

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER ONE

Alarms were created by the devil himself, I swear! I was having the most beautiful dream in the world. Sipping on coconuts somewhere in Indonesia and doing absolutely nothing but getting paid for it. Now the buzzing has disturbed my peace and I'm in my bed with no coconuts or white sand beaches in sight!

It's 7 am now and I must be at work at 8. I think I'll skip bathing, just dry wash, freshen up and go. It's winter after all. And since I will need a good recommendation letter after completing my internship, I have to be on my best behaviour. My door flies open as I'm still lying sadly in bed questioning the meaning of life and why I was born without my consent in the first place. How she's this alive so early in the morning, I don't know.

"Get up! You'll be late!", she throws my covers back and I growl in my throat. Who sent her! I just need 2 minutes to go back to that coconut in Indonesia. I'm still half asleep and getting out of bed is a mission. "Now hurry up. You'll be late!". She can be so motherly, my goodness! I get up and complain about how sleepy I am. "Bye babes. You're already late so take the car. I gotta run". She throws the car keys at me and they get me in the stomach. She knows she could have left them on the kitchen counter, right? "How do I look?", she turns around just before exiting the door. "You look gorg!", I respond in my sleepy voice. No homo but she looks as good as sin. That tiny waist, flat tummy and popping booty is sure to send any man and some women straight to hell for lusting! She's gone before I can suggest she wears different shoes. How will she run after the train with heeled boots?

Oh well, I probably should focus on myself. I'll re-wear that jean, I don't have time to waste looking for something else to put on. Quick dry wash, proper face wash, deodorant and perfume later, no one would guess that me and water didn't get intimate this morning.

I'm done by 7:20 and I quickly grab my bag and the keys off the floor then dash to the kitchen. Oh! Chelsea! She made me a health bread sandwich and filled my travel mug with creamy coffee and left two sweetener sticks next to it. Mann, I would never trade her for anything. Although she's adamant that her dad named her after the blue jersey soccer team, I still think he named her after the Chelsea bun because he knew she would grow up to be this sweetest sweet.

I'm cutting it really close and I'm worried I'll be late. I need a good excuse. I used the flat tyre and the accident on the road lies last week. I need to get more creative. I'm driving anxiously and cussing people out for driving at snail speed. I'm cussing in my head of course, this is Cape Town and road rage can quickly turn into a gun fight, then next thing I'll be a Gone Girl. But for real though, can people drive a bit faster?

This car of ours has taken me places. It's not mine per se, it's Chelsea's. She owns it and she buys the fuel but she lets me drive it because she takes the train. I don't know why I don't take the train. It would be cheaper and quicker but I think I'm claustrophobic and maybe a little bit bouje. I just can't deal with the Metro Rail crowds in the morning. The armpit smell makes me dizzy. Never mind the groping of my ass by perverts and the being robbed. I just cannot. Chelsea says I'm exaggerating and maybe she's right but I had enough bad experience to decide that I'd rather walk 30 km if the train was the last mode of transport left on earth. Besides, taking the train would mean waking up earlier, something we already established as impossible.

Traffic wasn't that bad and I pull up at work at 7:51. Parallel parking is not for me but it's not like I have an option. Radio off, windows closed, breath held, I reverse into the box, careful not to bump my boss's expensive sports car. The car is skewed but I don't have time to repark. It's inside the box, that's what matters. I rush across the street and through the gate that leads into the business park. It's grey split face bricks throughout making it look prim and proper. If only people knew the disaster inside!

It's 7:59 when I clock in and say a triumphant "Goeie more Meneer (Good morning Sir)" to my boss Dr Dirk. He looks at me and I think that was a smile. "Good morning Lotus. You're almost late again", he responds, walking away to his office. What a dick! I guess it's true that 'it's in the name'! I put a lot of effort in greeting him in Afrikaans only to have him respond in English! Pshhh. I find myself staring as he walks away. For his age, he looks good. Tall, good black hair, smells like Creed for Men and of course he has a gym body. Isn't we work our butts off so he can afford his personal trainer at that prestige gym he goes to! Plus he's successful, I mean he owns this place and I wouldn't be shocked if he has a vineyard somewhere in the Wine Lands. Priviledge!

