

ROAD TRIP RIOT

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Contents

Prologue

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

Six

Seven

Eight

Nine

Ten

Eleven

Twelve

Thirteen

Fourteen

Fifteen

Sixteen

Seventeen

Eighteen

Nineteen

Epilogue

Prologue

Do I believe in cupid? Are you kidding me? No! Love is way over exaggerated, for what it really is. And there is no thing as love finds you when you stop looking for it. I believe so because I wasn't looking for it. I was busy breaking my friend out of her own wedding...

Chapter One

JULY

“I think I twisted something in my neck while trying to do the hot head flip like in the movies and also got a good slap from my thick braids right into my eyes. So much for trying to feel cool though the moment does call for a little cool act because—well because my friends; Nancy, Ludo and I have finally managed to arrange the road trip to Kasane after all these years.

The weather is perfect, mid-November which is hot as hell here in Botswana just what we need to make the little vacation worthwhile. Bags packed-check, my new HD camera I almost went bankrupt buying—check. Long thick braids, worst hairstyle ever during a hot season—check. Credit cards and cell phones—check.--”

‘July are the phone car chargers packed?’ Ludo walks past me not even minding that I am livestreaming.

I lower the camera from the awkward arm hurting angle I had lifted it towards my face for the first shot of my infamous YouTube channel (haven't started it yet but I promise to do so after this trip). I purse my lips at Ludo as she toss the last large paper bag of road food into the back seat.

‘Why do we need so much food? It will be fun to buy on the way.’ I raise an eyebrow at her as she closes the car door and fixes the scarf that was keeping her hair from her face. I envied her long ebony hair that she managed to grow so well. My natural hair gave up health after reaching the edge of my neck. I considered keeping it short but Nancy was kind enough to tell

me that it made me look like a man. She's mean, but I love her anyway. We are more than friends, we go way back to kindergarten and the firsts of everything.

'We must reach Francistown within 6 hours.' Ludo explains briskly and scurries back into the house to get more of our staff. She returns with another bag which I suspect has iced water, 'the car chargers?'

I nod, 'don't worry too much about that—if you are planning to drive like a fast and furious addict we will be there before our phones shut down.' I quip

Ludo laughs, 'I am a good driver.'

'I beg to differ.' Nancy walks out into the verandah with her tote bag that she recently became obsessed with carrying everywhere lately, 'you almost got us all killed last Saturday.'

I want to laugh at the memory but hold it, gorging Nancy's expression first. Over speeding down a dust road was hilarious but the reason behind it was serious. My heart skips as I remember that Ludo and I stole the bride from her own wedding. Okay maybe not the picture I am painting right now but the situation called for some kidnapping or helping the runaway bride as we concluded later that night after we safely made it from the place.

Nancy laughs, obviously recalling the day. I manage a tremulous smile. Ludo rolls her eyes.

'That was a heroic exit.' Nancy is now laughing hard, 'you should have seen the look on my uncle's faces. Priceless.'

I give up and burst out laughing as well. I don't know what I will ever have to do again in my lifetime to see that look on people's faces again. It was unexpected, you don't expect a bunch of crazy women (their conclusion not ours) to show up and march out of a wedding ceremony with the bride.

The ceremony was a joke anyway. The bastard that Nancy was almost marrying (Ludo's and I opinion and a few other reasonable relatives) threatened her to not leave him and embarrass him in front of all the people even after discovering that he had ran away from his wife and two kids. (that's Nancy's version of the story. Not that we will be giving Vincent a chance to explain himself any time soon.)

I always smelled a rat on Vincent the moment I landed my eyes on him. Nancy thought he was hot—but his mean streak and bossy behavior made me dislike him the moment he opened his mouth. Guys like that, in real life, you sight them and reach for a pistol. Period.

So to cut the long story short, Nancy called me when I was stuck in a boring business meeting. She explained her situation I called Ludo and we devised this little master plan.

