathroom after her shower, Zach entered the bedroom.

“We have guests,” he said.

“Oh,” she said, watching him as he was watching her.

“We’re all waiting for you,” he continued.

“I’ll be there soon,” she said. Zach left. Lu dressed well, then she went to the lounge. She found Zach with his parents and a man that she had never met. She made to sit on the floor as a sign of respect to his parents, Zach helped her into a seat and sat beside her. He introduced the unfamiliar man in the room as his Babomncane.

“As I was saying, MaKhumalo and I are married. I want to pay amalobolo. I’m not asking you to help me to pay, I’m asking you to help me to talk to my in-laws, and I’m informing you so you don’t hear it through the grapevine,” he said.

“Have you gone mad? If you want a second wife get a young woman who’ll give Ethel siblings, and above all, one who’s a virgin. Stay with this woman and you’ll be dead in no time from a disease she’ll give you, if she hasn’t already given it to you,” said Babomncane. Lu gasped in shock.

“That’s for me to worry about. Will you help me to talk to my in-laws?” asked Zach.

“No, not for this woman. Find someone else and I’ll gladly help you.” There was a silence.

“If Esther found herself a man who rushed her to the home affairs office without talking to me, I’d be very upset. We’re not in a position to deny this boy our help. We have to help him before his in-laws kill him, or do some other untoward thing to him for not paying amalobolo. I know you’re unhappy about his choice, mfowethu, and about coming on board now, when he’s already married his wife, but I’m asking you to help Zachariah. This isn’t just about him, there’s also Ethel to think about,” said Mr Zulu.

Babomncane folded his arms and looked away from his brother. Lu was glad when MaDube and MaDlamini brought food into the room. She helped them to set up the meal, then she knelt to announce it before leaving the room.

She sat at the dining room table, worrying about how difficult her family would make things for Zach. They would be difficult and his family would refuse to help him to pay amalobolo.

He would get frustrated, say that it was too much trouble and leave. She would be alone again. She closed her eyes, feeling a lump in her throat.

She opened her eyes. Crying solves nothing, I know that, she thought, wiping away the tears. She noticed the shirt she was sewing for Zach and started working on it. In a short while, it was finished. She looked it over, ironed it, put it on a coat hanger, and hung it on the wall behind her seat, then she smiled, very pleased with it.

She sat down, looking at patterns for the girls' dresses, then she heard Zach's approaching footsteps and looked up. He stopped in the doorway, looking at her.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Looking at patterns."

"Why aren't you eating with us?"

"I thought you all needed time alone." Zach looked behind Lu.

"That's a nice shirt, did you make it?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Do you mind if I look at it? I think I want one just like it," he said, approaching the wall. He took the shirt down and looked it over.

"It's great! Did you make it for a customer?" he asked.

"No."

"Who did you make it for? You sew your name into the clothes you make? But...this isn't your name...it's my name! Why's my name in here?" he asked, looking at Lu.

"Because it's your shirt," she said. Zach looked at her, amazed.

"Here you are! You said you'd be back quickly," said Zach's Mama, MaMbambo. Zach looked from Lu to her to the shirt in his hand.

"Put that away and come. You said you were calling...MaKhumalo," MaMbambo said, looking at Lu. Zach hung the shirt on the wall and left. Lu followed him with her eyes.

"Come, we're all waiting for you," said MaMbambo. Lu followed her to the lounge. Babomncane was angry. He interrogated Lu, asking her father's name, his father's name and where her parents' homestead was.

"Have you told your people that we're coming to talk to them about marrying you?" he asked.

"No, I haven't," replied Lu.

"You want them to set the dogs on us?"

"No!"

“Then why haven’t you told them?” he roared. Lu did not respond. She was breathing heavily in an effort not to tell Babomncane to leave her home. She closed her eyes. It’s not my home, it’s Zach’s home. Good thing I haven’t sold my house. If the Zulus have their way, I’ll be back there soon, she thought.

“Do you want us to talk to them or not?” Babomncane demanded. Lu opened her eyes and looked at him.

“Have you lost the use of your tongue? I’m talking to you,” he said. She looked away from him. Is this your sign, Nkulunkulu, she prayed.

“Zachariah, the woman obviously doesn’t want us to talk to her people,” Babomncane said.

“She wouldn’t have told us where to find them if she didn’t want us to talk to them,” said Mr Zulu.

“Then why hasn’t she told them to expect us?”

“Because I haven’t discussed this with her,” said Zach.

“She should have known that paying amalobolo is the next step and she should have told them,” Babomncane insisted.

“She doesn’t live in Zachariah’s head. She can’t know that he wants to pay amalobolo unless he tells her,” said Mr Zulu.

“Hawu, is she one of these unprincipled women who sleep with anyone who asks?”

“Babomncane...” Zach said.

“How could she move in with you before the proper channels had been followed? She can only be here to rob you of your money before moving onto her next victim. Only loose women move in with men when the families haven’t met,” Babomncane insisted. Lu gaped at him with tears in her eyes, then she stood and ran out of the room.

In the bedroom she shared with Zach, she picked up her handbag, grabbed the nearest set of car keys and turned to the door. Her eyes fell on a picture by Zach’s side table. She had never seen it before. It was a picture of Lwazi and Ethel. Lwazi was laughing. Lu picked it up. She caressed Lwazi’s image, then she sat on the bed, her eyes on the picture.

Zach makes Lwazi laugh, I haven’t seen her laugh in years. I can stay for the girls, and of course, for myself. Why shouldn’t I enjoy some time with a wonderful man? His Babomncane doesn’t live with us, he doesn’t matter. My family matters and I want to be here for them, she thought.

She put the picture back where she had found it, then she went to clean her face in the bathroom. She made tea in the kitchen and took it to the lounge. She handed out cups, sugar and milk, then she returned to her seat beside Zach.

“How dare you leave the room without excusing yourself! Have you no manners?” Babomncane asked her. Before she could respond, he continued.

“You’ve come to rob my son, haven’t you? Haven’t you?”

“No! The only thing I want from your son is love,” she said.

“Shut your filthy mouth!”

“If he can’t give me that, I’ll leave and I’ll leave all his property behind.”

“How dare you talk of love in front of your elders! You were clearly not raised properly.”

“Excuse me,” Lu said, as she left the room. She stood outside her home taking deep breaths, then she phoned Ethel.

“Mama, hi,” said Ethel.

“Hi, how are you?”

“I’m fine, how are you?”

“Alright, how’s school?”

“Hard, I’m really changing courses next semester.”

“How’s your love life?”

“My what?”

“You heard.”

“It’s okay.”

“Do you have someone in your life?”

“Will you tell Baba?”

“Only if I want him to kill you and your friend.” Ethel laughed.

“There’s no one at the moment,” she said.

“When you have someone, listen to your gut.”

“My gut?”

“You’ll get a feeling telling you to not date him, or to not sleep with him. If the feeling says don’t, then don’t, no matter how hard he pressures you.”

“It’s hard.”

“I know. I had a strong feeling not to marry the man I was married to, but I ignored it, Lwazi and Thandi have suffered terribly because I ignored my gut feeling. Do you know what I mean by gut feeling?”

“Yes, I know what you mean.”

“Remember to use condoms.”

“Mama!”

“I prefer you to wait until you’re married before sleeping with someone, but if you don’t want to wait, or you can’t wait, make sure you don’t sign your own death warrant by not using condoms. It’s best to go for HIV/Aids testing before you sleep with someone, even if he says he’s a virgin.”

“How can you say this to me?”

“I’m your mother, I want you to be informed so you can protect yourself. I don’t want you dying because you’re ignorant or because people lied to you.”

“Did you say all this to Lwazi?” Lu paused.

“No, I said it to Thandi and asked her to tell Lwazi. Whenever I tried talking to Lwazi about sex, or anything big, she excused herself,” she sighed, realising again, just how badly she had failed Lwazi.

“Did Baba put you up to this?” asked Ethel.

“If he had, I’d have told you about his knobkerrie.” Ethel laughed.

“I’ve never talked to an adult about birth control. I always talk to my age mates because adults say condoms are for iyifebe,” she said.

“That’s what we were told when they first arrived, but nowadays, they’re for everyone. HIV/Aids doesn’t care about age, or colour, or anything else. We all have to protect ourselves.”

“Even you?” Lu gasped and heard Ethel gasping too.

“I’m so sorry, Mama, that is...I...sorry,” said Ethel, then she cut the call. Lu looked at the phone in her hand, then she sent Ethel a text message.

‘*Even me,*’ it said. She was walking towards the house when her phone rang.

“Hi, Ethel,” she said. Ethel did not respond.

“Take care of yourself,” said Lu. Still, Ethel was quiet.

“Can I come and see you?” asked Lu.

“Do you want to?” asked Ethel.

“If it’s okay with you.”

“Of course it’s okay. I’d love to see you. Can you bring Baba? Lwazi needs to talk to him.”

“Is she alright?”

“She’s fine, she just needs to talk and she really only talks to him.”

Lu returned to the house and cleared away her sewing things in the dining room.

“Our guests are leaving,” said Zach. He was standing at the door, looking at her. He was not a happy man. She went towards him, he turned away from her. She put a hand on his forearm. He turned to look at her.

“I’m sorry I spoke like that to Babomncane. I didn’t mean to make things difficult for you,” she said.

“You didn’t.”

“Then why are you mad?”

“I’m not mad!” he shouted. She started. He turned away from her. She put her hand in his. He squeezed it, then, still holding it, he led the way back to the lounge. The guests looked at their joined hands, then they looked away from them in disgust. Lu and Zach sat beside each other.

“Zachariah insists we talk to your people. Inform them that we’re coming and get them to give us a date over the next two weeks. We have better things to do than wait indefinitely for you and your people,” said Babomncane. Lu was quiet, caressing Zach’s hand with her free hand.

“I’m talking to you. Acknowledge that you heard me,” Babomncane insisted. Lu looked at him, he was looking at her.

“I heard you,” she said.

“Zachariah, you must send her back to her people so they can teach her good manners,” Babomncane continued. I’m fine, I’m fine, Lu repeated to herself. She smiled in an effort to cheer herself up.

“What are you smiling at? Have I said something funny?” Babomncane asked her.

“No,” replied Lu.

“Then what are you smiling at? You must be insane, no sane person smiles at nothing. I’m telling you Zachariah, this woman will visit sorrow on you. Send her back to her people permanently.”

“Babomncane...” said Zach.

“I want to know what she’s smiling at,” insisted Babomncane.

“We’re ready to go,” said Mr Zulu.

“What was she smiling at?” insisted Babomncane.

“Zachariah...”

“What was this crazy woman smiling at?” Babomncane shouted.

“You talk of me going back to my parents to learn some manners, you should come with me, we obviously need the same lessons,” said Lu. Babomncane looked fit to burst. Lu gasped, put a hand over her mouth and looked at Zach out of remorseful eyes.



“I’m so sorry!” she said. Zach had pursed his lips and he had laughter in his eyes. He looked away from her, she followed his gaze to Mr Zulu. He was working hard at not laughing.

“Did you hear that nobody from nowhere daring to tell me that I don’t have good manners? Buti, you must return her at once. We can’t have such a creature in the family teaching Ethel how not to have ubuntu,” he said. Everyone stood and left the room. Zach continued to hold Lu’s hand as he followed the guests outside, where he waved at them as they left in two cars.

Lu turned to him and opened her mouth to say something. He kissed her. She broke the kiss and started to speak again, he kissed her over and over again, until she stopped trying to talk and focused on kissing him as enthusiastically as he was kissing her. They held onto each other tight, catching their breaths.

“Go in,” he said.

“Aren’t you coming in too?” she asked.

“I want to take your clothes off and...”

“Oh!” said Lu, feeling her heart pound with excitement.

“Go in.” She went into the house.

Zach walked about the garden. His body was rioting with sexual frustration. He remembered Lu’s kisses and became even more uncomfortable, then he decided to think about paying amalobolo.

He was glad that that would soon be out of the way. He had visited Baba the week before, inviting him to his home.

“Is everything alright?” Baba had asked.

“Everything’s fine,” Zach had said.

“What’s so urgent?”

“I want to pay amalobolo for MaKhumalo.” Baba had nodded.

“Good. I must warn you, mfana, your mother doesn’t like her,” he had said.

“Why?”

“According to her, no woman is good enough for you. She didn’t like MaNgcobo either.”

“I remember.”

“Are you sure about this MaKhumalo?”

“I’m very sure, Baba.”

“How long have you known her?” Zach did not respond.

“I asked you a question,” Baba had said.

“Not long.”

“Then how can you be sure she’s the right woman? Has Ethel met her?”

“They like each other.”

“That could be an act.”

“It isn’t.”

“You admitted yourself that you haven’t known her long.”

“This is what I want, Baba.” They had shared a long look.

“Very well. I hope you and Ethel will be happy with this MaKhumalo of yours,” Baba had said.

“Thank you, Baba.”

Zach had had several scares that evening. Babomncane had upset Lu several times. Zach had been afraid each time that she had left the room, and been glad each time that she had returned.

Babomncane had not endeared himself to Liza either. He did not like women and believed that their sole purpose was to serve as conveniences for men. Zach remembered that Liza had once left home for two days while Babomncane had been visiting them. Babomncane had asked where she had gone, Zach had said she had been away on business.

He smiled, remembering Lu’s words about Babomncane needing lessons in good manners. He had been shocked to hear them, but they were true.

He frowned. Mama did not like Lu. She was going to make things difficult. He hoped that Baba would talk to her. He did not want to break ties with his family, but he would if they made life difficult for his Lu. Feeling cold, he returned to the house.

Lu cleared away the dishes from the lounge. After eating leftovers, she started doing the dishes.

“What are you doing?” Zach asked.

“I’m clearing up.”

“Leave it, the staff will do it.” Lu dried her hands.

“I spoke to Ethel,” she said.

“How is she?”

“Fine. I asked if I could go and see her. She said yes and that I should go with you because Lwazi needs to talk to you.”

“About what?”

“I don’t know. I’ll look at my schedule, I think I can make it this weekend.”

“Let’s go to bed.”

When Lu woke up next morning, Zach was on a call. It ended as she sat up.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hi.”

“I just phoned Lwazi.”

“How is she?”

“She wants to talk to me face to face. I’ll have to organise myself at work.”

“Okay.”

“Did you sleep well?”

“Yes, and you?”

“I didn’t get much sleep.”

“Why not?”

“I want you.”

“Oh!” said Lu, feeling her heart pounding with excitement.

“All I could think about was the feel of your breasts in my hands and the feel of your hands on my body, and your kisses. They’d tempt a saint,” said Zach. Lu smiled.

“Sitting on this bed with both of us half naked, is not making me feel better. I suggest you keep your body covered unless you want me all over you,” he continued.

“I do want you all over me.”