Time to stop hating on my boss and do what I'm employed to do. Maybe one day I can be one of the Girls With Vineyards. I hate this part of the morning - changing into work clothes. Protective clothing, safety shoes, two hair nets to hold in my weave and gloves on, I'm ready for another day in hell. Working in the Quality Department of a Food manufacturing company has to be the worst job in the world. I have to check and verify that all the equipment and instruments are working well, make sure everything is where it's supposed to be, make sure everyone in the factory is appropriately dressed, keep checking that everything and everyone remains clean. I borderline have to babysit, mentor and teach all the employees! And boy are these people stubborn! Dear LAWD in heaven, you know I don't get paid enough for this! Then on top of that I have to deal with the rude production staff and still have leftover strength to file the paperwork. If I had a choice, I would quit right here, right now. In my next life I'm coming back as a cashier like my mother! At least I'll get to sit down all day and embarrass customers with insufficient funds.

I'll skip tea-break today because I have too much backdating and cooking numbers to do. The audit is next week Friday and I still have so much essential information missing. Also, that ceiling above the stairs needs to be fixed! Good heavens, this place is a scrap yard! I need to find a way to deal with the fact that this company breaks more than half the rules in the regulation. I have to pass this audit, whatever it takes, or else Dr Dirk will grind me to mince and have me repackaged as the burger patties we make downstairs!

By lunchtime I'm starving. I quickly gobble up the sandwich Chelsea made and wash it down with a strong cup of black coffee. I take my coffee creamy but someone stole my milk again so I'm miserably drinking it black today! I probably should start stealing other people's milk as well but I'm a Christian and I take Commandment number eight very serious. I go through my WhatsApp. Chelsea sent me a short clip of Chris Brown's Freaky Friday. I respond with dancing and tongue out emojis and tell her how I can't wait to get out of this hell hole. We're turning up tonight. I forward the clip to my status with a happy grin on my face. I swear I live through my status. I probably have over 20 statuses, it looks like a dotted line. Whatever! I'm doing me selfishly. If it makes me happy then I do it, end of discussion.

I'm back at my desk filling in last week's daily checklists. I have a long To Do List and it keeps growing. Can't this day end already! The more I sit here with these files, the more I realise how much I hate everything and everyone in this place. I wish I got paid my worth, I wish I had a better job, I wish I could kick-start my career the right way. I wish I wish I wish... Dr Dirk makes this sour job even more bitter. He's too hard on me! Chelsea says if I cut him a slice of my cake he might treat me like royalty and maybe even up my salary. Unfortunately, I'm not that type of girl. I work for my bread so thank you very much but I'll pass!

I have a bad tendency of skipping introductions. My sincerest apologies. My name is Lotus Janse van Rensburg. Everyone says what a beautiful name because well, everyone believes the meaning I tell them. What no one knows is that I was named after a car. Yep, mummy dearest saw it fit to name me after a four wheeled automobile! She said my father was obsessed with car racing and his car of choice was the Lotus, that's why I have the name. Which is strange really because I don't know my father and I don't think my mother knows him as well. I won't be disrespectful and say my mother was a whore but from what my grandmother says, she was quite adventurous and multi partnered hence when I came around there was no male figure to sign the birth certificate. Sometimes I think that's why I try so hard to be good so I don't turn out like her.

Those are my secrets.

What I tell people when they ask is that I was named Lotus after the water flower. I was born in a forgotten township and first with SASSA then with NRF I rose above my situation and I'm making my mark in the world, or so I think. So just like the lotus, I grew from the bottom of muddy streams, rose above the water and bloomed into this lily that I am today. The lotus is a symbol of purity, humility and divinity. I've repeated that so many times I've started believing it myself. Hey, don't @ me! Beyonce said it's necessary to redefine yourself. So yea, my name is Lotus. Never mind my 'Janse van Rensburg' surname, you know the history of our people and how we ended up with these surnames. Please don't let me get into that.