'Do you think they will come looking for us?' Nancy sobers and worry streaks her pretty face. She is the prettiest between the three of us and innocent looking with a 'you don't know you are beautiful' aura that makes her the center of attention. Ludo has a no nonsense aura that

make people respect her presence and think twice before saying anything stupid. While I am the one people can't figure out.

'They won't.' Ludo assures her, 'they are too busy settling things with Vincent's family and trying to find their missing daughter.'

Nancy's eyes bulge out, 'my parents.' She gasps, 'what are they going to think—.'

I shake my head, 'Nancy, don't worry about that, your aunt explained to them that you needed some time away.'

Actually the trip was her father's idea, it was her mother who was charmed blind by Vincent. I am sure Nancy's father did a happy dance when we stole her from the ceremony. And he thanked Ludo and I by paying for this road trip to Kasane as far away from the rich evil lothario as possible (his words not mine, but I do agree)

Nancy's lip wobbles. Ludo and I share a look. The trip is another mission to make sure she gets over her lying fiancé while saving her from his demons. Ludo drapes a comforting arm around her shoulders.

'Don't cry over that prick Nancy—we are going away from him. This trip is girls only.'

'yes.' I agree with a vigorous nod, 'he won't come even a mile near you without getting a little tongue lash from one of us.'

'tongue lashing that airhead is a waste of time he is way over qualified in the no brain to mouth filter business we may as well stay with gang beating him.'

'he is a huge guy.' I say uneasily. Because Ludo just don't say things. If she says she plans to gang beat him she will do just that. Now I don't dream of trying to go anywhere near that six foot tall bulky guy especially countering an attack. It mere suicide.

'he's a large teddy bear.' Ludo rolls her eyes, 'we just need to tackle him down and he's done for.'

'we should leave him alive though—I don't want blood in my hands. my entire generation have been peace keepers since 1853.' I deadpan

Ludo scoffs, 'just when we are having fun you bring out the nerd.'

'Vincent has a black belt in karate.' Nancy says out of the blue and clears her throat.

Ludo and I gape at her in shock.

'just where on earth did you meet the mafia king pin?' Ludo whispers, 'I bet he owns guns as well.'

'you have got to stop watching Netflix.' I mumble.

‘better than studying ancestry.’ Ludo rolls her eyes at me.

‘there is fun in tracing your roots.’ I point out planting my hands on my hips,

‘I am sure my ancestors were great leaders in Shaka Zulu army, I don’t need that in my head okay.’

Nancy raises her chin, ‘Shaka Zulu was a great leader.’

I blink at her, ‘don’t forget cruel and controlling and a tyrant.’

‘just like Vincent.’ Ludo adds.

A silence falls because I am afraid Ludo and I have just put our feet into our mouths as Nancy blinks a couple of times then takes a deep breath. Something she does when she is pressing down a deadly emotion such as anger.

‘lets get out of here already before Shaka Vincent figures out where we are.’ She marches to the car and pauses by the door to say, ‘by the way he does own a gun—he has a license.’

‘what?’ Ludo and I snap at the same time while Nancy slides in the passenger seat and closes the door.

‘he is more dangerous than I thought.’ I say with a shudder. Ludo scoffs completely unaffected. Well I guess she is used to that world. She dedicated her life to meeting real hard core criminals and stating the law. What are the odds that the man has a black belt karate and owns a gun. Maybe he is an assassin.

‘you need to go out more often.’ Ludo tells me as she mounts the driver’s seat while Nancy fixes her tote bag on her lap. I am more than happy with the backseat where I can stretch and do whatever I want. I don’t know it just feels less restricted to be back here.

‘you are right.’ Nancy surprises me by agreeing, ‘maybe this road trip will do good for her.’

I almost blurt out the reason we have embarked on this trip in the first place but hold my tongue. At least Nancy seem to be loosening up a bit except its not thrilling as they are becoming the two usual friends who like to rile me up about my way of life. The topic never gets old for them.

‘you two are aware that this trip is supposed to be a peaceful one right?’ I meet Ludo’s eyes in the rear view mirror.

