

Chapter 1

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

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

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

I long for the warmth of days gone by

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

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

Hehehe that's my mom for you. I'm used to such texts. So I decide to go back to the closet and take out one of my yellow maxi dress I think it looks great for the occasion. For some reason I thought of wearing the suit just to piss off my mom but that doesn't actually end well. We let's just say it ends with one of us crying and that is me obvious. I wear the dress and my white

sandals. I have great feet and I like showing them off. I make my bed walk to the kitchen for a cup of coffee, I'm a coffee addict my family has been telling me that I'll die from a heart disease due to the amount of coffee I consume. I make a fish paste sandwich my favourite I eat 6 slices of bread and apparently it's unlady like. Who cares? As soon as I'm done making breakfast I eat wash the dishes. I'm a bit of a clean freak. I walk back to the bathroom to brush my teeth we all know how tin fish smells so I can't have that smell in my mouth so early in the morning.

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

Mrs Mabuza (Nobuhle): Mbali what are you wearing?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 2

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

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

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

I don't answer her I just walk into the house. Nobuhle's husband bought her a car 2 years back and my mom told me that I should also get married so my husband can buy me a car. I told her that once I have my qualifications I will buy myself a car I don't need a man to do that for me.

Well I've been working as a freelance writer for 3 of South Africa's biggest newspapers, but I know that a car is a liability it doesn't determine a person's wealth. I want to own a house first. Right now I'm renting a flat. Well my sisters may have the beauty in the family but I definitely have the brains.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I am used to such comments so I just ignore them. I'm about to dig in when the plate is rudely taken away by my mother. They may treat me like this every time I see them which is

becoming less and less but a person can take things to a certain point and right now I can't stand this. So I stand walk out the door, and leave the Mabuza premises. I wait for the taxi for almost 20 minutes. After 2 hours I am back at my flat. I take off my shoes and go straight to bed. I must have been sleeping for more than 5 hours cause I woken by someone banging in the front door and it's already dark outside. It's summer the sun sets after 7pm. I walk to the kitchen and peep through the peeping hole and I see my parents and sisters standing on my door. I open the door and walk in looking very mad.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 3

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Habe" well that's my dad, my mom must've have put the call on speaker for everyone to hear. "You're so dis..." I disturb her before she even finishes. "I said I called because of the sms you sent. Like I said you guys owe me an apology not the other way round" I say smiling at myself. It's high time I stood up for myself.

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

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

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

I hit send. After some times Bobo replies.

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

Bobo is so dramatic.

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

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

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

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

Chapter 4

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 5

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

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

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

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

You're so handsome

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mnquhe

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mnquhe: When and what time?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 7

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

"You look so handsome" I tell him, I can't help myself. He's the most handsome guy I've ever met. Yeah I know I also said that about Bobo and Mcebo but let me just say, you should meet Njabulo. "You're also beautiful" *eeh* I don't know what to say to that so I just smile and he leads the way. He is wearing a black skinny jean, black vest and shirt and all black All Star. We take a taxi to Lenasia Ext to a Mercedes Benz dealership. I want to buy a car not far from home so that I will go show my parents. When we get there he helps me choose a car. I buy a black Mercedes Benz and we drive home. If I knew how this will turn out I shouldn't have. I drive home, open the gate but before I can drive in my parents refuse to let me in, because I humiliated them. The last time I checked I am the one who was humiliated and left at the altar. I don't have time for this, I just bought my dream car and I go home to celebrate with my parents and what do they do? They tell me not come into their house because I humiliated them. I'm starting to think I'm adopted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 8

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

It's Friday, tomorrow Bobo and Mel are getting married. Yes they are finally getting married but after so much drama. Bobo punched Mel's brother when he tried to hook him up with some floozy. Never seen Bobo so mad he was shaking with rage. They are getting married tomorrow and their families are not coming. I'm Bobo's bridesmaid and no he won't be

wearing a dress. Njabulo will be Mel's best man. He actually doesn't like gays but he agreed and he's trying for my sake. We are busy running around trying to prepare things on time, so that Bobo and Mel can have their dream wedding. Since their parents and siblings won't be coming it won't be a very big wedding. We'll sleep at the venue on the floor because Bobo is worried that we might get late.

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

"Oh shit you can't be asking about that asshole" Bobo complains.

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

"Ncooo" that's Bobo I thought they were still sleeping.

"I thought you guys were sleeping" I reply shyly.

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

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

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

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

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

believe them. I've known them for almost 5 months and I have been told that I am ugly all my life so I still find it hard to believe.

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

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

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

"You're neat freak *yoh*. Yes please can I have coffee" I reply.

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

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

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

Chapter 9

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 10

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

"If someone doesn't pick up, they clearly don't wanna talk to you" she answers. I don't say anything I just hang up. "Sisi" that's Smanga knocking at my bedroom door. "Come in" I yell

from my bedroom. It's 7am where is Njabulo, why did he leave his phone again? And now I had to talk to his rude sister.

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

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

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

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

I'm a coffee addict, I rarely eat ice cream, it's been almost 3 years since I last ate it. After we're done with the food, I take the plastics to the car, I bought groceries for the whole month, I don't really know how long they'll be staying and I think she'll be staying with me for that period of time. Because we had many plastics I decide to take them to the car. I tell Smanga to go to Mr. Price and look for clothes she might like for me, I tell her that I hate choosing my own clothes and I ask to take whatever she likes. I don't take long. I find her at the underwear section, taking a set of matching pair of bra and underwear, she puts them back and stares so I

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