I'm what most would describe as a fitness addict. I have my reasons for fearing fat. If I had money I would be a gym freak but for now free Park Runs and a controlled diet have to do. I've also been described as 'nice' but that's only by people who don't know me like that. I smile and stay nice just to avoid being unpleasant, you know, it's easier for everyone. I can be a pushover sometimes but that's only because I don't like conflict, confrontation and altercations. I'm a girl of peace and my energy is very important to me so I guard it like a dragon.

I graduated last year with a Degree in Food Science and you would think that watermarked piece of paper would have guaranteed me a job but no, industry wasn't so accommodating. Young, black, female, qualified, a year of work experience - I tick all the boxes so I didn't understand why I wasn't getting a job. I went from interview to interview but no luck so I ended up settling for the R5000 internship that I have. One of the employees suggested that I was hired because looking at my CV (my surname) one would think I'm white. I don't know, all I know is if I had a choice to begin with I wouldn't be here. But rent needed to be paid and I was broke. Waitressing wasn't bringing in much money. I was desperate and although she didn't once complain, I hated having Chelsea pay all the rent, buy the groceries and give me pocket money on top of that. She comes from a well off family but mama didn't raise a leech.

My best friend Chelsea! Remember that girl who woke me up earlier and went all mama bear on me? That's her, Chelsea. If I had to describe her in one word I would say ALIVE. That girl is alive. While most of us merely exist, she lives. She's everything I'm not. Loud, free, drinks, smokes, dances, has tattoos and a mouth of a sailor, wears whatever she wants and keeps it 100 all the time. Unlike me, she has no time to cradle anyone's feelings and play small. Although I would never be like that, I admire her for being so unapologetically her.

Having a friend like Chelsea is like having an army. It's like having soldiers on your side always and forever and you know they are sworn to you no matter what.

"Lotus, how is the Audit prep coming up?". My boss's voice shocks me back to reality. "Good, we're good", I flash him a nervous smile. His hazel eyes make me nervous every time. "We're good Doc but there's a list of things that need to be fixed urgently...". I get ready to pull up my spreadsheet. "I'm not interested. Fix what you can and make the rest go away", he says with a serious face. I open my mouth but close it again. How on earth will I make a ceiling and a broken floor go away? Paper work I can make up but serious things, I can't. "So we're good now?". He raises an eyebrow. I doubt that I can say no so I nod instead. We are so far from good, he should enjoy owning a company while it lasts because I'm sure it will be shut down next Friday. "Alright, I'll leave it in your capable hands then. I need that pass Lotus!". He says it like it's a threat and walks away before I can say anything else. I will need all my angels and ancestors to come together and conjure a miracle for us to pass the audit.

TGIF (Thank God It's Friday), in a few hours I'll be out, dancing my sorrows away.

Thank you for reading. I appreciate you. I would love to hear your thoughts 😊

I suck at intros, I know 😂🙏

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER TWO

Finally, it's 16:30 and I'm ready to hit the road. "Have a good weekend Dr Dirk", I wave at him as I pass his office. "Lotus, do you have a minute?". I have to backtrack because I had already passed. "What are you doing on Sunday?", he puts his phone down and looks up at me. "I'm going to church Sir". I'm praying in tongues that he doesn't expect me to work this weekend. "After that?", he holds eye contact and I look down. His eyes always look at me accusingly. "I don't know". "Think you can come over to my house?". My facial expression must spell out my shock! "It's my birthday celebration and I'm extending my invitation. It's a small thing with family and friends", he says. I make another face thinking which category I fall into. I'm neither family nor friend. "It will be a pleasure Doc. Can I bring a friend?". I doubt I'll go anyway, I'm just being 'nice'. "Yea sure. I'll text you the address and you let me know how many friends you're bringing along. I know you people! You invite one person and ten show up", he smiles like that's funny. I want to roll my eyes but he intimidates me so bad. "See you Sunday then. Have a Good Friday", I excuse myself. "You too Lotus. Try not to be late!", he says. Yea I'll try but no guarantees.