‘we are not in a protest.’ Nancy rolls her eyes as she turns her head to look at me, ‘you just need to accept the fact that we are worried about your social life.’

I let out a laugh, ‘my social life is just fine,’ I say defensively because I know where they are going with this. Nancy is not the only one between the three of us who has ended up with some psycho human of the opposite sex.

‘really?’ Ludo challenges me the engine purrs to life, ‘when was the last time you went anywhere besides work?’

I roll my eyes, ‘I don’t do parties.’ I actually bark that one out.

We’ve been friends our whole lives and none of the girls have ever been successful into converting me to like parties. Too many people. You would think being a loner went more with Nancy’s personality. But no. the girl is a wild little thing under that cool domineer. I mean how else would she have met Vincent?

‘don’t the power suits and manicured guys suffocate you? You need more color.’ Ludo sings as the car leaves the compound. Ludo’s house. I look at it with a silent goodbye, (because it’s the only house in sight to say goodbye to). Ludo as the mature one among us already owns her own house and is building in her home village. I am happy with my bachelor pad where I can easily move on out whenever I can. I don’t want to be stuck in one place my whole life, I have the craziest fantasy to always be on the move. (Fantasy because I have never actually done it).

‘you love being around power suits.’ I poke a bear. Because I figure it would give us something to rattle on about for the next so hours to Francistown and not think about the possibility of being hunted by the police for kidnapping. Though in this case, the hostage is participating.

But I suspect Vincent has connections. I mean he knows karate and own guns for heaven’s sake.

Chapter Two

JOSHUA

My mouth twists to the side as I stir my coffee slowly like I am concentrating on what I am doing. It’s a trick to stop the hysterical laugh that is coming up my throat. Its six in the evening on a Saturday I don’t fancy taking a fist from Vincent right now.

But its rare to find occasions where Vincent is in a laughable position. Like it barely ever happens. Growing up together I have always been the troublesome adventurous one. Vincent was born mature. Something I suspected he inherited from his father. He has always been so straightforward and mature it made what would have been the best bonding as cousins to be something I could never talk about in public. Vincent was basically my other father in a small form my whole life. I hated him for it once till the day he saved my gut. Thanks to his martial arts skills. I ruffled up a group of wrong guys and they were going to beat me up to death.

And, well I should just say no one is stupid enough to start a fight with the best karate star in the country. And that's Vincent.

I stop stirring my coffee and turn to him. He is still in that damn sofa with the same clothes I had forced him to wear after dragging him from his own wrecked up wedding. And it's the first I have seen him this low as well. Every steely man has a weakness. Vincent doesn't handle losing the people he loves very well.

I take the coffee walk to hand it to him. He gives me one look and I know he doesn't want to see that damn cup in front of him. I draw it away from him and take a long sip.

'I am not planning to change your clothes again Vee, its been three days.'

He closes his eyes and run his hand into his uncombed hair which looks like a perfect haven for lice if he ever met them. 'why don't you just leave me alone.'

'leave you alone? Its just a girl dude and here you are acting as if the world is ending.'

'it is. I loved her man.'

I hold myself from cringing at the look on his face. 'I know man—but sitting here turning yourself into a slob is not going to change anything. You are just watching the days go by like a miserable old lady.' I sip my coffee.

Vincent glares at me but only for a moment before he returns to his lost puppy dog face. I bite my lip. This is just legendary. But seriously I expected Nancy to be the one whom Vincent would hurt not the other way round. Vincent and I didn't do relationships. It was our motto. Or maybe he was pretending that it was because the moment he landed his eyes on that girl he never reasoned straight again. I suspected it was something about her seeming to be in need to protection that drew her to him. Vincent after all prided himself in protecting others. Well look where it got him.

I put my cup of coffee on the table and walk to crouch in front of him such that I am eye level with him. he slowly raises his gaze to meet mine and I see a lingering rage in the background. But I am willing to take my chances at this moment.

'listen Vee-.'

'I hate that nickname.' He grumbles

‘just listen okay—either we do something about this or I am shipping you to uncle Harold.’