“Don’t say that! How am I supposed to resist you?” he asked, then he climbed out of the bed and stormed to the bathroom. Lu lay back on the bed, a smug expression on her face. She was excited that Zach wanted her and she was excited by his frustration. Deciding to be kind to both of them, she made the bed quickly, took her clothes and went to bath in another bathroom. Later, she found Zach in the dining room.

“You ran away,” he said.

“For both our sakes. I don’t want to pass diseases onto you.”

“Whenever you touch me, I forget all that. I was faithful to Liza, but after she died, I was with other people, I may have picked something up.”

In the evening, they agreed to visit the girls at Rhodes University over the weekend. Lu started sewing blouses for the girls.

Next evening after work, she phoned Zach to tell him that she would be home late as she was visiting her Aunty MaKhumalo. She asked Aunty to tell her parents that the Zulus would visit them to talk about amalobolo.

“You’re very lucky to be getting a second chance, Lungile. I hope this time, things work out well for you.” said Aunty. At home, Lu found Zach in their bedroom.

“Where did you go?” he asked.

“I went to ask Aunty MaKhumalo to tell my family that your family will be visiting them. If your Babomncane’s leading your family’s team, we can just forget about things working well, I really rubbed him raw, but I didn’t mean to. I lost my temper and behaved badly, just as I did when I told MaNzimande that we were married,” said Lu.

“Babomncane won’t be part of the delegation. I made sure of that when they were here.”

“You should divorce me.”

“What?”

“I’m causing problems in your family. I was brought up to believe that if a woman split a man’s family, she would be returned to her family permanently.”

“Come to bed.”

Next evening, they took a cab to the airport. Lu only relaxed long after take-off.

“Don’t you like flying?” asked Zach.

“It’s not that.”

“Then what is it? Lu?”

“Last time I flew, the girls, Absolom and I went to Namibia on holiday. The nightmare began when we returned. I used to think if we hadn’t landed back here, the marriage would have lasted.”

“Our marriage won’t be wrecked.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” she said, then she studied him.

“What is it?” he asked.

“I’ve only seen you smooth-shaven,” she said, then she caressed his lightly stubbled cheek. She smiled as it tickled her palm. Zach kissed her palm. Her heart beat accelerated when he laced his fingers with hers and put their hands on his thigh.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Lu was pleasantly surprised that Lwazi and Ethel were at the airport to meet them. She was even more pleased when Lwazi followed Ethel's example of hugging her and Zach. Zach put a hand on Lu's lower back as they followed Lwazi and Ethel, who were carrying their luggage. They all climbed into a car belonging to Lwazi's friend, Luke.

Luke dropped the family off at the chalet that the girls had booked for the weekend, then he left. Lu and Zach freshened up, then they joined Lwazi and Ethel for supper. After supper, Zach went to sleep. Lwazi and Ethel watched TV with Lu for a while, then Lwazi started reading a book. Lu studied Ethel.

"You look well," she said.

"I'm fine."

"Are you okay to talk about school?"

"Yes."

"How are you doing?"

"Lousy, I'm changing courses next semester. I'll tell Baba tomorrow and hope he won't be mad. Are you disappointed in me?"

"No."

"Sisi said you moved in with Baba."

"Yes, I did. Are you okay with that?"

"Of course."

"I won't discriminate against you in favour of the others." Ethel drew back.

"It never occurred to me that you would," she said.

"Step-mothers..."

"You're not my step-mother, you're my Mama."

"I'm glad you think that, I feel like a Mama, not a step-mother."

They were quiet for a while, sitting side by side. Ethel took Lu's hand in hers.

"I like the dress you made me. I've never had anything made for me by someone who wasn't paid to do it. I'll treasure that dress, even when it's tattered and torn," she said.

"I'll make you another one," said Lu, putting an arm round Ethel. There was a long silence.

"I'm going to sleep," said Lwazi. Ethel joined her, and Lu went to the room she was sharing with Zach. He was fast asleep. She undressed and climbed into bed beside him.

In the morning, she found him in the kitchen.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hi.”

“The girls went for a walk, they’ll be back soon.”

“Did they cook before they left?”

“No, I did this.”

“Oh!” said Lu, looking at Zach with renewed interest. She moved close to him and kissed him. He did not respond at first, she kissed him more enthusiastically until he started kissing her back. The kiss heated very quickly. Lu untucked Zach’s shirt from his trousers and caressed his chest and back. She slid her hands down his belly until she was touching his masculinity through his trousers. He broke the kiss and watched her, panting.

She felt his hand on her bare breast. She fumbled with the zip on his trousers, eager to touch him, then she stopped. She withdrew her hands from his body and stepped back from him.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry,” she panted.

“For what?” he panted back.

“Coming on so strong. Absolom always told me to stop being aggressive, but I can’t help it! When I like someone, I want to touch them. Forget this happened, please. In future, I’ll behave myself,” she said, closing her eyes.

Nkulunkulu, please help me to remember my place, she prayed.

“I won’t forget this,” said Zach.

“What?” Lu said, opening her eyes.

“I said I won’t forget this.”

“You must! Please! How can you not forgive me? It’s been a while, I’m a little over-enthusiastic I know, but...”

“I like it.”

“...I’ll behave myself and...you like it?” He approached her, his eyes were full of desire.

“I like it. I didn’t want you to stop,” he said.

“Oh!” she said, looking at him closely. He seemed to be serious.

“If there was time, I’d ask you to take up where you left off, but the girls will be back soon.”

“You don’t think I’m forward and disgusting?”

“I think there’s no one else whose hands I’d like on my body.” Lu put her arms round him and held him tight.

"I'm so glad to hear that. No matter how hard I prayed, I could never be as demure as Absolom wanted me to be," she said. She felt Zach stiffen in her arms, then he withdrew from the embrace.

"What have I done? Whatever it is, I'm sorry," she said, seeing the displeasure on his face.

"I'm not Absolom, I never was, I never will be. I don't ever want to be compared to him."

"I wasn't comparing."

"He disgusts me! I don't ever want to think about you giving him access to your body."

"But..."

"Don't remind me! Ever!"

"Okay," she said, looking at him cautiously. He made a frustrated sound and turned away from her, then he turned back to her.

"Don't look at me as if you're afraid I'll attack you," he said.

"Okay," she said, looking away from him.

"Don't do that!" he said.

"What?"

"Look as if you're going to cry."

"I'm not going to cry."

"The only time I want to see you cry, is if you're crying for joy." Lu fiddled with some dishes.

"Sit down," he said.

"I'll just..."

"Sit. Please." Lu sat down, Zach sat beside her. He watched her for a long moment.

"I'm not angry with you," he said.

"You're not?"

"No."

"Then who are you mad at?"

"Me, and that man you were married to."

"Why?"

“I’m mad at me for not meeting you and marrying you before you married that...person, and I’m mad at him for marrying you. I’d never have put you and the girls through what he put you through.”

“You can’t change any of that, it’s no use being mad about it.”

“I know, but I can’t help it. I feel sick at the thought of him touching you.”

“He doesn’t touch me anymore.”

“That’s good,” said Zach, then he frowned.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Do you want him touching you?”

“No!”

“I’d kill him if I found out...”

“You won’t find out anything of that nature. I was hurt when he sent the girls and I away, but once he traumatised the girls, I wondered what I’d ever seen in him. If he and I were the only two people on earth and I was desperate for sex, I’d do without.”

Zach looked deep into her eyes then he stood, helped her to her feet, and kissed her thoroughly.

They were both startled by hearing a key in the front door. They released each other and fixed their clothes quickly, as Lu told herself to calm down.

“Hi, Mama, hi Baba,” said Lwazi and Ethel together, as they entered the open plan chalet.

“Hi, girls,” Lu and Zach said together.

“What are we having? I’m hungry,” said Lwazi, washing her hands. Ethel washed her hands too and they all sat round the kitchen table.

“Everything looks great. Did you cook this, Mama?” asked Ethel.

“Don’t be sexist, I made breakfast,” said Zach.

“You’ll make some woman a great husband,” smiled Ethel. Zach looked from her to Lu and their eyes held.

“Let’s eat,” said Lwazi. Lu smiled and watched her eating. Ethel started eating too. Lu looked at Zach.

“Aren’t you eating?” she asked.

“You’re not eating either,” he said. Lu started eating. She and Zach did not eat much. The girls finished eating, cleared the table and returned to their seats.



There was a long silence. Lu forced herself not to look at Zach. She needed to behave herself and she would not behave if she looked into his eyes and remembered what they had been up to before the girls joined them.

“Baba,” said Ethel.

“Yes, Baby,” said Zach.

“I don’t know if Mama told you.”

“Told me what?”

“Well...”

“What is it?”

“I’m...”

“You’re what?”

“The thing is...”

“You’re pregnant, aren’t you?”

“No! No, I’m not pregnant.”

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely!”

“Then what is it? Are you HIV positive?”

“No!”

“Then what is it?” Zach demanded.

“I’m changing courses next semester.”

“And?”

“And nothing. I’m joining the drama department.”

“Oh.”

“I’m hoping you’ll pay.”

“Are you sure about this?”

“Absolutely.”

“Then of course I’ll pay.” Ethel stood from her seat and hugged her father tight. He watched indulgently as she returned to her seat. Lu watched him, a smile on her lips and pride in her heart. Her eyes fell on Lwazi and her smile faded.

“What makes you look like that?” Zach asked. Lu looked from Lwazi, to him and back.

“What is it?” Zach asked Lwazi.

“I...”

“You what?”

“I want to change surname,” said Lwazi. Lu’s heart picked up speed.

“You want to be married?” she gasped.

“No!”

“Then what are you talking about?” Lwazi looked from Lu to Zach.

“I want to use your surname,” she said.

“To use my surname?” said Zach.

“I know you and Mama aren’t married, but you’re my Baba. Children use the surnames of their Babas, I want to use yours.” Lu looked between them. Zach looked from Lwazi to Lu.

“I’ve looked into it, it doesn’t cost much. I promise you’ll never regret making me your child. Please, Baba,” said Lwazi. She looked from him to Lu.

“Mama, you’re great. There’s nothing in your power you haven’t done, but I want a Baba as well. Baba, Ethel and I are already like sisters, you referred to us as sisters, let me use your surname, please,” she said. Zach looked from her to Lu.

“Please don’t feel bad about this. Before we were made fatherless, we used Baba’s surname, I’m just going back to the original arrangement. Please don’t be upset,” continued Lwazi.

“I’m not upset,” said Lu.

“So I can do this?”

“If Baba says yes, it's fine.”

“Thank you,” said Lwazi. She stood and surprised Lu by hugging her quickly, before going to kneel beside Zach.

“Please can we do this, Baba? Mama says we can. All Babas share their surnames with their children. You call me your child and you treat me like your child,” she said.

“Tell me what I need to do, and I’ll do it.” Lwazi hugged him tight. Lu looked from her to Zach, he was watching her intently.

“I’ll start on lunch,” said Ethel.

“I’ll help,” said Lu.

“No, you and Baba can go and rest, we’ll handle this.” Zach helped Lu out of her seat and led her to sit on a bench under a tree.

“What do you think of Lwazi’s request?” he asked.

“It took me by surprise, but since it makes her happy, I’m all for it. Are you okay with it?”

“Of course.”

“Thank you for letting her do this. I’m all for anything that makes the girls happy.” Zach was quiet, watching her.

“What makes you happy?” he asked.

“Seeing the girls happy.”

“I mean something personal, something that only affects you.”

“I haven’t thought about that in a long time,” she said.

“Tell me.” She looked away from him thinking, then she smiled shyly and looked down.

“Tell me,” said Zach. She looked at him.

“I like that you seem to like me as I am.”

“I don’t *seem* to like you, Lu, I *do* like you. I like being with you, and I like that you return my feelings.” Lu gave him a big smile, then her smile faded.

“What is it?” he asked.

“You don’t know me, I seem new and exciting now, but...”

“But nothing. You’ll always be exciting to me.”

“The excitement always wears off.”

“It will never fade because I love you, and I want to spend my life with you,” he said. She looked at him, fear and hope in her eyes.

“Trust me with your heart, the way I trust you with mine,” he said.

“You shouldn’t,” she said.

“I shouldn’t what?”

“Trust me with your heart. It will probably be broken beyond repair within three months.”

“My heart, or yours?”

“Yours...and mine.”

“Mine won’t be broken.”

“You can’t know that for sure.”

“I do know it for sure. I don’t give my heart to just anyone. I first make sure that the person I plan to give it to will treasure it.” Lu looked down.

“I trust you with my heart and my life, trust me with yours,” he said. She was quiet a long moment.

“I’m afraid,” she said.

“Of what?” She looked at him.

“I won’t recover if you and I separate,” she said.

“We won’t.”

“Surviving one divorce was bad enough, surviving a divorce from you will be beyond me.”

“We’re not getting divorced.”

“Never say that, you don’t know what tomorrow brings.”

“True, I don’t know what tomorrow brings, but I do know that we’ll face whatever comes together.” Lu looked down, then she started, feeling Zach’s hand on her cheek. She looked at him.

He kissed her. The kiss was unlike any kiss she had ever received. Zach was kissing her as if he was making a vow to her.

When the kiss ended, her eyes were closed. She opened them, feeling Zach wiping tears off her cheeks. He raised his eyes from her cheeks and looked into her eyes. She gasped, seeing the love in them. He kissed her again.

They were startled by the ringing of his phone. They broke the kiss and looked at each other. Zach looked at his phone and made a frustrated sound. Lu stood and returned to the chalet.

She quickly went into the bathroom to clean her face before the girls could see her, then she joined them in the kitchen, working quietly, her mind on Zach.

“Mama?” said Ethel. Lu looked at her.

“Yes?” she said.

“Baba’s practically adopting Lwazi, I don’t see why you can’t adopt me. I like having you as my Mama and I want you for the rest of my life. Can we legalise it?”

“Legalise what?”

“Your being my Mama. I know you and Baba live together, but relationships break up. I want to be sure that if you and Baba break up, you won’t break up with me.”

“Ethel!” gasped Lu.

“No one is breaking up, not you and your Mama, and certainly not me and your Mama!” Zach said firmly. Lu and the girls turned to look at him, he was standing at the open front

door. He entered the chalet and went to the bedroom he was sharing with Lu. She and the girls finished making lunch.

After lunch, Lwazi and Zach took a walk while Lu and Ethel cleaned up. When Zach and Lwazi returned, Lwazi invited Lu and Ethel to join her and Luke sight-seeing. Lu declined, but Lwazi and Zach used persuasive arguments. She reluctantly joined the girls and Luke.

She was not interested in the sights that the girls raved about as she wanted to be with Zach. She was glad when it became dark.

“We need to go back to our chalet, now,” she said.

“We have time, Mama. Some of these places are best seen in the dark,” said Lwazi. Lu snorted in disbelief. In desperation, she started faking yawns. Luke took pity on her and said it was time to go back.

“Mama, I hope you and Baba don’t mind if we leave you alone tonight. Luke and his family invited us to join them at a function,” said Lwazi.

“Have fun,” said Lu. Zach opened the chalet door for her and kissed her cheek.