Did my boss just invite me to his birthday party? Oh wow! We don't vibe like that me and him. And why would I want him to see me in my personal out-of-work zone? He's quite mean, not to me directly but he's really unkind to the floor workers. I think he's a bit of a racist, maybe not intentionally so but he throws around the phrase 'you people' a lot when referring to black people. He treats me differently though but no, I don't take it a compliment. Yet somehow I always make it a point to say hi and bye to him, with a smile even! And now I'll be sharing family time with him!

I see a missed call from my mum as I go down the stairs. I'll call her later, I don't need stress today. The fact that it's Friday is the only thing that kept me going today and I can't risk hearing poverty news from home or worse her boyfriend troubles. Traffic is a nightmare and if I could I would leave this car right here and go and hang out of the doors of a packed train like everyone else. I keep hooting and almost bumping into taxis. They are driving on pavements, in the bus lane and towards oncoming traffic in some places! It's a mess and I'm scared for my life. But I trust taxi drivers. They got this driving thing under control. So if I stay in my lane and remember to give way to them always, I will live.

I'm home after forever. By home, I mean a 2 bedroom flat I share with Chelsea in Retreat. The apartment block is old and not so well maintained but it's a place called home for now. Chelsea can afford better but since she was paying mine and her rent too, we settled for this one. She's a simple girl from an affording family. They are not a private jet, Rolls Royce, billion Rand rich family but more of pay our child's tuition in full, buy her a car for her 18th birthday, help her out with bills every month, let her pay for her friend's upkeep and treat her like a princess type.

We did the most with the inside of our apartment. It looks girly girly pretty and we keep it as clean as humanly possible. I like to think of myself as a "God will provide" type of girl! As soon as my salary comes in, more than half of it goes to rent and the rest to toiletries, groceries and in one day it's all gone yet somehow I always make it through the month. If that's not a miracle then I don't know what is! Wait, that's more like Chelsea will provide! Right now I have R400 between me and poverty.

I get home before Chelsea and I leave the chicken defrosting in the sink while I go and shower. We're going clubbing but to save money it will help us to eat before we go out so that we only spend on drinks. Chelsea probably can afford to get us food but there's so much receiving you can do from a friend. I save whenever I can and try not to be a leech.

I'm halfway through cooking when she gets home. She looks like she's had a rough day but I go first anyway. She's the only person I can really talk to. I tell her about my day and she lets me vent about everything work. "Four more months and you'll be done babes. Stay focused. Don't let them get to you", she gives me a back hug. She's so precious.

"Oh, and Dr Dirk invited us to his birthday thingy on Sunday". She puts her glass of wine down and looks up at me like I'm lying. No surprise there because I've never had anything nice to say about my dick of a boss. "Who's we?", she asks. "Me and you of course!". She doesn't believe me so I get my phone and show her the Directions my boss sent me. She ignores all that and opens his profile picture. "White chocolate! He has that Christian Grey thing going. Look at his eyes. He looks dangerous", she ogles my boss and I just can't. "Decided, we're going", she says. "I don't think it's a good idea. He scares me". He really does! And I have no desire to be asked about the audit on a holy day. "We're going! Didn't

you see that address? Something something farm, Stellenbosch? That means unlimited boerewors and wine and those funny expensive cheeses white people eat". I laugh and give up. We'll go it's fine.

I make the chicken while she talks about her Instagram crush, some cute model she will never meet. The way she's describing him, you'd swear he's a piece of chocolate waiting to be devoured. Poor mystery boy. "And you? How long is your anti-men campaign by the way?". There she goes laughing at me and my celibacy. "Till kingdom come. Men are trash!". "Mmm", is all she says before she shows me her other crush, a black American model with an unnaturally taunt stomach. He looks yum, I won't lie but I also won't admit it. Men are absolute trash.