His eyes slightly grow wide. I have been holding the uncle Harold card back for a few days until things got extreme like this moment. It seemed that he just cant snap out of this one. Love is a bitchy sickness I never want to be caught up with. I mean look at him. at least I get a reaction at the mention of uncle Harold. That would be my father. He isn’t tough, he is an easy going man that Vincent find very annoying.

‘you wouldn’t dare.’

‘try me.. if you skip another shower or nibble at my food again I am packing your bag.’

‘your cooking sucks.’

‘oho—I have been feeding you for a week you ungrateful bastard—now either we solve this or..’

‘don’t say it.’ He raises his voice, ‘look I don’t need you to nag at me all day its suffocating are you a woman?’

I scoff, ‘you were about to get married bro. that’s like signing up for a nagging fest,’ I pause to wear a dramatic expression, ‘your whole life.’

He gives me a death glare and I stand on my feet, ‘look, what do you want to do?’

‘I want her back.’ He cries, ‘we had a misunderstanding and she takes off during our wedding.’

‘you didn’t explain things to her bro and why would you want a woman who left you stranded at the alter back? Have you no pride?’

‘Nancy is my other half—I feel lost without her man.’

This time I outwardly cringe, oh god he is talking mushy shit now. This is worse than I thought. I back away from him as if he is about to transform into a zombie and I retrieve my phone from my pajama pants pocket. My eyes still locked on his sullen face I dial Question’s number.

I press the phone to my ear as it rings twice before Question’s voice booms from the speakers.

‘yo Josh what’s up?’

‘911 man.’ I mutter our bro code for serious emergencies as Vincent still sits there looking he wants to jump into a well.

‘will be right over as soon as I can.’ Question replies without hesitation.

Chapter three

JULY

I reach for the little drum shaped mp3 player that has the volume capacity of a full club and Nancy slaps my hand away.

‘hands off party crasher!’ Nancy playfully snarls at me.

‘change the song!’ I groan.

‘your playlist sucks.’

Ludo and Nancy sing along dancing to the music. I am guessing its something they caught at their parties. At this point my lack of excitement for socializing should have created a huge gap between us. But there is one thing that is pretty special about our friendship. We have learned to accept our differences nonetheless.

We were different in every other way. Nancy worked at a bakery and hoped to open her own pastry shop one day. completing the sweet girl image she has in her personality. Ludo is a lawyer and she works in her family’s law firm. Suits her. I am a corporate kind of girl. I don’t mind the long hours or the hermit life. I love the power suits and tight hair buns.

When I was little I always thought I’d be a doctor. But when I finished high school I decided I wouldn’t last a day in that department or did life choose for me? but I love starting my own company—its thrilling. It’s the only thing I kept my head on since David. Don’t go there.

There is a moment’s silence as the last song draws to an end followed by the two girls’ contented sigh. I sigh too—in relief. I am reaching for a bottle of water when the next song blasts from the speakers followed by a language I am not sure its Ndebele or kalanga.

‘okay that’s it.’ I shriek above the music and I jump for the drum thing, seizing it off the dashboard before either girls could stop me. I drop in on my lap, giving it a gentle caress before I cruelly punch the stop button.

‘ah!’ I sigh in relief at the silence that follows.

‘what is wrong with you.’ Nancy tries to reach for the thing and I swat her hand away.

‘eyes on the road.’

‘I am not driving.’ Nancy pouts at me and I stick my tongue out at her.

‘how much longer?’ I ask Ludo who meets my eyes in the review mirror

‘I am tired of your whining I am tempted to book you a bus.’

I shake my head, ‘don’t you dare.’

Nancy sighs, ‘you slept throughout the five hours drive.’

I shrug, ‘Ludo wont let me drive—I have a license.’

‘and a problem with over reacting.’