“You’re freezing, do you want to shower?” he asked. She nodded. After her bath, she found him in the kitchen. She gasped, seeing her favourite foods on the table. She looked at Zach.

“I’m delivering on my promise to cook for you,” he said.

“Oh, Zach, you actually cooked for me,” she marvelled, with tears in her eyes.

“I said I would.”

“Yes, but men promise the moon and deliver nothing.”

“If I say I’ll do something, I do it,” he said, wiping away her tears. She put her arms round him, and kissed him soundly. They held onto each other, panting.

“If this is the way you react to me cooking for you, I’m going to be doing it a whole lot,” he said.

“Let’s eat,” she said. When she was done, she smiled at him.

“Thank you, so much,” she said.

“I enjoyed watching you eat. I’m glad you enjoyed it.” They shared a long look.

“I’ll do the dishes,” she said.

She smiled to herself as she washed up, feeling Zach’s eyes on her. When she could no longer resist looking at him, she turned her head and looked into his eyes. She dropped the forks in her hands and kept her eyes on his as she approached him. She stood between his spread legs, looking down at him as he looked up at her. Her heart pounded as the silence stretched. She realised that her hands were wet. She dried them on her skirt, keeping her eyes on Zach.

“I want to see and touch every inch of your body,” he said. She felt her heart beat accelerate. She started undoing her blouse buttons. Her excitement rose as he focused on her hand movements. She let her blouse and jacket drop to the floor. Zach ran his eyes over her bra-clad torso. She removed her skirt and put a hand on her bra.

“Stop,” he said. She looked at him, he was running his eyes all over her body. When he looked into her eyes, her heart thumped even faster, he liked the look of her. She made to move closer to him and almost tripped on her skirt. She kicked it away. Zach stood, she gasped as he kissed her. She put her arms round his neck and held on tight. He broke the kiss, took her hand and led her to their bedroom. She looked from his eyes to his clothed body, then she started undoing his shirt buttons.

She dropped his shirt, looked at his chest and ran her hands across his chest and belly. He made a sound. She looked at him, he was liking what she was doing. She undid his belt buckle and zipper. His trousers fell to the floor. She stood back and looked at his legs and between his legs, he was showing a very high state of arousal.

She ran her eyes up his belly to his chest, to his mouth and into his eyes. They were still, watching each other, then he shuffled to the bed. He sat on it and removed his shoes, socks and trousers, then he looked at her.

“Turn around, slowly, I want to see all of you,” he said in a voice that excited her. She turned her back on him and looked at him over her shoulder. The look in his eyes excited her further. She turned round slowly, striking sexy poses as she moved. When she faced him, she felt as excited as he looked. She moved towards him. He undid her bra and dropped it, then he looked at her breasts. She stepped back for him to see her properly.

He put his hands on her waist. She stopped. He put his thumbs in the edges of her panties and dropped them to the floor. She stepped out of them, watching him as he looked her over.

He stood. Her heart beat accelerated. She gasped when he put his hands on her shoulders. He kissed her cheeks, then he kissed his way to the side of her throat as he caressed from her shoulders, slowly to her forearms, down her arms, until he was holding her hands in his. She watched him kiss each of her hands in turn. He released her hands and caressed her upper belly. His hands inched to her breasts, then he caressed above her breasts.

“So soft, so beautiful,” he said.

“Zach,” she panted, trying to get him to touch her breasts. He resisted and kissed her deeply. When the kiss ended, she looked at him out of dazed eyes. She gasped, feeling his hands on her lower belly, then, without touching the hair below her belly, he caressed her back, then he ran his hands to her hips and outer thighs.

He started running his hands up her inner thighs and she felt them quiver as her knees turned to jelly. She tried to hold onto him, but her hands were too weak. She gasped as he held her tight. She found herself on her back on the bed, with Zach lying beside her, looking at her body. He caressed her breast, then he kissed it all over. She put a weak hand on his head as he started kissing her other breast. He sucked on her and her back arched off the bed.

“Zach,” she gasped. He sucked on her other nipple, then he kissed his way down to her belly and to her lower belly, as his hand caressed the hair on her mons, then he caressed lower. She gasped, feeling his fingers caressing the petals between her legs. She cried out as he played a

finger slightly above the place that was crying out to be joined with him. She put her hands between his legs and made a frustrated sound when she touched cloth. She lowered his underwear, then she held onto the duvet beneath her as his caresses and kisses made her blood pump faster.

"I need you," she panted, then she stiffened before a wave of pleasure made her whole body shudder. When she opened her eyes, Zach was watching her. The desire in his eyes reawakened her desire. She drew his head to her and kissed him. She broke the kiss, pushed him onto his back and removed his underwear. She looked his body over, he was a whole lot of man. She kissed his chest, caressing down to his belly and lower. He made a sound, then he took her hand off his tumescence. She raised her head from kissing his lower belly and looked at him.

"Not yet," he panted.

"I want you," she said.

"I want you too, but we don't have our test results back yet." Lu felt her blood go cold. Her excitement died on the spot. She made to sit up, Zach kissed her. In a short while, his kisses and caresses had made her even more excited. She shuddered again, her head thrown back.

When she opened her eyes, she felt him kissing her throat and chest, his hand on her belly. She raised his head and kissed him until he was on his back. She kissed her way down his chest to his belly, then she sat astride his upper thighs. She looked down his body, then she looked into his eyes.

He was very excited. She put a hand on his tumescence and heard his breathing accelerate. She caressed him lightly, then she firmed her touch. In a short while, she watched him shudder in excitement. She smiled, then she lay beside him and kissed his cheek. In a while, he turned his head and they shared a gentle kiss. They held each other a while.

"I need a shower," she said. He released her. She sat up, kissed his cheek and climbed off the bed. She could feel his eyes on her as she left the room. He showered after her. Later, they fell asleep with their arms round each other.

She woke early and watched Zach sleeping. She smiled, glad to have the right to touch him, and that he was happy to have her hands on him. She freshened up and made breakfast. When she was done, she stood outside the front door, appreciating the beauty around her. She smiled as she felt arms come round her waist from behind and smelt Zach's aftershave.

"Hi," she said.

"Hi," he returned. She turned to face him and put her arms round his neck. He kissed her lightly, over and over again until she was dazed. He kissed her deeply. She stilled when she heard a gasp. She broke the kiss and saw the girls behind Zach. She made to withdraw from him, he would not release her.

"The girls are here," she said.

"Do you girls mind if I kiss your Mama?" asked Zach. Lu gasped. The girls giggled.

"No, we don't mind. Come and eat," said Lwazi.

“I don’t have a problem with kissing you, do you have a problem with it?” Zach asked Lu.

“No, but...” Zach leaned down and kissed her. It was a deep and thorough kiss that left her weak in the knees. He put a hand on her lower back and led her into the chalet. Everyone greeted each other, washed their hands and sat down at the table.

“That’s a nice shirt, Baba. I’ve never seen it before. Where did you buy it?” asked Ethel. Zach looked from her to Lu.

“Your Mama made it for me,” he said. Lu smiled with pride.

“It’s beautiful, Mama,” said Ethel.

“Thank you,” said Lu, then she focused on eating.

After breakfast, Lwazi and Ethel cleaned up while Lu and Zach packed up. The girls and Luke took Lu and Zach to catch the airport shuttle. Lu was surprised when Zach took hold of her hand when they were in the shuttle. There were other passengers in the shuttle and Lu made to withdraw her hand from Zach’s. He wouldn’t release her.

“If I don’t hold your hand, I’ll have to kiss you,” he whispered. She looked at him, he was serious. She left her hand in his. They boarded the plane and Lu settled down after fastening her seat belt.

“Lu, Lu, wake up,” said Zach. Lu opened her eyes and heard a heartbeat. Her head was on someone’s chest. She sat up quickly.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

“For what?” asked Zach.

“Embarrassing you.”

“Embarrassing me?”

“By sleeping against you and snoring in public.”

“You don’t snore, and I was proud that you slept against me.”

“You were?”

“I was proud that you trust me to keep you safe.” They shared a look as Lu tried to see if he was being genuine, he was. She took one of his hands in hers. The look of love in his eyes made her want to dance and sing.

Next evening, Lu went to the kitchen after her bath.

“There are guests,” said MaDlamini. Lu went to the lounge.

“What’s going on here?” she demanded.

“Mama!” said Thandi, startled into putting space between Nsi and herself. They had been sitting very close to each other. Nsi had been whispering to Thandi, and she had been laughing.



“Is that the way to welcome guests?” asked Nsi. Lu took Thandi’s wrist, pulled her to her feet and drew her away from Nsi.

“You can never, never, speak to him, or have anything to do with him!” she shouted.

“Mama!” returned Thandi.

“I know you’re lonely, but he is out of bounds!”

“She’s a grown woman!” said Nsi.

“One who is off limits to you! If I see or hear that you’ve been anywhere near her, or either of my other two girls, I’ll kill you,” Lu shouted to Nsi.

“Mama!” gasped Thandi.

“Sthandwa...” Zach said.

“Didn’t I ask you never to invite him here?” Lu demanded of him.

“I didn’t...”

“Do you want him coming onto one of the girls and giving them diseases?” Zach kissed her. She struggled, then she stilled, his kiss was pleading. He stopped kissing her.

“I have to go,” he said. She nodded.

“Thandi, will I find you here?” he asked, his eyes on Lu.

“If Mama doesn’t kill me,” said Thandi.

“She won’t.” Zach kissed Lu lightly.

“Let’s go,” he said to Nsi. The two men left. Lu looked at Thandi. She was watching her, then she left the room too. Lu sat down.

Why, why, why did I have to go and spoil a good thing, she asked herself. She tried to sleep, but sleep eluded her. She watched TV until she tired of it and still, there was no sign of Zach.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

How can I have been so careless? I almost jeopardised this! Zach rebuked himself as he drove Nsi back to his home. Lu had been livid when she had found Nsi with Thandi. Zach understood where she was coming from, but he needed her to work with him, not against him. He wanted this over and done with, then he could focus on his family.

“Is everything alright?” he asked Nsi.

“No. Those children will drive me crazy. They’re always crying for their mother. Am I supposed to pull her out of her grave?” asked Nsi.

“They were very close to her, it's understandable that they miss her.”

“I’m doing the best I can!”

“I know.”

“What do you think I should do?”

“I don’t know. I used to spend most of my free time with Ethel. I don’t know that it helped, but sometimes, it took her mind off her loneliness.”

“I work!”

“I know.”

“Does your MaKhumalo have a sister I could marry? Looking after children is women’s work.” They arrived at Nsi’s home. MaMdluli, Nsi’s home helper, was sitting in the lounge.

“Where are they?” asked Nsi.

“They’re asleep. They wanted to see you,” said MaMdluli.

“I don’t hire you to tell me how to be a parent.” Zach saw an unpleasant look in MaMdluli’s eyes. He greeted her. She smiled at him then she left.

“She wasn’t telling you how to be a parent, she was telling you what the children wanted,” said Zach. He followed Nsi to the children’s bedroom. They had started sleeping in the same bedroom after their mother had died. They were sleeping in Emma’s bed. Luke had an arm round her. Both children had cried themselves to sleep. Nsi kissed his teeth and left the room. Zach followed him out.

“That woman shouldn’t have gotten herself killed. How did she think I’d manage the children alone? I can do nothing right in their eyes. Have you ever had children look at you and find you wanting? I wouldn’t recommend it to anyone. Let’s eat, I’m starving,” said Nsi. He ate, Zach sat watching him. After his meal, Nsi was tired. He saw Zach out of the house and thanked him for bringing him home.

Zach sat a long time in his car. He should have planned things better. His marriage had become his primary focus and he had lost sight of his chosen mission. He had to keep a closer eye on Nsi. The only way to do that was to spend time with him.

He decided that he would have to tell Lu what was going on. He did not want her finding another man because he was neglecting her. If she knew what he was doing, she would be patient, he hoped.

Out of the blue, he remembered the way she had looked naked. His body hardened instantly. How was he going to focus on Nsi when all he wanted was to be in Lu’s arms?

Get a hold of yourself, he told himself sternly. He should have considered what he would do if he remarried. Marriage had been on his plans for some time. Why had he not considered what to do with a wife? Lu was not the type to tolerate a threat to her family. He would have to fill her in and hope that she would not leave.

He smiled, remembering how passionate she had been when she had been protecting Thandi. She was so sexy when she was in fierce mother mode. His smile faded. His wife was a wonderful woman. Losing her was out of the question.

He frowned. She was obsessed with divorce. How could such a beautiful woman be so insecure? That bastard she had been married to must have been threatened by her strength. He must have undermined her and made her doubt herself. Thinking about Lu's ex-husband made Zach want to bash something.

He forced himself to think about the job at hand. How was he going to tell Lu about his involvement with Nsi? Sitting in the car was not going to get the job done. He started the car and drove home.

Lu was woken by the sound of the front door closing. She sat up, then she went to the entrance hall.

"Where have you been? Do you know what time it is? Anything could have happened to you," she shouted. Zach stood still, watching her. He was quiet for so long that her anger dissipated and was replaced by fear.

"Please don't send me away," she said, tears in her voice.

"We need to talk," he said.

"I'm sorry, I'll never ask about your movements again."

"Let's sit down."

"Zach..."

"Come," he said, taking her hand and leading her back to the lounge.

"I'm sorry," she pleaded.

"There's nothing to be sorry for. I should have called. I'm sorry to have worried you," he said, helping her into her seat and covering her legs with the duvet she had been using before his arrival. He looked at her a long moment, then he sat down.

"It's...we...I...Ethel and I moved here because I was following Nsi," he said.

"Why?"

"He makes passes at women, I told you that, but he only makes a serious pursuit of married women."

"What do you mean?"

"He loves to destroy marriages. He sleeps with married women, then he tells their husbands. Most men divorce their wives once they know that he slept with them. I didn't divorce Liza." Lu gasped.

"She had an affair with him because he threatened to hurt Ethel," Zach continued. Lu gasped again.

“She taped the conversations she had with him when she was trying to end things with him. Every time, he got his way. He’d tell her how devastated I’d be by their affair and warn her that if she stopped the affair, Ethel would be dead within hours of the breakup.

“For months, she was miserable, then she made me listen to the tapes. I wanted to strangle him. She said she’d leave and asked me to get Ethel some bodyguards. At first, I agreed to her leaving, then I changed my mind. We got bodyguards for Ethel and Liza told Nsi that she was done with him. She taped the conversation. He told her what he’d do to Ethel before killing her.

“I thought he was my best friend and he slept with my wife and plotted ways to hurt my child before killing her. I can’t believe how twisted he is in the head,” he shouted. He stood and paced the floor, then he returned to his seat.

“The night of the breakup, he came to dine at our home. He told me about the affair and laughed at the sick look on Liza’s face. A week later, he asked if I’d divorce her and I said no. He went crazy, calling me weak for putting up with her infidelity. He never once mentioned that he’d threatened her into the affair. He tried to get to Ethel and the bodyguards made sure that he didn’t get anywhere near her.