So we'll eat, drink a bit, get ready then we'll paint the town red. I can not wait!

A little black dress on, tight on my skin like a skin tight, black heels on my feet, makeup on fleek, watch on wrist, choker on neck, red lipstick on lips, I'm ready to get the party started baby.

It's after 10 pm when we pull up in Longstreet. We were meant to leave at 8 but someone had to go through 8 outfits only to pick the first one at the end! How I hate that I don't hate her at all. As always, parking is a nightmare so we end up parking in Loop Street and walking down. It's freezing but pretty hurts, doesn't it? Weaves longer, heels higher, dresses shorter, we are ready for a good night.

It's the opening of Club Lotus and ladies get in for free tonight. We don't ever pay in this club anyways, we are regulars. We've been coming here since Varsity, except it was called something else then. It has the best vibe so Friday after Friday we found ourselves here until the bouncers knew us by name and we didn't have to pay anymore. Besides, this is where our pretty Chelsea met her heart-breaker, the Hulk we call him. They are on and off so many times, I can't keep up! But they are off now so unfortunately there'll be no one to bless us with drinks.

The ambiance is utter bliss, it effortlessly takes my mind off things. So Club Lotus is my club, my sinful escape, a place where I let my hair down and kick it with my girl. But now I share a name with a nightclub! In a weird way I like it because in my dreams I imagine that I own it and I drive a Lotus and I have money. I'm dripping in finesse nje and living the dream.

The bouncer nods at us as we stop in front of him, giggling for no particular reason. Must be that wine we had before we left. This man has worked here for as long as I can remember! And of course he knows us, no one forgets Chelsea, she's that extra! "Have you seen my boyfriend around here tonight?", Chelsea asks the bouncer. "No he's not around today", the buff man in black says. "Boyfriend?", I ask as we go up the dark stairs towards our little piece of heaven. "Hulk. Don't judge me, I kinda miss him ok". I can't keep up with them so I just stay out of it.

It's packed and we stand by the bar struggling to hear each other over the noise. The party has already started, the music is good and the DJ has Chris Brown polluting our ears with

Privacy. Chelsea gets a Long Island ice tea and I get a frozen margarita with extra tequila. We are dancing and singing along to the dirty lyrics of Privacy. Already I'm good and the night hasn't even started! When two girls leave for the bathroom, we claim their table.

The scene is lit. The music is loud, people are plenty, clouds of smoke from marijuana and bongos fill the air, shots are being downed over there, guys keep trying to hit on us over here, dancing on the stage over there, drunkenness overload. It's Freaky Friday and it is happening. I'm still on my first cocktail and Chelsea is on her third Long Island! Her stories are becoming nicer by the minute. Her accent gets very coloured when she gets drunk and yep we're getting there. I think drunkenness is contagious because I'm beginning to feel intoxicated and I'm laughing too loud. I'm on drink one!

"A drink for you Miss lady from that guy over there", a waiter dumps an overflowing frozen margarita in front of me. I try to scan for the mystery guy in the direction the waiter pointed at but the dim club lights plus humans make it impossible. I know what it means; getting a girl drinks all night to win her as booty for the night. Not happening! This body of mine is a temple okay. I won't trade it for a lusciously looking tempting iced pink drink. A temple barely covered in an extremely short number but a temple nonetheless.

"Don't drink that Chels! What's wrong with you! It might be spiked!". There goes my friend drinking up the cocktail. I reach for the drink but she pulls her hand away. The way she guards alcohol I'm convinced if it came down to choosing between her life and it, it would be her pick. "Stop drinking that!", I try to reach for the glass again. "No Miss Uptight don't kill my vibe! I'm drinking this, spiked or not", she says, sucking up through the straw. I don't know what to do with this girl really. She acts like a toddler sometimes and arguing with a toddler quickly makes you the fool. So I let it go.