I open my mouth and close it. I will never hear the end of this argument if I go down this road. We were in Palapye were we stopped for a while to refresh and stretch our legs when it happened. Ludo had gone to recess and I took a stroll down the road enjoying the scenery of the mall. It’s a lovely town and I have an obsession with small towns. My e-reader can testify to that fact. The little people the better. Nancy once told me that I am fashioned to be a serial killer. Seriously? Well I blame the fact that he was half drunk and Ludo had dragged her into her movie marathon. The woman is obsessed with Rambo for heaven’s sake. What are the guys going to watch then? I could join her if she watched chick lit like every other woman on the planet (you are welcome to argue the point) but I ran a mile for good when the scenery for transformers began on the screen.

Okay back to the story. So Nancy was left alone in the car and when I got back I found two guys leaning on her window, arms against the car roof while Nancy tried to politely shoo them away. I tried to be nice about getting them to leave playing the we have boyfriends card and the bastards turned to me.

And the rest is history.

‘who cares they were probably robbers.’ I say defensively.

‘they were just doing a guy thing.’ Ludo rolls her eyes, ‘you should go out more often.’

I place my hand on my chest feigning hurt, ‘two guys don’t work on a girl at once—what did they want? A threesome?’

Nancy coughs and splutters the water she had been sipping while Ludo let out a full throttle laugh.

‘so what? its not your thing?’ Nancy also start laughing

‘what makes you think I am a nun?’

Ludo snorts, ‘you my dear July, are a nun living in Narnia.’

‘Narnia is a fantasy movie.’ I mumble.

‘you need to meet a slap in the face.’ Ludo says

What?

‘uh I don’t think I need that.’

‘seriously Ludo?’ Nancy raises both eyebrows at her.

‘trust me girls I know what I am talking about.’

‘no you don’t.’ I cry picking up Ludo’s train of thought, ‘you added me on a dating site.’
I recall with a shudder.

‘and you had a hundred interests in a day.’

Nancy starts laughing because that had been the most irrational moment of my life.

‘no.’ I point at Ludo, ‘that’s not it at all—its not my thing.’

‘you’ve never tried.’ Nancy breathes adding a dramatic wave of her hand.

‘we should have solved this a long time ago.’ Ludo mutters.

‘you are a bad influence on me.’ I point at them, ‘why aren’t we arriving yet?’

‘uh no changing the topic—seriously July you have never given any one the time of day since you broke up with David... its been five years for crying out loud.’ Ludo glances at Nancy who nods at her in agreement.

‘I am too busy with my career to date anyone.’ I mumble.

‘you hide behind your job to avoid any one.’

I fold my arms, ‘are you guys really going to bitch about my relationship status during the whole trip?’

‘if the boot fits.’ Nancy announces and the debate begins.

I point out Ludo’s style of friends with benefits and we give her hell about it because she acts like she has relationship advice and is a love guru or something. She tries to convince me that no attachments relationships are fun and at least she is trying. Nancy is laughing at our banter.

None of us mention Vincent or how disastrous their relationship turned out. honestly, whether I liked Vincent or not. Nancy had this starry eyed look in her eyes whenever she was with him. they were a sickening love couple even though the man still got on my nerves.

He was just too intense. I read characters like him in novels I don't want to meet one in real life. Protective, domineering boyfriend with a bad boy attitude as a cherry on top of a sundae urgh. Anyway the banter ends when I remind the girls that this is a girls only trip. No guys mentioned. We all leave the topic. For now.

Chapter Four

JOSHUA

'she is what?' Vincent stands erect and alert for the first time in days. I cant help but gawk for a moment as he begins to pace. Question gives me a questioning gaze and I shrug with a go-with-it look on my face

'they must be in Francistown by now.' Question closes his laptop, 'her phone is showing there.'

'where the hell are they going?' Vincent stops to look at him

'how should I know?' Question shrugs.

Vincent mutters expletives under his breath while I throw myself on the nearest couch and reach for the remote. Its almost time for the news.

'who is possibly driving them there.' Vincent wonders loudly, 'what type of car are they driving.'

'I'm thinking the one they ran off from the ceremony with.' Question says and rubs between his eyes because that's the only way he cant squirm under Vincent's glare.