“He was furious and told Liza that she’d pay. I attribute her death to him,” he said. Lu gasped again.

“I couldn’t believe it when the nurse who killed her was acquitted. Liza had been murdered, but no one cared. I spent nights awake comforting Ethel, and when she finally slept, I stayed awake, wondering what to do.

“Finally, I hired a private investigator. He got me all the evidence I needed to convict Nsi, then he told me that he’d been warned that no one would prosecute Nsi, and that he’d be dead sooner than later if he continued with the investigation. He dropped the case.

“I took the evidence to an international human rights organisation, but they weren’t interested. They only started being interested when I did further investigations and showed that several married women he’d been involved with in several countries where he’d worked had also died.

“I’m onto him, Lu. I know he gives you the creeps, but I’m going to stay close to him so I can see that cocky look wiped off his face when he’s caught. He’s involved with two married women right now, they’re also involved with him to protect someone, or something. He’s sick and I’ll see to it that he doesn’t hurt anyone else.”

“You’re putting your life in danger,” said Lu.

“I’m standing up for the women no one else stood up for. Liza’s killer won’t get away with this. He must be caught and if no one will prosecute him, then I’ll kill him.”

“Zach!”

“He hurt her, he hurt my Liza just because he could. I don’t discount the possibility that he killed his wife. She hated his infidelity, he wanted her to put up with it. She’d instigated a separation against his will at the time of her death. All she ever did was ask for her dignity not to be trampled on, and he killed her.”

They were silent a while.

“Let’s go to sleep,” he said.

“I’m sorry, I can’t not react badly to him. If I see him anywhere near the girls...”

“That’s fine, just don’t talk about what I told you, with him or anyone else, and don’t ever react to him or anything he says in a way that shows that we had this conversation.”

“I don’t ever want to lay eyes on him.”

“I can’t promise you that. I didn’t invite him here, yet he turned up. I don’t control his movements.”

“How can you stand to be close to him?”

“I do it for Ethel and Liza. Ethel was robbed of a mother, Liza was robbed of life. Every time I think of stopping, I remember Ethel’s screams. No one hurts my family with immunity. You look tired, let’s go and sleep,” he said, taking her hand.

Lu tossed and turned in bed. She went to sit in the lounge. She did not want to watch TV, nor did she want to sew. The house was spotless, but she wanted to do something. She walked up and down.

Nkulunkulu, I know you haven’t given me a sign, or maybe you have and I missed it, and if that’s the case, I’m sorry. I’ve decided to have Zach. Please don’t take him away from the girls and me. We all need him. Protect him as he pursues that murderer.

Make a miracle and get the murderer arrested and prosecuted and shamed. Let those women and their motherless children be avenged, and let those hurting husbands get justice. I can’t be strong again. If you take Zach, I’ll have to be strong for the girls and I won’t be able to do it. I don’t want to live without him, don’t make me, please, she prayed.

“What are you doing?” asked Zach. Lu turned and saw him at the door.

“Come to bed, it’s cold without you,” he said.

“I can’t sleep.”

“Come, I’ll hold you.” She followed him to their room and climbed into bed beside him. He put his arms round her. She tried to sleep, but sleep eluded her. She kept shifting and moving.

“Go to sleep,” said Zach.

“I can’t. I’ll go, so you can sleep.”

“Hold me. Put your arms round me,” said Zach. He shifted down the bed and put his head on her shoulder. He put an arm across her waist and in seconds, he was fast asleep. Lu shifted until she was comfortable, then she harmonised her breathing with his.

When she woke up, she was alone in bed. She bathed, dressed, then she went to work. Towards lunch time, she finished the wedding gown she had been working on. Since she was

the closest size to the bride, she put the gown on. She studied herself in the mirror in the dressing room, then she went to the workshop.

“What do you think of this gown?” she asked her staff.

“It looks great on you,” someone said.

“The workmanship is superb,” someone else said.

“Thank you, but I’m looking for ways to improve on the gown,” said Lu. Her eyes were on the gown as she turned for her staff to see it from every angle.

“You can’t improve on perfection,” said Zach. Lu looked up, and straight into his eyes. He was looking at her as if she meant the world to him. Her heart picked up speed. She and Zach shared a long look. She broke eye contact when MaPhiri greeted Zach. He greeted everyone, then he looked at Lu.

“Are you free to come to lunch with me now?” he asked.

“Yes, she’s free,” said MaPhiri.

“Let’s go,” Zach said to Lu. She changed in the change room, then she returned to the workshop.

“Ready?” said Zach.

“Yes,” said Lu, picking up her handbag.

“Thank you,” Lu said, after the meal. Zach nodded, watching at her intently.

“Is everything alright?” she asked.

“It’s been two years since I decided I wanted to get married again. I’ve dated, but no one fit the bill, until I met you. I knew at once that you were the one. I’d never thought about the wedding day, until I saw this,” he said, giving her his phone.

She took it. He had taken a picture of her in the wedding gown. She looked and was stunned to see that she looked beautiful.

“I want us to have a big wedding reception, what do you say?” he asked.

“I...I don’t know. Can a divorcee have a big reception? It’s not as if I’m a virgin.”

“You’re not a divorcee anymore, you’re a beautiful bride. Think about our wedding. I have an appointment across town. I’ll drop you off at work and be on my way,” he said, getting to his feet.

At work, Lu started sewing another wedding gown. She finished work late and when she arrived home, she went to soak in a hot bath. The bathroom door burst open.

“You’re home! Are you alright?” asked Zach.

“I’m fine,” replied a startled Lu.

“I was worried sick about you. I phoned you an hour after you normally get home, and you didn’t answer your phone. I thought something had happened to you.”

“I’m sorry, I’m fine. I wasn’t answering my phone because my battery went flat.”

“Where were you?”

“At work.”

“Until this late?”

“I have very little time to make three wedding gowns.”

“Take fewer orders, or get more people to help you.”

“I will, once I get more machines.” He watched her, then he nodded and left. After her bath, she joined him in the dining room.

“I have a meeting, don’t wait up,” he said, then he was gone. Lu put the food away then she went to do some sewing.

Over the next two weeks, Zach was seldom home in the evenings. Lu spent most of that time sewing at home.

She arrived at work one morning and her heart picked up speed. Zach’s car was parked outside the workshop. She gasped once she was inside the workshop.

There were six more machines and work stations, and there were welders welding the machines, new and old, to the floor to prevent theft.

“Hi. The welders will be done soon, then you can all get to work,” said Zach.

“Oh, Zach,” she said, with tears in her eyes. He took her hand and led her out of the workshop.

“Are you mad at me for not talking to you about this? I wanted to surprise you,” he said.

“You have surprised me. I don’t know what to say.”

“You’ll need to hire more people, then this business of working late has to stop. If you want to work longer, bring your work home. I don’t want you sitting alone here, where anything could happen to you.” He wiped away her tears, then he kissed her lightly.

“I have to go,” he said. She watched him drive off, then she returned to the workshop. The welders finished and she and her staff started working. When she arrived home after work, Zach met her at the front door.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hi,” Lu smiled.

“You look tired, are you alright?”

“I just need an early night.”

“Come in,” he said, taking her hand in his. After dinner, he led her to their room. He helped her to undress, then he led her to their bed.

“I need my nightie,” she said.

“No, you don’t.”

“But...”

“Come,” he said, helping her onto the bed.

“Lie on your tummy,” he said.

“I...”

“On your tummy.” She complied then she gasped, feeling his hands on her shoulders. He massaged her neck, shoulders, and down her back. She moaned and relaxed.

When she woke up, Zach was sitting beside her, watching her.

“Hi,” she smiled. He leaned down and kissed her cheek.

“Come to breakfast, I want to eat with you,” he said. Lu showered quickly, then she joined him in the dining room.

“Sit down,” he said. She could feel his eyes on her as she sat down.

“My family and I are meeting your family tomorrow,” he said.

“Oh!” she said, thoroughly taken by surprise.

“Why do you look like that? Don’t you want us to do this the right way?”

“Of course I do.”

“Will you be going home?”

“Home?”

“To your parents’ home stead. They’ll need to ask you a few questions.”

“Yes,” she said, closing her eyes, a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach. She opened her eyes when she felt a hand on her cheek.

“It’ll be fine,” said Zach. She nodded.

“I’ll have to leave soon. The buses...” she said.

“You’ll take a car.”

“The roads there are terrible.”

“They’re terrible everywhere.”



“The car will get damaged.”

“Don’t worry. We can collect the results of our HIV tests today. Are you free to go and get them with me now? If we don’t get them before midday today, we’ll have to wait until next week.”

“I’ll be free at ten.”

“I’ll meet you at the doctor’s rooms.” He kissed her cheek and left.

Lu fetched some things from the workshop, then she went to meet Zach at the doctor’s. They looked at each other in relief when they found out that they were both free from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

“I’m going home to pack a few things, then I’ll go to my parents’,” said Lu.

“I’m going home too,” said Zach. At home, Lu packed some clothes in a bag, then she went to the kitchen. She packed some groceries into two boxes, then she asked MaDlamini and MaDube to take them to her car. She was leading the way to the front door when it opened. Zach looked at the women.

“Bring those parcels this way,” he said. Lu made way for her helpers to walk past her. She went to fetch her bags from the bedroom, then she went outside and started walking to her car.

“Come this way,” said Zach. She approached him, he was standing beside a toyota landcruiser.

“You’re going in this car, the driver, Mdluli, will take you. He’ll be here just now. He’s fetching some things from one of the other cars. Here he is. Mdluli, this is Mrs Zulu, she’ll tell you how to get her to her destination, then you’ll drive her back tomorrow,” said Zach. Lu and Mdluli exchanged greetings, then Lu watched him and one of the gardeners packing boxes into the back of the landcruiser.

“What is all that?” she asked.

“Groceries. I’ll see you tomorrow. Don’t worry, okay?” said Zach. Lu nodded. Zach kissed her and helped her into the passenger seat of the car. She waved at him as Mdluli drove her off. They did not have much to talk about, he played music. All the way to their destination, Lu was praying for things to go well. Memories of her last visit gave her a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach.

Mdluli drove into her parents’ homestead. There were people bustling about, preparing for the arrival of the Zulus. Everyone stopped what they were doing to see who was in the car. Lu climbed out of it and one of her sisters, Songa joined her.

“Sisi, is it you? Where did you get this big car?” she asked. Lu greeted Songa and everyone who had come to meet her. She, Mdluli and everyone else started unloading the car and taking the groceries to the kitchen. Mama was in there.

“Lungile, you are here?” she greeted, looking Lu over.

“Hello, Mama,” said Lu, as she sat down.

“Hello. What’s all this?”

“Groceries, from my family.” Mama looked from Lu to the six boxes that she had brought and continued with her chores.

Lu's sisters, Phumla and Songa started unpacking the grocery boxes excitedly. Lu gaped in amazement when she realised just how much grocery Zach had sent.

“This will feed everyone. Even if Baba hadn’t slaughtered that beast, everyone would get enough food,” said Songa.

“I’ll say this for you, Sisi, this time, you chose a good provider,” said Phumla. Lu’s Aunt MaKhumalo, who had informed the family of the visit by the Zulus, took Lu under her wing, telling her what she needed to do. After supper, the adults in the family gathered for a meeting.

“Have you met her man?” Baba asked Aunty

“No, but you said you had.”

“For two seconds, I know nothing about him.”

“He’s a good provider, that’s all anyone needs to know,” said Songa.

“I’m not talking to you!” Baba said crossly.

“I think we should be grateful that the girl found a man to marry her. At least now, she won’t be a disgrace,” said Babomkhulu.

“What does anyone know about him?” asked Baba.

“The girl’s old enough to know her own mind. Leave her alone. We all need to sleep now. Say goodnight, Lungile, and come with me,” Aunty said firmly. Lu tossed and turned worrying about the following day’s events and missing Zach.

After breakfast next morning, Aunty insisted that Lu accompany her on a walk. They sat down after a while. Aunty asked Lu to tell her about Zach. Lu told her what she knew. Aunty asked several questions to which Lu had no answer. Aunty gave her a long look.

“Do you want to be married to this man when you know so little about him?” she asked.

“Yes, I want to be married to him,” replied Lu.

“It mightn’t work.”

“I know.”

“I haven’t seen you this happy in a long time. Is he responsible for that?”

“Yes.” Aunty nodded, then she stood and they returned to Lu’s parents’ homestead.

“You’re late, where were you? The Zulus have been here a long time,” said Mama.

“We’re here now,” said Aunty.

The negotiations took a long time. Eventually, one of Lu's nephews arrived in the kitchen to say that lunch could be served. Lu was assigned to serve the guests and to eat with them. She took food to them in another hut. She and two nieces started serving the food. Aunty entered the hut and sat down. Lu served her too.

When everyone had food before them, Lu dismissed her nieces. She busied herself filling glasses with water, asking the guests if everything was to their satisfaction and bringing in more food.

"Sit down," said Aunty.

"I'll just finish this," said Lu, continuing to appear busy, even though there was nothing else to be done. She gasped when she felt a hand on her wrist as she put a cold drink on the table. She looked up, Zach was holding her wrist.

"You're not eating," he said.

"I'm not hungry," she said. She made to turn away. Zach did not release her. She looked back at him.

"Let's eat," he said.

"I..."

"Come," he said, drawing on her hand until she was forced to sit beside him.

"But..." she said, then she looked at Zach, startled. He had put a forkful of food into her mouth.

"These are my cousins, Luke, Bart and Senzo. Brothers, this is my MaKhumalo," said Zach.

"Hello," the men said. Lu had to chew and swallow quickly to respond to the greeting, then she introduced Zach to Aunty. They greeted each other, then he introduced his cousins to Aunty. She greeted them as Zach made to feed Lu again. She turned her head away, embarrassed.

"She hasn't eaten since she arrived yesterday, feed her, she must be starving," said Aunty.

"I haven't been hungry," said Lu.

"I don't believe that, eat," said Zach, putting a forkful of food in front of her.

"I'll get my own plate," said Lu, getting to her feet.

"You're not going anywhere," said Zach, who was also on his feet.

"I'll get one of the girls to bring her a plate," said Aunty, then she called out to one of Lu's nieces. Zach helped Lu back into her seat, then he sat beside her.

"How many children do you have, MaKhumalo?" asked one of Zach's cousins.

"Excuse me?" she said.

"Zach tells us you have children."

“Yes, we have three girls,” Lu said, looking from the cousin to Zach.

“Is it true you make wedding gowns?” the cousin continued.

“Yes.”

“I’m marrying my daughter off in three months, can you help with the gown?”

“Of course, if your girl can come to my workshop...”

“Great! The girl’s mother’s been worried we’d have to deal with a stranger who’ll overcharge us, or not do a proper job. Now that someone in the family will be making the gown, I can sleep in peace.”

“Here’s your food, Mamkhulu,” a young woman said to Lu, putting a plate of food before her.