"He says here's yours. Don't let your friend steal it this time", the waiter says. "Wait...", I call for him to ask who this man sending me drinks is. My voice drowns in the loudness of the music and he is gone. The last thing I need at the end of the night is paying a fat bill. "Drink up babes", my too loud friend urges me on. Her drink is already half gone and her lipstick is smudged all over the glass. I really don't want to drink mine but like always, she convinces me. She laughs too loud, exaggerates her stories and is just extra but she's my ride or die, and I love her to the death.

A second round of drinks comes around. I don't even bother asking the too busy waiter anymore, he just drops and goes. We dance some, just the two of us around our table, not entertaining the guys trying to slide in and dance behind us. We take turns going to the bathroom because someone must keep the table and watch the drinks. I feel good, really good. Like always this club has come through for me. Work stress is all gone.

As we sit to rest, another round of drinks comes through and this time the waiter brings a bottle of Moët. "He says congratulations on the opening of club Lotus" then he's gone. Huh? Did someone maybe think since I'm Lotus, I mean yes I'm Lotus but did they think I'm the Lotus who owns the club? Chelsea and I laugh at that and drink up to whoever this is who's predicting a bright future for me.

"But seriously though, who's this guy?", Chelsea asks. "I don't know. I can't see him from here". Frankly I don't care who he is, it's time for us to go home now. It's way past midnight and we have danced and laughed and drank free drinks, now it's time to bounce. I must drive

now before I drink anymore. "Let's get out of here", I gulp the last of my cocktail. "What? Aren't you going to find out who Mr Drinks is? Maybe he's cool and you can leave him with your number, you know, for future drinks. He might just be loaded", she says. What's funny is I know that she's actually serious. "Come on girl, you haven't gotten some in years! I'm sure there's cobwebs growing down there now!". I told you she exaggerates, didn't I? "Drink up let's go! Some of us need to run in the morning", I stand and pull down my barely there dress. Unlike her I need to work out to look half as sexy as she does and I have this 30 day challenge I'm doing.

Drunk Chelsea is fun Chelsea but she's also stubbornner than a mule. So when another round of free drinks come, I push my glass to her and ask for a bottle of water instead. I need to de-alcoholise so I can get us home in one piece. My job has zero benefits so I don't have medical aid therefore count me out of dangerous driving.

It's almost 3:30 am and we really need to go if I'm to wake up tomorrow. I'm even sober now! My friend is a professional in this drinking game! She stands tall on her heels and walks up straight like she's been drinking water this whole time. She agrees with me that it's time to go but quickly changes her mind and sits back down. Ok, I know that laugh, she's drunk!

"Sorry Miss, he says I must bring you to him, he wants you to say thank you for the drinks", the waiter says. The nerve of this stranger! "Tell him thanks for the drinks but no thanks", I roll my eyes. Such entitlement! "It doesn't work like that Lotus! Come on, just go say hi and then we'll go", Chelsea says. Friends like these! "You know what!", I open my purse and pull out R300, "Take. Give him his money back and tell him to keep change", I give it to the waiter. I'm pretty sure that doesn't cover it but I don't have any more money. This is already an inconvenience because I didn't plan to spend this emergency cash. There's a good reason I was drinking that first cocktail slowly!

"Who the hell does he think he is? So what now? He thinks he suddenly owns me because of these lousy cocktails he's been sending our way? He thinks I'm a slay queen and he can buy me with a bottle of Moet? What a prick!". My English runs dangerously low when I'm upset. So I'm half Xhosaring-half Englishing it. Yerrr! Men!

Chelsea makes a face that I can't read. Is it because she doesn't understand Xhosa? Not my problem right now. Anger can't be expressed in English! "I probably should go over there and give him a piece of my mind. I bet you he's ugly. Only ugly, desperate low lives who prey on girls in clubs do this nonsense". Chelsea makes a face but I'm too upset to ask what's up with her. "The idiot thinks I owe him a thank you? Me? A thank you for what? I didn't want these drinks to begin with! You know what! He should go and find a cactus and sit on it with his raggedy ass!", I go on and on bashing the stranger black and blue. I call him all sorts. How dare he!