'that death trap.' Vincent growls. I grin as that day flashes in my mind. I only ever met Nancy personally, sweet girl. I was to meet her two best friends during the wedding who according to Vincent were a piece of work. But the way that car vroomed out of there was no

woman's driving or I would have to believe Vincent's theory about Nancy's friends being a nut case.

'if that woman is driving--.' Vincent pauses and I open the TV, yes the six o'clock bulletin has just begun. I lift my feet onto the coffee table.

'I think they are going for a trip or something.' Question offers. Seeing Vincent dramatic has set him on edge. I am enjoying this because I have been waiting my whole life to see the man lose his cool. I lean back on the couch as the headlines are being run.

'where?' Vincent snaps

'how should I know—don't go all Tarzan on me dude.' Question shoots back.

'you know Que—there is a time in life that you need to get over movie obsession.'

'oh are you trying to motivate speak me Vee—go do it in the mirror.'

Wrong thing to say to a wound up Vincent right now. In fast movements he has already fisted the material of Question's shirt in his hands by the collar. Question splutters and tries to raise his hands in surrender but Vincent's expression tells him that he has to start taking.

I focus on the news which I am not even hearing

'alright dude I know where they are headed.'

'where?' Vincent practically growls

'they are taking a road trip to Kasane.' Question mumbles before quickly adding, 'but dude I think the girl needs her space, they will return eventually her two friends have jobs here in Gabs.'

Vincent lets go of him, Question staggers until he falls on one of the long couches while Vincent comes to throw himself to the one next to mine. He looks relieved. That means trouble. It doesn't take him two seconds to spell it out.

'guys we are going for a road trip.' He announces smiling for the first time since the wedding, 'Question you get us the fastest car.'

'I am not going anywhere Vee—Que is right, give the girl her space.'

'did I stutter?' Vincent mutters staring ahead.

Que and I share a look. The bossy bastard. I don't know how we have been close our whole lives or why Question sticks around at all.

'man I have a job and I'm not your little servant,'

That earns me a glare I ignore and fix my eyes on TV, they are already at the last bulletin and rounding up.

'I am not asking Josh.'

I press my lips together. He doesn't have to threaten me anyway. I was so going with him. Not that I had any interest in reconciling the two but because I can't let Vincent drive in this condition. He will end up with tickets and trouble that his uncle Harold would gladly probate him for. I am always caught up in the middle, tried to avoid it but I can't so I try to not let the situations happen.

So for the sake of my sanity, if it's Nancy he needs to get back to normal, it's Nancy that we get him. Spoiled arrogant son of a bitch.

Chapter Five

JULY

I shuffle into the kitchen yawning and rolling my shoulders in search of a coffee. It's six am and the granite fancy kitchen is awash in sunlight. Early morning smell of dew and lively vegetation floats into the air while the outside world is abuzz with the sound of a waking world. Cars, trains, birds and the damn rooster that I suspect lives next door that have been shrieking since 5am.

If it were up to me I would roast it for lunch and save the world of noise pollution. I open a cabinet and take out a mug the same time the water boils in the kettle. I put the coffee together in five minutes before sliding on a stool and start taking grateful sips while willing the sleep to go away. We have another six hour drive to Kasane our destination and I can't wait. I bought a camera for this.

Nancy shuffles into the kitchen twenty minutes later rubbing her eyes. She is just so cute. I don't get how she ended up connecting with a complicated person like Vincent. Love is blind.

'morning you.' I watch her as she starts making her own coffee, 'you didn't sleep well you have bags under your eyes.'

'I can't sleep in strange houses.'

'this is nice house.'

‘I guess.’ she mumbles just as she finishes making her cup and sits on the stool at the other side of the island facing me. ‘I wasn’t driving but I am pretty zonked—do we really have to go to Kasane—this is far enough.’

‘why don’t you want to go?’

She shrugs, ‘don’t want to make it seem like I am running from Vincent.’