“Thank you,” said Lu.

“Eat,” said Zach. Lu forced herself to eat a little. She absentmindedly listened to Zach and Aunty talking.

“What do you say, ntombazana?” asked Aunty.

“Excuse me?” said Lu.

“Mkhwenyana says he wants a big wedding but you’re undecided, have you made up your mind?”

“I...I don’t know,” Lu said, looking from Aunty to Zach.

“I’m thinking we do it in three to six months, what do you think, Aunty? I want everyone to know that I’ve married this lovely lady,” said Zach. Aunty looked from Lu to Zach.

“Six to twelve months. Your bride will want to plan things properly,” she said.

“Six months it is.”

“Mkhwenyana, I won’t have this girl harassed. When her last marriage ended, I thought she’d die from shock and stress. I don’t know if she’ll survive if you mistreat her.” Zach looked from Aunty to Lu.

“I won’t mistreat her, I love to see her smile and I’ll do everything I can to keep her smiling at me,” he said. Lu’s heart was pounding as she saw the love in his eyes.

Several people came to collect the dishes. Lu made to stand, Zach put an arm round her shoulders. Feeling shy, she made to move his arm, then she was side tracked by one of his cousins engaging her in conversation.

Zach nibbled on her throat. Her stomach flip-flopped and she gasped. She looked at him, he kissed her. She returned the kiss, starved for him, then she broke it, remembering that they were not alone. She looked round the hut, they were alone.

“Where’s everyone gone?” she asked.

“It’s time for us to go. I’m going with my cousins, Mdluli will take you home when you’re ready,” he said. He stood, took her hand and led her out of the hut.

She withdrew her hand from his, he put a hand on her lower back. She moved out of his reach, he put an arm round her waist and drew her close to him.

“Zach! What are you doing?” she asked, feeling self-conscious as everyone was watching them.

“Don’t run away from me,” he said.

“I’m not...”

“Sbali, I intend to take such good care of your sister that she’ll never have reason to come crying to you about anything,” Zach said to buti Richie. He kissed Lu’s cheek, then he took buti Richie aside.

“Must you display yourselves so indecently? You’re adults, act your age,” Songa hissed to Lu. Before she could respond, Zach was taking her hand.

“Is this your sister?” he asked. Lu introduced him to Songa and Phumla. They all greeted each other.

“Walk me to the car,” Zach said to Lu. She could feel everyone watching them walking to the car.

“I think we should start going to church soon,” he said.

“What?” gasped Lu, surprised enough to stop walking.

“We need to attend regularly if we’re to have our marriage blessed.”

“We already had a civil ceremony!”

“We’re getting blessings too. This marriage has to last and it has to be good for all of us. I’ll see you when you get home,” he said, kissing her lightly and climbing into the car.

“Bye, MaKhumalo,” his cousins said.

“Bye,” said Lu, then she watched them driving off.

“Lungile, can’t you control yourself?” demanded Mama.

“Ma?” said Lu.

“What kind of behaviour was that? What decent woman carries on with a man that way? Why do you behave like a loose woman? Can’t you respect your father and me? How can you touch each other and carry on in front of us as if you’re alone in the bedroom? What will everyone think of you now? Hayi! I don’t know what wrong I did to deserve you as a child,” Mama said. She turned her back on Lu as she returned to the kitchen.

Lu watched her, then she noticed the rest of the family and the extended family looking at her, wondering how next she would embarrass them. She had planned to leave in the early

evening after helping with the cleaning up, she changed her mind on the spot. She fetched her clothes and handbag, then she gave Aunty the dress she had made her.

“He’s a big strong man, I hope he won’t be intimidated by your strength, the way the other one was,” said Aunty. Lu went to say bye to Baba, he grunted. When she said bye to Mama, Mama ignored her. She made herself not cry in the car.

At home, she was glad to find Zach with his cousins. She greeted them, then she went to the bathroom. She sat a long time in the bathtub. After her bath, she started making dinner.

“We’re all going out,” said Zach. Lu looked at him, startled, she had not heard him enter the kitchen.

“I didn’t mean to scare you. Are you alright?” he asked.

“I’m fine.”

“You look...”

“I have some work to do. You all go on.”

“I want to eat with you.”

“I won’t be able to enjoy the food, my mind will be on the work I have to do.” Zach gave her a long look, kissed her cheek and left. Lu put away the food, then she went to her sewing station.

She started cutting a dress for Thandi, then suddenly, she could not see. Thinking she had closed her eyes, she opened them wide, but she still could not see. She put a hand on her cheek intending to open her eyes with her hands, and felt moisture. She wiped away the tears, then she could see again. She returned to work, and in a short while, she could not see again. She threw the scissors down in frustration feeling sobs coming from deep in her belly. She put her arms on the table, put her head on them and sobbed until she had no more tears. She sat a long time then she was startled by the sound of a car.

She quickly went to wash her face, change into her sleep wear, and climbed into bed. She heard Zach enter the bedroom and close the door.

“Lu,” he said. She did not respond.

She heard him walk into the dressing room. His clothes rustled as he changed into his sleep wear then he was approaching the bed. He climbed into it. Lu kept her back to him. When he spooned in behind her and put an arm round her waist, she forgot to breathe.

“Why aren’t you happy, sthandwa?” he asked. Her heart picked up speed, but she did not reply.

“Did someone say or do something to hurt you?” he continued. Still, she was quiet. He moved closer to her.

“Did you pay amalobolo?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“You should find a way to get back everything you gave to my family.”

“What?” asked Zach startled into turning her onto her back and sitting up to look down at her in shock.

“You should...” she began.

“Why? Don’t you want to be with me?”

“How can I not want to be with you?”

“Then how can you say...”

“I shouldn’t have agreed to your family going to see mine.”

“Why not?”

“To all intents and purposes, I’m dead to my family. Is it right to receive amalobolo for a dead person?”

“Don’t say that!” She looked away from him.

“I forget...I always forget just how terrible it is for all of us when I visit any of my family. I can’t go back there, I can’t bear to see any of them or to be seen by any of them. That’s why I say you should get amalobolo back,” she said.

“I won’t do that.” She looked at him.

“I’m sorry that going there hurt you. You’ll never have to go there again if you don’t want to,” he said. She drew his head to her and kissed him. He withdrew from her.

“Are you alright?” he asked. She nodded.

“I didn’t like seeing you upset,” he continued.

“I’m fine now.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Sleep now. Will you?”

“I’ll try.” He kissed her, then he lay beside her and put his arms round her. She put her head on his shoulder, put an arm across his chest and sighed.

“I love you,” he said.

“I love you, too.” He kissed her forehead fervently.

He was glad amalobolo had been paid. Lu had looked beautiful. She had handled herself very well in front of his cousins. They had been very impressed by her. On the drive back from her parents’ homestead, they had all agreed that she was worth every beast that had been demanded by her father and uncles.

Zach had been surprised by her strange mood when she had returned from her parents' home. He was very relieved to discover that she had not been upset with him, or by him. It saddened him that she and her family did not get along well. He intended to charm them so well, that they would instigate a reconciliation with her.

He smiled, thinking about how pleased she would be with him. He listened to her breathing, glad to be holding her. He wondered how the girls would react to the marriage. He and Lu would have to tell them as soon as possible.

She had been shy when he had touched her in front of her family, she needed to get used to his touch.

His expression hardened. He had to get the Nsi business out of the way. He would have to focus his attention on him and see if he could not goad him, if necessary, into giving himself away and being arrested. He had to put things in place at work and focus on Nsi. He was not looking forward to it, but it had to be done, then he could focus on his beautiful bride.

Next morning, Lu met Zach in the dining room for breakfast.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“Yes,” she replied.

“We need to tell the girls that we’re married.”

“Yes.”

“I think we should do it tonight, or tomorrow night. Invite Thandi over then we’ll phone Lwazi and Ethel and tell them all together.”

“We could wait till Lwazi and Ethel come back from school.”

“We need to tell them ourselves before the extended family members tell them.” Lu invited Thandi for dinner there and then. Thandi said she could come that evening.

Lu went to pick her up from work in the evening.

“Is everything alright, Mama?” asked Thandi.

“Yes, everything’s fine. I just thought we could go home together, is that alright with you?”

“It’s fine.”

“I’m sorry I over-reacted the last time you visited,” said Lu.

“Hmm.”

“It won’t happen again.”

“Are you sure?”

“I want us to have a cordial relationship always. I’ll trust you to know what you’re doing and I won’t be so nosy.”



“You’re not nosy.”

“I ask too many questions.”

“It’s your way of showing that you care.”

“Yes, it is, but maybe...”

“Maybe nothing. It’s fine, Mama. How are you?”

“Fine, thanks, and you?”

“Okay. Zi tells me you went to visit them.”

“Yes.”

“How did it go?”

“It was fine.” At home, they freshened up, then Zach joined them for supper. After the meal, Thandi cleared the table.

“Come and sit down when you’re done,” said Zach. Thandi returned from the kitchen.

“Your Mama and I have something to tell you and your sisters. I’m phoning them now, and we’ll tell you all together,” Zach said. Thandi looked from him to Lu as he speed dialled on his cell phone. They could all hear the phone on the other side ringing. Lwazi answered it, and everyone greeted each other.

“What is it you want to tell us, Baba?” she asked. Zach looked at Lu.

“Your Mama and I got married,” he said.

“Really?” said Thandi, looking at Lu.

“Yes,” said Lu. Thandi stood and hugged Lu, then Zach, congratulating them. They both thanked her.

“That’s great!” said Ethel excitedly. There was a silence.

“Lwazi?” said Lu.

“Congratulations,” said Lwazi.

“Did you not want us to get married?”

“I’m just so happy to have a Baba.”

“I’m happy we’re a real family now. Why didn’t you tell us? When did you get married? Was it a big wedding?” asked Ethel excitedly.

“We wanted to take care of amalobolo first,” said Zach.

“You went to see Mama’s family?” gasped Lwazi.

“Yes,” said Zach.

“Are you alright, Mama?” asked Thandi.

“I’m fine,” said Lu.

“Did they set the dogs on you, Baba?” asked Lwazi.

“No,” replied Zach.

“You must really love Mama a lot. You guys can’t get divorced. I can’t go through another divorce,” said Lwazi.

“We’re not getting divorced,” said Zach.

“Why isn’t Mama saying anything?” asked Ethel.

“I don’t want a divorce,” said Lu.

“Even if you divorce Baba, you can’t divorce me.”

“I won’t divorce you.”

“But you’ll divorce Baba?” asked Lwazi.

“I didn’t say that,” said Lu.

“If you divorce him, I’m giving him custody of me. You’re not allowed to divorce him!” shouted Lwazi. Everyone was startled into silence.

“There’ll be no divorce,” said Lu.

After the call ended, Thandi left the dining room. Lu looked at Zach as he sat beside her.

“Are you planning on divorcing me?” he asked.

“Of course not!”

“Then why did you sound as if you didn’t believe that our marriage will last?”

“I don’t want a divorce, but maybe there’s something wrong with me.”

“What do you mean?”

“My family received amalobolo from three men before my first marriage. The first man left for the mines and after two years of waiting for him, I decided to move on. The second one went to study in the USA, then he sent me a letter telling me that he’d married someone else.

“The third man died a few months before our wedding day. Absolom sent the girls and I away. There must be something wrong with me.”

“There’s nothing wrong with you.”

“Then why did all those men either leave me, or get rid of me?”

“I don’t know. I do know that I won’t do either of those things to you.”

“Maybe I’ll do them to you.”

“Do you want to?”

“No!”

“Then you won’t,” said Zach, then he kissed her.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A few days later, Lu went to visit Aunty.

“How are you, ntombazana?” asked Aunty.

“I’m fine, how are you?”

“Alright.”

“Thank you for facilitating amalobolo talks.”

“I was glad to. Zulu loves you. I’ve never met a man so proud of the woman he’s chosen to spend his life with. Pay no attention to the last words your mother said to you. Focus on making your marriage work. How is Zulu?”

“Very well.” They had tea, then Lu made her goodbyes. She and Aunty stood outside her car.

“What’s on your mind, ntombazana?” asked Aunty

“I’m afraid,” replied Lu.

“Of what?”

“Zulu’s a good man and he and the girls like each other. I’m afraid I’ll spoil things. We told the girls that we’re married and Lwazi wanted to be assured that we won’t divorce. How can anyone ask that at the beginning of a marriage? I couldn’t reassure her, I don’t know that I won’t be a divorcee again.”

“Do you love your husband?”

“Yes.”

“Does he love you?”

“Yes.”

“Do you trust him?”

“Yes.”

“Then trust yourself.”

“Trust myself?” asked Lu, looking at Auntie quizzically.

“Trust yourself to be lovable, you must be, otherwise he wouldn’t love you. Trust yourself to do what’s right to keep your marriage strong. Don’t let the fears and mistakes of the past spoil this good thing,” said Auntie.

“I’m scared.”

“That’s a luxury you can’t afford.”

“It is not a luxury!” gasped Lu.

“It’s self-indulgence. You should be busy taking care of your man and children. You should be making sure you look good to your man so he never ever notices other women. Marriage is a full time job. It can’t work if you’re taking time out to scare yourself with horrible possibilities.” Lu and Auntie shared a long look, then Lu hugged and thanked Auntie and left.

Zach went away for a few days. On the evening of his return, Lu left work early. At home, she cooked his favourite food, following the recipe Ethel had given her. When she was done, she freshened up and dressed well.

She heard Zach’s car drive up and went to open the front door. She watched as he parked the car. He climbed out of it and approached her. She smiled and met him half way, putting her arms round him. He held her tight.

“Come in,” she said. He withdrew from her and turned to the car. She put a hand on his arm and walked beside him. She stopped in her tracks when she saw his parents standing by the car. She ran quickly into the house and to her bedroom.

She changed from her trousers into a full length skirt. She removed her off-the-shoulder top and replaced it with a three quarter sleeved top. She put a head scarf over her head covering the hair she had spent hours having styled. She found Zach’s parents in the lounge.

She sat on the floor to greet them. Mr Zulu returned her greeting, MaMbambo ignored it. Lu excused herself and went to set another place in the dining room. She moved her sewing things to the kitchen then she went to find Zach. He had just showered and was dressing in their dressing room. He smiled at her, she smiled back.

“Welcome home,” she said.

“It’s good to be back. How are you?”

“Fine, and you? How did it go?”

“It went badly, but I’m okay. Can we eat? I’m starving.”

“Supper’s ready. Come,” she said, taking his hand and leading him to the dining room. She helped him into a seat then she went to announce the meal to his parents. They followed her to the dining room. She poured water for them each to wash their hands then she went to the kitchen.

She had just set up her sewing things there, when she heard footsteps. Zach stood frowning just inside the kitchen door.

“What’s taking so long? Come and eat. I want to eat with you,” he said.

“I can’t eat in the same room as your Baba.”

“Why not?”

“We haven’t arranged to eat in the same room.”

“That’s ridiculous! I want to eat with you.”