I hold myself before my eyes bulge at her. I can’t believe she hasn’t figured out that since the wedding chaos last week we have been running from Vincent. I subtly take sips of my coffee while she carries on about the topic.

‘there is a part of me that feels like I overreacted you know—I mean we were together for a whole year, maybe there is a good reason for what he did.’

My eyebrows shoot to my hairline, ‘Nancy, there is no good reason for a man to leave his two children and wife to marry someone else. He is bad news. and if there is a good reason I really want to hear it as well and it must be damn good.’

Nancy only shakes her head and looks down at her coffee mug. My heart sinks at the expression that ghosts her face for a moment. I know she is having a hard time with this. She was about to commit her entire life to the man for pete’s sake.

‘I think I’m going to call my parents.’

And I hope for her sake she calls her mom not her dad. Mr. Babutsi wouldn’t be able to hide his pleasure regarding the situation I am sure. I flash her a smile of encouragement as she leaves her untouched coffee and walks out of the kitchen.

With a sigh I take my cup to the sink. What can I make for breakfast? Ludo hates stopping when driving. So eating on the way is a luxury I can’t afford.

Taking my phone I open the music app and start playing some music. Between the three of us, I am the one who knows the kitchen way better. Translation—I am the one who loves cooking. For Ludo and Nancy it’s just a skill they had to learn being a female child and all. For me, I manage to put up a fabulous meal together and still maintain my fifty-four kg weight.

I place the pan on the stove and smear it with oil while turn to chop my tomatoes. Maybe I could add a little onion. I decide against the idea. Once onion gets its scent on my fingers we will arrive to Kasane with me advertising to everyone I come into that I had onions for breakfast. Yeek.

‘Hmmm that smells fantastic—what are you making?’ Ludo comes to slide on a bar stool and yawns a good measure.

‘Eggs and tomatoes.’ I announce as I pour the lightly beaten eggs on top of the softly cooked tomatoes. I watch for a moment as they blend in as in the eggs seeping into the tomatoes before I start turning the mixture.

‘I love your good old Zimbabwean recipes. Are you going to add onions.’

‘no.’ I say a little forcefully, Ludo isn’t aware that I have fired onions this morning.

Ludo chuckles, ‘seriously?’ she mutters as I turn to put three plates on the counter before I begin to dish the eggs in them.

‘Where is Nancy?’

‘Making a phone call.’

Ludo gaps, ‘I thought we were supposed to get her away from everyone for a while?’

‘Yes, but Mrs. Babutsi needs some assurance that her baby is fine and Mr. Babutsi needs to remain committed to paying this trip.’

Ludo rolls her eyes, ‘I wish my father is that cool.’

I offer a wan smile. Ludo’s parents never fail to remind her that her biological clock is clanging and they enjoy playing match maker. They are bent of seeing the last born of their seven children settle before it’s too late. As for me I keep reminding dad that I am twenty seven not eighteen. It doesn’t have to be a punishment that I look younger than my age.

I take out a loaf of bread and place it on the table. Ludo immediately starts digging in the time I have made steams mugs of coffee after disposing Nancy’s cold undrunk one. What’s taking her so long? I glance at the sliding doors she disappeared through and decided to stop being paranoid. Mrs. Babutsi does have a flood of words come out of her mouth every conversation.

‘So why don’t your family ever use this house?’

Ludo shrugs ‘they are renting it out after Christmas.’ She says, ‘are you travelling this Christmas?’

I shake my head, ‘no—I am staying in my apartment with a small Christmas tree by the TV stand and good old Christmas movies.’

‘Oh I envy you.’ Ludo pouts her lips. Of course she knows I am joking. Our families get together most of the holidays. I am sure this year is going to be another giant Christmas with large braais and loud chatter. I wonder if they are going to plant a giant tree in the middle of the yard like last year while Ludo’s grandfather pretends to be Santa clause. I smile fondly at the memory. With the smile on Ludo’s face I know she is thinking about the same thing as well.

A knock at the door startles us both. We share a scowled glance before glancing at the direction of the front door.

‘Maybe the neighbors think we moved in.’

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