“I’m sorry, I can’t eat with you tonight.” He looked away from her, clearly put out. She kissed him lightly. He put a hand either side of her head and kissed her thoroughly.

“I’ve missed you. I want to be with you,” he said, as they held onto each other tight.

“Zachariah, what’s taking so long? Oh!” said MaMbambo. She was standing at the kitchen door. Lu released Zach, he kept an arm round her waist as they both faced his Mama.

“MaKhumalo was just telling me that she can’t eat in the same room as Baba. I want that fixed right now. How am I supposed to eat with her and with you when you’re in different rooms?” demanded Zach. MaMbambo glanced at Lu then she looked at Zach.

“Your Baba’s waiting for you,” she said then she left. Zach looked at Lu then he followed his Mama. Lu went to fix a room for the guests. As she returned to the kitchen, Zach called out to her. She went to the dining room and made to sit on the floor.

“Don’t do that! You’re my wife, sit on a chair,” said Zach. Lu sat on a chair.

“I’ve spoken to Baba, he says the two of you can eat in the same room,” said Zach. Lu looked from him to Mr Zulu, then she looked down quickly, Mr Zulu was watching her.

“Mama and Baba are visiting Zeb’s son in Cape Town. They catch their bus tomorrow at midday. Can you get them to the bus?” Zach asked.

“Yes,” replied Lu. When no one else said anything, she started clearing the table. When she had taken everything to the kitchen, she showed MaMbambo where she and Mr Zulu would be sleeping. In her bedroom, Lu found Zach sitting up in bed. She changed into her sleep wear and climbed into bed beside him.

“Did you enjoy your meal?” she asked.

“No.”

“Why? What was wrong with it?”

“The food was fine, but I couldn’t enjoy it without you there. I’d have liked you to be present while I ate a meal you obviously spent hours preparing for me.”

“I’m sorry, I couldn’t be there.”

“That should have been taken care of long ago.”

“Everything’s happened very fast. I didn’t have time...”

“I’m not blaming you! I’m just saying that I wasn’t happy.” She put her arms round him.

He left home early next morning. Lu prepared lunch for her in-laws, then she went to work. MaPhiri was not in and Lu had to do the work of two people. She only remembered to fetch her in-laws when MaDube phoned her saying MaMbambo was asking if she had forgotten to fetch them to the bus. Lu broke several road safety rules as she drove to fetch her in-laws from home, and as she drove them to the bus.

They arrived at the bus depot after check-in had closed. If Lu had not been the tailor of one of the check-in persons, her in-laws would have missed their bus. She drove back to work, furious with herself for making a terrible impression on her in-laws. She had just arrived at work when her phone rang. She looked at it and smiled as she answered it.

“What was that? Are you trying to kill yourself?” demanded Zach.

“I don’t know what you’re...”

“How could you drive so fast? I just saw you driving like a formula one racer.”

“I...”

“Never do that, Lungile, never! I’m not about to bury you.”

“You won’t bury me.”

“Don’t do it again.”

“I won’t,” said Lu, then she looked at her phone, Zach had cut the call.

She continued to work after her staff had left. When she tired, she took some of her work home.

“Where have you been?” Zach demanded as she entered her home. She started.

“I’m talking to you,” Zach continued.

“I was at work.”

“Didn’t I tell you to bring your work home?”

“That’s what I’ve done.”

“Can we eat?”

“Go ahead.”

“Not without you.”

“I need...”

“I’m not letting you die.”

“What?”

“First, you try to kill yourself by driving like a lunatic, then you stay late at work for thieves and murderers to kill you, and now, you want to starve yourself. I won’t let you.”

“I’m not trying to kill...”

“Supper’s in thirty minutes,” he said curtly, then he walked away from her. She noticed his brother David, and a strange woman watching her. She greeted them, they followed Zach in silence. She freshened up quickly, then she went to the dining room. Zach, David and the strange woman were already seated.

“Sorry I’m late,” said Lu.

“Sit down,” said Zach, then he started eating. Lu sat looking at her food.

“Eat,” said Zach. Lu picked up her fork.

“Zeb says your wife tried to kill Mama and Baba, and that they almost didn’t get on their bus,” said David. Zach looked from him to Lu.

“I wasn’t trying to kill them. I got caught up with work, then I had to drive fast so that they’d get on their bus,” she said.

“Why didn’t you leave work on time?” asked Zach.

“I was busy.”

“I told you to hire more staff.”

“I haven’t had time.”

“You haven’t made the effort!”

“You left me your work load while you were gone. When would I have had time to do my work, your work, and conduct interviews?”

“Make time,” said Zach with finality. Lu watched him eating angrily. She noticed the guests watching her.

“Who are you?” she asked the woman.

“She’s David’s wife!” said Zach in exasperation.

“How was I supposed to know? No one told me.”

“Must you be told everything?”

“What do you mean?”

“Do I have to tell you when to leave work, when to conduct interviews, when to...” Lu stood and left the room.

She stood panting in fury in the kitchen. She picked up her car keys and left the house.

She sat in the car outside her home, trying to decide where to go. She was startled when the driver's door was wrenched open.

"Where are you going?" demanded Zach.

"I don't want to fight with you," said Lu.

"Then answer the question."

"What are you so mad about? I've told you about my work situation, but you're still mad. What am I supposed to do to make you feel better?" Lu shouted.

"Get inside," said Zach, ushering Lu into the house. She removed her arm from his hand and went towards the kitchen.

"Come to bed," he said.

"I prefer to be with the clothes, they won't shout at me," said Lu, sitting at the kitchen table. As she picked up a garment, she was aware of Zach watching her. She started sewing.

A few minutes later, she heard his receding footsteps. When she tired, she went to sleep in a guest bedroom.

Nkulunkulu, make whatever's making Zach angry go away, I can't be a divorcee again, she prayed as she lay on the bed, looking at the ceiling.

She came awake with a gasp. Someone was climbing into bed beside her.

"Relax, it's me," said Zach.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Go to sleep," he said, as he lay down beside her. He put his arms round her and fell asleep. She listened to him breathing, then she fell asleep.

David and his wife left the following day.

Over the next few days, Zach was tense and curt with everyone. Lu was almost always on the receiving end of his criticism and anger. At first, she would defend herself, but Zach refused to see reason. Lu stopped defending herself. When the criticism became more than she could bear, she decided to leave.

She was packing a suitcase into her car one evening, when he roared up to the front door. He jumped out of his car.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

"I'm leaving."

"What?"

"I'm going away."

"Has someone sent you away?"



“Yes.”

“Tell me who it was and I’ll sort it out right now.”

“It was you.”

“I would never...”

“I’m sick and tired of your anger that has no beginning, no end, and no reason! When I come back, you better have sorted yourself out. If you try to divorce me, I’ll give you the fight of your life. If you have another woman, get rid of her, I’m not losing you to anyone. Hi, Thandi.”

“Hi, Mama. Are you sure about this?” asked Thandi who was standing beside Zach.

“Absolutely. Hi, Nsi. Good night, everyone,” said Lu. She climbed into her car and drove off.

Zach stood staring after her car in disbelief. She had left. She had actually left! What was he supposed to do without her? He phoned her several times, she did not answer her phone. He stormed into the house.

He showered then he went to sit in the lounge, making calls.

“Come and eat,” said Nsi.

“I’m not hungry.”

“Come on, man, you’re always hungry.”

“Go ahead without me.”

“Zach...”

“Go!” shouted Zach looking at Nsi in fury. The man had cost him his first wife, and now, he was in the process of costing him his second one. He was not going to be a victim of his destructiveness a second time.

“Why don’t you go after her if her departure makes you so grumpy?” asked Nsi.

“Excuse me,” said Zach. Nsi laughed.

“You’re such a fool for women! You put up with Liza’s infidelity, and now, your MaKhumalo has you twisted in knots. Are you going to go after her? I bet you’ll go after her and beg on your knees.”

“Nsi, I never told you how to conduct your marriage, I won’t be told how to conduct mine.” Zach was on his feet, his heart was pounding furiously. Nsi shrugged and left.

Zach sat down. He had almost jeopardised everything by almost punching that murderer. He had to calm down.

He tossed and turned in his bed, missing Lu. He had to get her back. How was he going to combine his mission with keeping his marriage?

In the morning, he was in a terrible mood. He shouted at the staff and at Thandi and Nsi at breakfast. Later, he went to his bedroom to fetch his work things. He saw one of Lu's dresses and went to smell it. There was a knock on his bedroom door.

"Come in," he called. The door opened.

"Thandi, is everything alright?" he asked.

"How can everything be alright when you sent Mama away?"

"I didn't send..."

"I'm not about to go through another divorce! I won't pick up the pieces again. Do you know what it's like to listen to your Mama crying every night because of a fool who broke her heart? Mama doesn't deserve to have her heart broken, do you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you."

"Good. Sit down." They sat beside each other on the bed. Thandi took a deep breath.

"I'm sorry for shouting at you. Please don't tell Mama, she'd never forgive me for shouting at you. She's always told us to respect our elders. I'm sorry, Baba," she said.

"You're forgiven."

"We've just become a family, please don't destroy that."

"It was your mother who left."

"She's coming back."

"You don't know that for sure."

"She said she'd be back."

"When did she say that?"

"Last night, when she left."

"Oh!"

"Don't you remember? She said she's coming back."

"I'm so glad to hear that."

"Good. Make this work, for the two of you, and for the rest of the family. I'm going home. Take care of yourself and Mama for us." Thandi stood and walked to the door.

"Thandi," said Zach. Thandi turned to look at him.

"Thanks," he said. She nodded and left.

Lu arrived at her old home. Her house sitter, MaNkosi, was waiting for her. They drove to work together over the next few days. Lu made time to interview and hire more staff.

She returned to her marital home four days later.

“You’re back,” said Zach, when he found her in the lounge.

“Hi, Zach, hi, Nsi,” said Lu. The men stood watching her in silence.

“This is a very good movie, join me,” she said. Both men declined and left the room. A while later, MaDube announced supper. Lu found Zach and Nsi in the dining room. She sat down and started eating.

“You should eat, Zach. That lean look isn’t in the least attractive to me,” she said.

“How am I supposed to eat when I don’t know where you are?”

“I’m sitting right in front of you.”

“Where were you?”

“No inquisitions, please.”

“I have a right to know. I’m your husband.”

“When you talk to me, instead of inquisitioning me, I’ll tell you all about where I was. Excuse me, I have a call to make,” said Lu, then she left the room. She went to her bedroom to phone Ethel.

“Are you getting a divorce? Sisi says you left home,” said Ethel.

“I did leave, but I’m back now. No one is getting divorced,” said Lu. When the call ended some minutes later Zach was sitting beside her on the bed.

“I was afraid you weren’t coming back,” he said.

“I said I would.”

“You haven’t moved in.”

“Of course I have.”

“Your body’s here, but your things...”

“My clothes are here, that’s all I needed to bring.”

“This is our home, yours and mine. I want to see your furniture and your other things here.”

“Zach...”

“You don’t want to be with me.”

“Of course I do.”

“Then why haven’t you moved in?” he asked. Lu gave him a long look, then she looked away from him.

“Have you ever been homeless?” she asked.

“No.”

“I have, and I’m not going to be homeless again.”

“This is your home.”

“If you die before me, your family will tell me to go away. I need that house so I don’t have to beg friends or other family for a roof over my head, and so the husbands and sons of whoever I would have to live with don’t think I should pay for rent with sexual favours.”

“What?” said Zach. Lu looked at him.

“When Absolom sent the girls and I away, we had to stay with one of my friends and her family. Her husband would try to touch me, so would his sons. I was always afraid of being alone in the house with one of those men, or with all four of them. I was always afraid for Thandi and Lwazi.” Zach was breathing heavily horrified by her words.

“I need that house. Your family has no reason to be kind to me, I haven’t given you a child. I’d like to, but my body can’t anymore,” said Lu.

“I have a will, and you have the marriage certificate, you’ll be fine,” said Zach.

“I’m keeping the house,” she said firmly. They shared a long look, then he nodded.

“I’m glad you’re sure that we’re not divorcing,” he said.

“There would be no point. The girls would be distraught and you and I would be miserable. I don’t know what’s eating you, but I do know that I love you, and that I want to stay with you. Do you want to divorce me?” she asked.

“Of course not!”

“Have you found another woman?”

“How can you even think that?” he gasped.

“In my experience, a man behaves like an angry elephant when he wants to be rid of his wife.”

“That’s not what’s going on here.”

“What is going on?” Zach opened and closed his mouth.

“I can’t talk about it,” he said. Lu gave him a long look.

“Clear your calendar, we’re going on honeymoon in a month,” she said.

“How could you arrange that without talking to me?”

“When would I have talked to you? You were busy yelling at everyone. Did you yell at Thandi?”

“She threatened to do something drastic if you left for good. I love you.”

“I love you, too. Sort yourself out and stop this yelling.”

“I will.” He leaned towards her and kissed her. The kiss heated and Lu felt his hand on her bare belly under her blouse. A throat was cleared. Zach broke the kiss. Lu leaned her head against his chest, catching her breath.

“Hi, Nsi,” panted Zach. Lu opened her eyes, Nsi was standing at their open bedroom door.

“We need to go,” he said.

“We’ll cancel,” said Zach, his hand caressing Lu’s belly.

“We can’t,” said Nsi. Zach made a displeased sound. He looked at Lu, kissed her again, then he followed Nsi out of the room. He gave Lu a last look from the door, then he left. Lu put a hand on her mouth and smiled.

She was setting up breakfast in the dining room next morning when she heard Nsi talking to Zach. She rolled her eyes. The men had suddenly become inseparable. She took a deep breath and made herself smile as she heard their approaching footsteps.

“Hi, Nsi, sit down,” she said.

“Hi,” he returned, running his eyes all over her.

“Hi, sthandwa,” said Lu, walking to Zach. He stopped, looking at her. She smiled at the desire in his eyes. She was wearing tight black jeans and a tight white top. Both articles of clothing showed her body in a very positive light. She kissed Zach lightly then she took his hand and led him to his seat.

“Do you want tea?” she asked him. He shook his head, his eyes on her bosom. The top part of her breasts was alluringly displayed.

“Tea, Nsi?” she said.

“No, thanks.” Lu sat down and started eating. She was full of questions and compliments for the men. When breakfast finished, both men were completely under her spell. She walked them to Zach’s car, made her goodbyes to them, kissed Zach then she watched as Mdluli drove them off.

In the evening, she arrived home from work before Zach. She freshened up and dressed well. She met Zach at the front door with a sound kiss, then she heard Nsi greeting her.

She stilled in Zach’s arms and broke the kiss. Zach had a hand just beneath her breast. She withdrew from him. Nsi could not take his eyes off her.

“I thought you were hungry,” growled Zach.

“I am,” said Nsi, his eyes on Lu’s legs. She smiled as Zach ushered him away from her. She closed the door then she went to set the table. She smiled to herself remembering the way both men had salivated when they had looked at her.

She was wearing a black mini skirt and a red, off-the-shoulder top. Her arms, the top part of her chest and back, as well as her legs were on display. She felt young and sexy. The men joined her for supper. After the meal, she took the dishes to the kitchen. Zach followed her there.

“Can I see you? Now?” he said. She followed him to their bedroom.

As soon as she closed the door, he kissed her. She felt him caressing her shoulders and neck. He broke the kiss and she felt his mouth on her throat. She opened her eyes, she was leaning back against the wall by the door. She gasped, feeling Zach’s hands on her bare breasts.

He drew away from her and she realised he had taken off her top and bra, and that he was looking at her body.

“You are magnificent,” he said. She started undoing his shirt buttons. She caressed his chest and belly then she kissed him. She felt her skirt pooling at her feet. Zach caressed her inner thighs and she gasped, breaking the kiss.

“I want you,” he panted. Her heart beat accelerated. They both stilled when they heard a knock on the door.

“Zach, I need you,” said Nsi. Zach closed his eyes and groaned. Lu kissed him. The kiss broke when Lu landed on her back on the bed. Zach was kissing and caressing her breasts.

“Zach? Zach. Can I come in?” asked Nsi.

“I’m coming,” panted Zach. He kissed Lu. Nsi knocked on the door again. Zach broke the kiss. He stood and fixed his clothes, his eyes running all over Lu’s body. He put his mouth on her nipple and sucked. Lu’s back arched off the bed, and she gasped. Zach gave her a last look, then he left. Lu put a hand on her breast and closed her eyes, more sexually frustrated than she had ever been in her life.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

Next morning, Zach was in a terrible mood. He was growling at Lu, Nsi and the staff. Lu smiled to herself glad that she was not the only one suffering from sexual frustration. When she returned home from work, she found Zach’s parents there, with Lucky, the grandson they had been visiting in Cape Town. She greeted them, then she excused herself. After her bath, she went to the lounge.

“Girls!” she said, in wonder.

“Hi, Mama,” said Ethel and Lwazi together. Ethel hugged Lu tight. Lu then hugged Lwazi. She was very pleasantly surprised when Lwazi did not push her off. She introduced Lwazi to her in-laws, then she and Ethel followed Lwazi out of the room with their arms round each other.

“This is a very pleasant surprise. Is school finished now?” asked Lu.

“We’ve written our exams so we decided to come home,” said Lwazi.

“We wanted to see for ourselves that you’re married,” said Ethel.

“We are married,” said Lu.

“We also want to make sure you don’t divorce,” said Lwazi.

“We won’t divorce,” said Lu. The girls went to freshen up. Lu helped the staff to make supper. Zach arrived with Nsi and his children. Ethel was full of chatter and questions and kept everyone laughing during supper. Everyone looked at Nsi’s daughter, Emma when she suddenly started crying.

“What is it now?” asked Nsi in exasperation. Emma’s brother, Luke, tried to hug her, she pushed him off. She climbed off her seat and went to put her arms round Lu. Lu was startled, then she pushed her chair back and put Emma on her lap.

Emma started crying in earnest. Lu looked at Zach, then at Nsi. Both men did not know what to do. Lu rocked Emma and told her that everything was alright. Emma finally stopped crying.

“What’s the matter?” asked Lu.

“I want my Mama. Can I stay here with you so you can be my Mama? Please? I’ll be very good and...” Emma pleaded.

“Will you stop that!” said Nsi. Emma looked from Lu to him then she hid her face in Lu’s bosom, crying quietly. Lu put her on her feet and led her out of the room. She bathed her then she took her to a guest room and told her a bed time story.

Luke joined them. He climbed into bed with Emma and they looked at Lu solemnly. She sat with them a long time, then she returned to the dining room.

“How are they?” asked Zach.

“Asleep.”

“I don’t know what got into her,” said Nsi.

“Be kind to her, please, Babomncane. I know how hard it is to want your Mama and not have access to her,” said Ethel.

“Don’t tell me how to parent my children,” said Nsi.

“She’s trying to help,” said Lu.

“I don’t need help!” said Nsi. Everyone was quiet, then Lu and Ethel finished clearing the table. Lu sat sewing in the kitchen a long time.

On her way to bed, she heard crying. She went into the room that Emma and Luke were sharing. She found Luke holding Emma, both of them were crying. She held them, they both clung to her. The door opened, Zach and Nsi entered the room.

“What is it?” asked Nsi.

“I don’t know,” said Lu.

“I’ll take care of them.” The children turned their backs on their father and clung more tightly to Lu. She looked away from the anger on his face.

“Let’s leave MaKhumalo with them. She’s very good with children,” said Zach.

“They are my children!” said Nsi.

“I know, but they want a Mama, and right now, MaKhumalo’s the only Mama on the premises. Let’s go.” Nsi reluctantly followed Zach out of the room.

A few minutes later, Ethel entered the room. She told the children about how lonely she had been when her Mama had died. The children stopped crying, listening to her. They went to sit on either side of her. They talked about their Mama, then everyone was quiet.

“It’s cold, you need to get into bed,” said Lu. Emma moved closer to Ethel.

“Do you want to come and sleep with me?” asked Ethel. Emma nodded. Ethel took her hand and they left the room together. Luke climbed into bed and turned his back on Lu. She went to her bedroom.

“How are they?” asked Zach.

“Miserable,” replied Lu, as she climbed into bed beside him.

Next day, Emma and Luke refused to go to school. No matter what Nsi said, they refused to go. He threatened them with a hiding.

“Let them stay. Ethel and I will look after them,” said MaMbambo.

Nsi left the house angrily. Zach and Lu made their goodbyes and left.

Lu phoned home four times asking after the children.

“Mama, they’re fine, stop worrying. They have me, Lwazi, Gogo, MaDube and MaDlamini. Nothing will happen to them,” said Ethel. Lu relaxed and focused on her work.

When she arrived home, she greeted her in-laws, Zach, Nsi, and a strange woman, who were all in the lounge. The strange woman was introduced as Emma and Luke’s Mamncane. Nsi was glaring at Mamncane, who was talking to Emma and Luke. Zach called Ethel to take the children out of the room.

“No one is taking my children,” said Nsi.

“Mamncane is having them for the weekend, then she’ll bring them back,” said Zach.

“Who told you where to find my children? I told you before to stay away from them,” Nsi said to Mamncane.

“I brought her here. When Ethel was missing her Mama, I’d have done anything to stop her pain. I think you feel the same way, that’s why I’ve brought Mamncane.”

“I don’t need help!”

“Do you like to see the children suffering?”



“I didn’t say that!”

“Mamncane will bring them back. Let them go for the rest of the week and the weekend. I doubt they’ll skip school if they’re with her.”

“Let the children go,” said MaMbambo. Nsi nodded reluctantly.

Supper was served after Mamncane and the children had left. Lu went to sleep immediately after the meal. When she woke up, she tossed and turned, then she felt for Zach on his side of the bed. He was not there. She sat up. He was sitting beside her on her side of the bed, watching her.

“Hi,” she said.

“Hi.”

“Why haven’t you slept? You’re still in last night’s clothes.”

“Hold me,” he said. She climbed off the bed, stood between his legs and put her arms round him.

“What’s wrong?”

“Hold me,” he said in a flat tone. Her alarm clock rang. She switched it off then she helped Zach to his feet. She stripped him, led him to the shower and left him freshening up. She showered in another bathroom then she met him in their dressing room as they both dressed.

They found the Zulus, Nsi and the girls in the dining room. Nsi was driven away by Mdluli after breakfast. Zach said that he would be staying home. Lu kissed him when she left, he did not respond.

She went to work but she could not focus because she was worried about him. She phoned him, he curtly asked her to clear the line. She could not work after that. She packed up her work and drove home.

As she climbed out of the car, the front door opened. Two strangers walked out of the door, followed by Nsi, he was followed by another stranger. Nsi’s hands were behind his back. He seemed to be talking earnestly to the people around him. They all ignored him and led him to a car. Lu realised then that he was handcuffed.

“Help me, Zach. Help me. You know I’d never hurt anyone. Help me,” he shouted as the people round him forced him into the car. Zach was standing outside the front door, watching Nsi in silence. The men accompanying Nsi climbed into the car and drove off. As the car passed Lu, she noticed that Nsi was looking out of the back window at Zach, talking. Lu looked at Zach.

He looked from the receding car to her. She hurried to him and put her arms round him. He held her tight.

“Zachariah, what’s going on here?” asked Mr Zulu. Lu released Zach and noticed her in-laws standing just behind him. She greeted them and looked at Zach, he seemed to be in another world.

“I’m sorry, we have to go,” she said. She took Zach by his elbow and led him to her car. She helped him in, climbed in beside him and drove off. She stopped at a park. Zach did not want to get out of the car, they sat in silence.

After a while, MaPhiri phoned Lu asking her to come back to the workshop. Lu looked at Zach, he was still spaced out. She took him to work with her because she was worried about him. She worked at her workstation while he sat beside her. He was still for a long time.

“Lu,” he said. She looked at him. He looked back at her in silence. She delegated her work and asked MaPhiri to lock up at the end of the day. She helped Zach out of his seat and led him to her car. She drove to her former home, and led him into it.

As soon as the front door was closed, Zach kissed her deeply. She withdrew from him and turned away. He put his hands on her waist and turned her to face him again. He made to kiss her, she put a hand on his mouth.

“Wait,” she said.

“No,” he said, kissing her cheek.

“I have to be sure we’re alone.” He kissed her, then he released her. She checked the house quickly and found him waiting for her in her bedroom.

“Come here,” he said, putting his arms round her. He kissed her frantically. She gasped, feeling his hands on her bare waist. He kissed his way down her throat to her chest. She undid his shirt buttons before helping him to get her bra and blouse off her shoulders. He caressed and kissed her breasts in turn. She closed her eyes as pleasure spread all over her body.

She took his shirt off him and caressed his chest and back. She gasped, feeling his hand between her legs. Her legs felt too weak to hold her. He shuffled with her, she landed on her back on the bed. He took all her clothes off quickly and kissed her deeply. He broke the kiss and started taking off the rest of his clothes, Lu helped him.

When he was naked, he joined her on the bed. They shared a frantic kiss, then he was kissing her throat, then her breasts as he caressed his way down her body. She caressed his chest, his back and his thighs. She gasped as he caressed between her legs. She could feel her body weeping to join with his.

He caressed the petals between her legs, making her pant even faster. She caressed his tumescence then she gasped as she felt Zach’s finger inside her. He stroked her with it, while another finger caressed her clit, driving her crazy, then he withdrew his fingers. She made a displeased sound and continued to touch his masculinity as he made room for himself between her legs. He removed her hand from his masculinity, then she felt him going into her body.

They both stilled, looking into each other’s eyes, panting, then they started moving together. Lu gasped and cried out as they moved faster and faster. Her heart was thudding excitedly as the pleasure escalated. She gripped Zach then she felt him shuddering.

Disappointed, she lay still. He collapsed beside her, an arm round her waist. She kissed his cheek, then she climbed out of the bed. As she filled the tub with water, she told herself that things would get better.

She had just climbed into the tub when the bathroom door opened. She looked at Zach, startled. He closed the door and approached her.

“Move forward,” he said.

“What?”

“Move forward.”

“Why?”

“I’m coming in.”

“You won’t fit.”

“Move forward,” he said, stepping into the bath tub. Lu moved forward. Zach sat behind her. She found herself sitting between his spread legs. She gasped as he started soaping her back, her shoulders, breasts, belly and lower.

“Zach? What are you doing?” she gasped, as he caressed between her legs. She was getting very excited. She made to push his hand away from her body, afraid he would think her insatiable.

“Let me do this for you,” he said.

“But...”

“Please. I’m sorry I was inconsiderate.”

“It’s okay,” she said, still trying to push his hand away.

“No, it’s not okay to use your lover’s body selfishly and leave her frustrated. Let me do this, Lu. I want to please you.”

“I’m fine.”

“I failed you.”

“You didn’t.”

“A man who doesn’t satisfy his wife is unworthy of her. I want to prove to you that I’m a worthy husband.”

“Zach...” she said, turning her head to look at him. He kissed her. She returned the kiss then she felt her heart beat accelerate as he continued to caress her between the legs.

She broke the kiss, panting then she leaned back into him and held onto the edges of the tub as her body was overwhelmed by pleasure. She arched her back and cried out as she shook in his arms.

She released the tub edges and sighed. Zach was kissing her shoulders. She opened her eyes. His arms were wrapped on her belly.

“Okay?” he said. She nodded, too weak to speak. He continued to soap her body, then he rinsed her off and told her to go and get dressed. She had just finished dressing when he joined her.

She helped him to dress then she gave him a long slow kiss. He held her tight.

“Can you drive me to work?” he asked. She nodded. They spent the rest of the day going to his appointments together.

At home, they found his parents with Nsi’s parents.

“Where have you been? We’ve been waiting ages for you,” said Mr Zulu to Zach. Lu and Zach sat beside each other, then they greeted everyone. Lu made to stand, Zach took her hand in his, she sat back in her seat.

“Well, Zachariah, what’s going on?” asked Mr Zulu.

“What can you do to help our son? He says you’re his only friend and that we should trust you to make the court see that he’s done nothing wrong,” said Mr Nsibande.

“I can’t help him,” said Zach.

“He said...”

“You know that Ethel’s mother died?”

“Yes.”

“What if I told you that her death wasn’t an accident, but that it was planned?”

“What?”

“If I knew her murderer, would you say I should let him get away with his crime?”

“Of course not!”

“Your son knows who murdered Ethel’s mother, and he knows who murdered his wife. He also knows who murdered several other men’s wives.”

“That’s not possible.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Mrs Nsibande.

“Tell your son to co-operate with the police, for his own good,” said Zach.

“He knows nothing!”

“A lot of people would beg to differ with you. I have nothing more to say about this,” Zach said with finality. The Zulus and Nsibandes looked from him, to each other. Zach changed the subject and made sure that Nsi’s arrest was not discussed for the rest of the evening.

After supper, Lu went to sew in the kitchen.

“MaKhumalo,” said a voice. She looked up, startled. MaMbambo and Mrs Nsibande were sitting at the kitchen table, watching her.

“MaKhumalo, tell me, what’s going on? What does Zachariah know about Cain’s arrest?” asked MaMbambo.

“I don’t know. He hasn’t said anything to me,” said Lu.

“You’re his wife, he’s bound to have said something to you.”

“Men don’t tell their wives everything, every married woman knows that.”

“What did he say to you?”

“Nothing. I saw his friend being escorted away, then he and I went to work. The only things he discussed with me were work related.” Both women looked at Lu closely, then they looked at each other.

“My child did nothing wrong. He’s innocent,” said Mrs Nsibande. She and Mrs Zulu talked about vindictive people who must have told lies about Nsi, because they were jealous of his success. That made them both feel better, and they left the room. Lu sighed with relief.

She was climbing into bed, when there was a knock on the bedroom door. She opened it.

“Girls? Is everything alright?” she asked Lwazi and Ethel, who were standing outside the door.

“We need to talk,” said Ethel. Lu made room for the girls to enter her bedroom. She was about to close the door, when she noticed Zach trying to come in. She released her hold on the door and he entered.

“Baba, why was Babomncane arrested?” asked Ethel. Zach looked from her to Lu, then he turned to close the door. He paused, Lu noticed the Zulus and the Nsibandes at the door.

“Let’s all go to the lounge,” said Zach. Everyone left. Lu closed the door and changed out of her sleep wear. She found everyone in the lounge. Zach was sitting beside Ethel, Lwazi was on her other side. Lu sat down.

“You all want to know why Nsi was arrested, I’m going to switch on a CD and it’ll answer all your questions,” said Zach. He pressed the remote in his hand, and everyone heard a woman talking.

She said she was a nurse, and that Cain Nsibande had told her that Liza Zulu was trying to get her not only fired, but that she was also wanting to make sure that she never worked again in the medical field. She said Cain Nsibande had given her a syringe full of poison and told her that injecting Liza Zulu with it was the only way to protect her job.

Lu watched as Ethel looked at Zach in shock and horror. She started crying, Zach put his arms round her, Lwazi took hold of one of her hands. Lu felt a lump in her throat.

“Lies!” shouted Mrs Nsibande. Several other voices came on, each telling how they had killed one or more people because Cain Nsibande had blackmailed them into it, or scared them into it. The CD became silent.

“It’s not true, you know it’s not true. My child wouldn’t do that,” said Mrs Nsibande. She sounded as if she did not believe her own words.

“How can you, his best friend, be the one believing such lies?” asked Mr Nsibande.

“They’re not lies,” said Zach. The CD player started playing again.

“If you break up with me, you’ll be meeting your maker soon. No one breaks up with me,” said Nsi. A woman’s voice came on, insisting that she was done with him. Nsi told her to remember that he would hurt her mother. She said she was done with him. She started screaming, there were sounds of a scuffle, then a gunshot startled everyone listening.

“I told you I’d kill you if you left me,” said Nsi, then everyone heard footsteps. A door opened and closed, then the CD player was quiet again.

“No. No.” Mrs Nsibande kept saying, over and over again.

“What’s the meaning of this, mfana?” Mr Nsibande asked Zach.

“I don’t think I need to explain further. We all heard for ourselves how he threatened a woman and then killed her. She wasn’t the only one that he killed, directly or indirectly,” said Zach.

“How can you stab him in the back like this? You’re his best friend!”

“I thought I was his best friend until he threatened Ethel’s mother and had her killed. I am not lifting a finger to help that sick, backstabbing murderer. Please leave.” The Zulus and Nsibandes looked at each other in shock.

“Please leave!” said Zach angrily. The Nsibandes stood. Lu saw them out of the house and off the premises. Mrs Nsibande was crying.

“Where will we go, and how will we get there?” she wept. Lu had been wondering the same thing. Mr Nsibande made a call on his cell phone and within minutes, a car arrived to take them away.

Lu returned to her home, relieved that the Nsibandes would be alright. As she entered the house, Lwazi was leading Ethel out of the lounge. Lu made to follow, Lwazi shook her head. Lu went to the lounge. Everyone was quiet for a long time.

“How could you keep him in your house knowing what you know?” asked Mr Zulu.

“I wanted justice. It’s time for us all to go to sleep,” said Zach. He took Lu’s hand and led her to their bedroom.

“Are you alright?” she asked.

“I’m glad it’s over. Come to bed,” said Zach. Next evening, he brought everyone a gift and apologised to them all for having been curt, unreasonable and very unsociable in the past weeks.

After supper, Lu did some sewing, then she went to sleep. She awoke with a moan and opened her eyes. Zach was watching her as he caressed her bare breasts.

“Hi,” he said, covering her breasts with her negligee.

“Hi.” She caressed his cheek, he kissed her hand.

“If you don’t get up now, I won’t let you out of this bed until noon,” he said in a voice made her hot and bothered. She sat up, her heart was pounding in excitement. He held her tight then he released her.

“Hurry,” he said, as she went to the bathroom.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Zulus left after breakfast. Zach and Lu went to fetch their work things in their room. Zach kissed Lu thoroughly, then he went to work.

He was glad that the business with Nsi was over. He and the human rights agents he had worked with had been in touch for the last time when the agents had picked Nsi up. Zach could now focus on his beautiful bride and their marriage.

He finished what needed doing in his office, then he drove home. It had been good to see the girls. They looked well. He was concerned about Ethel. She had been very shocked when she had found out about the circumstances of her mother’s death. He wished he had used a less brutal manner to tell her about it. He had organised for her to see a psychologist. She had been to her first appointment that morning. He found her at home.

“How are you?” he asked.

“I’m fine, Baba.”

“Did you see the doctor?”

“You mean the psychologist.”

“Yes.”

“I told you that I don’t need to see him.”

“Baby, I don’t know how to help you. The psychologist is the best I could come up with.”

“I’m not going again.”

“Ethel...”

“I’m not going!”

“This can’t be easy for you.”

“No, it isn’t. Did you see a psychologist?”

“No, but...”

“You seem alright.”

“I am.”

“Then I’ll be fine too.”

“Baby...”

“I’ll be fine.” They watched each other in silence.

“Are you happy, Baba?” she asked.

“Happy?”

“Now that you’re married.” Zach gave Ethel a long look.

“Yes, I’m happy. Are you happy about this?”

“Yes, I’m very happy. Are you going to have a wedding feast? Can I be a bridesmaid? Have you been on your honeymoon? Are you going to give me siblings?”

“Ethel, slow down.”

“Are you going to answer my questions?”

“I’ll have to talk to your mother before I can answer you. Your new mother.”

“I know who you mean, you don’t need to call her my new mother. She’s the only Mama I have now. Lwazi and I have some errands to run.” said Ethel as she stood.

“Baby?” said Zach.

“Baba.”

“You need help.”

“No, I don’t.” Zach paused, watching her.

“Can we talk to your mother about this?” he said.

“Okay.” Ethel left the room. Zach followed her. She and Lwazi told him that they would see him later, then Mdluli drove them away. Zach decided to go and visit his beautiful bride.

He frowned when he saw the car that was outside her workshop. No one was taking his wife away from him he resolved as he climbed out of his car.

Lu had a lot of work to do at the workshop. Towards the end of the business day, she received a surprise visitor.

“Hi, MaKhumalo,” he said. Lu looked up at Absolom. Before she could say anything, he was seated in front of her work station.

“What do you want?” she asked.



“We need to talk.”

“There’s nothing left to say.”

“Don’t let your bitterness cloud your judgement.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You’ve made Zulu suspend me. It’s only a matter of time before he fires me because of you and the terrible lies you must have told him about me.”

“He doesn’t want to hear your name, we never talk about you.”

“Then why has he suspended me?”

“Ask him.”

“I’m asking you.”

“I don’t know.”

“Find out.”

“It’s none of my business.”

“You owe it to me.”

“For what?” Lu asked in disbelief.

“For all the times I was there for you, supporting you...”

“Hi, sthandwa,” said Zach. Lu looked up. Zach was behind Absolom. He walked to Lu, helped her to her feet and kissed her soundly.

“How was your day?” he asked. Lu was too dazed to answer. He helped her into her seat, then he found a chair and sat beside her, an arm across the back of her chair. He greeted Absolom.

“Don’t let me disturb your discussion,” he said.

“Mthethwa was asking me why you suspended him,” said Lu.

“What did you say?” asked Zach.

“I told him to ask you.” Zach looked from Lu to Absolom.

“Here I am, Mthethwa, is there anything you want to discuss with me?” he asked.

“I don’t think this is the right place for the discussion,” said Absolom.

“You’re right, this isn’t the place, and my wife isn’t the person to ask. Her signature was not on that document. Direct your queries to the relevant people. Is there anything else?”

“I want to see the girls.”

“You’ll take that up with them, they’re grown women,” said Lu.

“Talk to them for me.”

“I won’t do that.”

“I’m their father, I have a right to see them.”

“Is that why you made me change their surname from yours to mine?”

“That was then, this is now.”

“As I said, take it up with the girls.”

“Here comes Lwazi,” said Zach, looking behind Absolom. Lwazi and Ethel were approaching Lu’s work station.

“Hi, Mama,” said Ethel.

“Hi,” said Lu.

“What’s he doing here?” asked Lwazi, looking at Absolom.

“Is that anyway to greet your father?” asked Absolom.

“You’re not my father, you told me that yourself.”

“Have you looked in the mirror lately? You’re the spitting image of me.”

“I’m not your child. My name is Nolwazi Zulu.”

“What?”

“Lwazi, who is this?” asked Ethel.

“Mama’s former husband,” replied Lwazi.

“Oh!”

“How could you change my child’s surname?” Absolom demanded of Lu.

“I’m not your child! It’s time for you to go now, no one wants you here,” said Lwazi.

“Lwazi...”

“Go.”

“I want to see you and your sister.”

“You’ve seen me. Thandi will kill you before she sees you.”

“I’m your father.”

“We’re in the middle of something,” Zach said. Absolom left reluctantly.

“What was he doing here? Did you invite him?” Lwazi demanded of Lu.

“Don’t speak to your Mama that way,” said Zach. Lwazi was furious.

“We’ve come to take you out to supper, Mama,” said Ethel.

“That sounds good, but I’m afraid I can’t make it tonight,” said Lu.

“It has to be tonight,” said Lwazi.

“Why?”

“It’s your birthday.”

“Is it?”

“We haven’t celebrated your birthday in years, Mama. Get your things, let’s go.”

“But...”

“We won’t be out late. You, Baba and Thandi have work tomorrow.” Lu dismissed the staff then she locked up. Zach and Lwazi drove off together while Lu and Ethel drove together to the restaurant where they were going to dine.

They met Thandi there. They ordered their food, then they chatted easily before and during the meal. A cake was brought for Lu when everyone was done eating. Everyone sang happy birthday then Lu cut the cake.

She tasted a piece, it was her favourite banana cake, made the way only Thandi knew how to make it. Lu looked at Thandi then she went to kiss her cheek.

“I want one too,” said Ethel. Lu kissed her, Lwazi, and Zach. He moved his head and kissed her fervently. When the kiss ended, she was sitting on his lap. She opened her eyes and returned weakly to her seat.

She opened her birthday present. It was a beautiful evening gown, made by an international couturier. She looked round at everyone with tears in her eyes.

“Thank you,” she said.

“You’re welcome. Let’s go home,” said Zach.

“We’re going to spend the night with Sisi, her room-mate’s away and she doesn’t want to be alone,” said Ethel.

“Is that alright?” asked Thandi.

“Is that alright, Mama?” asked Zach. Lu looked up from her gown.

“Is it alright if Ethel and Lwazi spend the night with Thandi?” he asked.

“It’s fine,” said Lu. The girls went off in her car, she went home with Zach in his car.

At home, she freshened up. When she was done, she found Zach in the dressing room. He had just freshened up too and was standing with a towel round his waist.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hi.” He dropped the towel round his waist.

“Take that off,” he said. Lu dropped the towel she had wrapped round herself. He took her hand and walked to the bedroom with her. He caressed her belly, then he caressed up to her breasts. He kissed and fondled them, then he sucked them in turn.

Lu held onto his shoulders as her knees turned to jelly. Zach helped her to lie on the bed then he kissed and caressed every inch of her skin.

“Zach,” she panted. He caressed between her legs, then he kissed her there. She started in surprise, which was followed by embarrassment.

“Don’t do that,” she said, trying to get Zach to stop kissing her.

“Zach...” she began, then her thought process was short circuited by pleasure. She shuddered, her eyes shut tight, as she gripped the duvet beneath her. When she opened her eyes, Zach was kissing his way up her belly, to her breasts as he caressed between her legs.

She touched him, caressing his back, arms, and head. She held onto his forearms as she felt him join with her. He moved slowly in and out of her. She picked up the tempo, he held onto her hips and kept his movements slow.

“Zach,” she panted desperately.

“Wait,” he said, through clenched teeth. He continued to move slowly, then he picked up speed. Lu moved with him, then she cried out as her body shook and shivered in pleasure. She could feel Zach shuddering as her pleasure spasms ended. He collapsed beside her. She kissed him. He put his arms loosely around her. After a while, she kissed him and went to freshen up.

When she joined Zach in bed later, he was fresh out of a shower. She climbed into bed beside him and they put their arms round each other.

“This is the best birthday I’ve ever had. Thank you,” she said.

“It’s the second best birthday celebration I’ve been to this year,” said Zach.

“Which was the best one you went to?”

“Ethel’s last one, that’s where I met you.”

“Oh, Zach.”

“I love you, Lu.”

“I love you, too.” They were silent a while.

“Why do you touch me in public? People look at me as if...” she said.

“You don’t like me touching you?”

“It’s not that, it’s just that everyone looks at me as if I’m an indecent woman.”

“You’re not indecent.”

“People say I make you touch me, and when you do, they feel embarrassed.”

“I’m a man who likes to touch his woman and I won’t stop. I stopped touching Liza in public because people were saying to her what they must be saying to you. The day she died, I dropped her off at the hospital. I wanted to kiss her, she refused because she said people would see us and be embarrassed. Do you know how much I regret not having kissed her? If I’d known I’d never see her alive again, I’d have kissed her.

“I won’t bow down to public opinion again. I don’t know how much time I have with you, but whenever death separates us, I want to have no regrets. If anyone harasses you about me touching and kissing you, refer them to me.”

“I’m sorry.”

“About what?”

“I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“I’m not upset!”

“Then why are you shouting?” Zach released Lu and lay on his back. Lu watched him, then she leaned towards him and kissed his cheek. He raised her head and looked into her eyes.

“I love you, Lungile, only death will stop me from touching you. If you have a problem with that, I suggest you get over it,” he said.

“I don’t have a problem with it,” said Lu.

“Good.”

“I love you, too.” He drew her head to his and kissed her soundly.

**END**

### **Glossary**

**Amalobolo** – A thank you to the bride’s family for raising their child and letting her join the groom’s family / Bride price

**Baba** - Father

**Babazala** – Father-in-law

**Nkulunkulu** - God

**Buti** - Brother

**Gogo** – Grandmother

**Hawu** – Expression of surprise

**Hayi** – Exclamation

**Malume** – Maternal uncle

**Makoti** - Daughter-in-law

**Mamkhulu** – Mother's older sister

**Mamncane** – Mother's younger sister

**Mfowethu** – Brother

**Mkhulu** – Grandfather

**Mkhwenyana** – Son-in-law

**Mzukulu** – Grandchild

**Ntombazana** - Girl

**Sbali** – Brother-in-law or sister-in-law

**Sfebe(Iyifebe-plural)** – Amoral person with several sleeping partners

**Sisi/sis** – Sister

**Sthandwa** – Beloved

**Ubuntu** – Probity

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