"Lotus...", Chelsea keeps hushing me with her finger. "And wena? You being weird now! What's with the faces? Maybe you should go and join the weirdo who bought the drinks!". She's also annoying me now. Parting with that R300 really hurt mann. "Behind you", she finally says. "What?" I snap at her. I turn my head and my eyes fall on blackness. I lift them up and there standing behind me is the roughest guy I've seen in a while! It's pretty dim but his command is unmistakable and I don't mean that in a good way. Just by looking at him I feel like shouting 'don't shoot' because he looks like a killer. Ok, maybe not those creepy serial killers but more like Michael Scofield Prison Break almost-killer, you know. It's dim

though and club music has me dizzy so I'm probably judging him too harshly. It's his body that has my attention. A black T-shirt is hugging that umm fatless array of muscles and his arms especially catch my eye. So strong, so hard, so sexy, so tattooed, dear Zeus! Did one of your half demon-half human sons escape Mount Olympus? I'm probably staring but who cares, it's a club so I'll just act drunk if he calls me out for being awkward.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER THREE

I'm deciding whether to act drunk, to run away or to pretend like I don't know English! Ok that last one won't work, he heard me calling him words I'm too embarrassed to repeat. Most people have left so it's not so loud anymore. Yazi all this could have been avoided! I could have just said Thank you! But no, I had to accept free drinks then turn around and act all independent on a R400 budget. Now I'm in a situation. But since my mouth got me into this, my mouth should take me out of it. I'm still staring at this guy and I have no doubt he thinks I'm a weirdo now. I laugh at nothing, you know, acting drunk mos. It doesn't work though and I'm double embarrassed now. I look up at him sheepishly and blink blink, I hope my puppy eyes do the trick.

"Why all the insults? What did I do?", he asks in a laid back voice. His accent screams 'Cape Coloured'. "I ah emm. The drinks? It's you, I mean, sending us the drinks", I stutter badly, gathering what's left of my English. I wasn't aware he was behind me! How much did he hear? He looks at me and I look down. Why didn't Chelsea try harder to warn me! "Come with me. You need to thank me first then apologise for your rudeness but it's loud in here", he says. I don't like what he's saying and his tone is too arrogant, I don't like it at all. "What? Fxck you! I gave you back your money so what's your problem?" I push him back hard but he doesn't fall, just staggers a little. He doesn't know me I see. I'll beat him up then plead temporary drunkenness. "Feisty! It's cute but playtime is over, let's go!". I roll my eyes, cross my arms and look away. Chelsea is staring back at me, her lips slightly parted but she says nothing. "Let's go, I don't have all night!", he reaches for my arm but I shrug him off. He smiles at me and I'm really confused.

"For real, let's go", he says calmly, taking my bag from the table. He can't take that! It has my whole life in it. From licence to ID to my last R100 to keys to phone. Everything! "Put that down and leave her alone!", Captain Chelsea finally comes to the rescue! "Stay out of this sweetheart. There's a reason I sent her drinks and not you. It's her I want, not you. Verstaan jy? (Do you understand?)", he says bluntly. How rude! She says something rude in Afrikaans slang and he says something back. I didn't quite understand. I only know survival Afrikaans. The written type I learnt at school. He walks away and I have no option but to run after him.

"Give me back my bag!". I follow him out and down the steps. Descending steps in high heels in the dark is an extreme sport. "Stop him. Thief!", I yell some more hoping the bouncer will do his job. Instead he steps aside and lets him pass! Idiots all of them. The cold Long Street breeze hits me square in the face and I feel goosebumps crowd my skin. I can hear Chelsea shouting for me to wait for her but I need to make sure I don't lose sight of this person. I follow him across the road, almost getting hit by a car in the process and Chelsea eventually catches up with me. She runs much better in heels than I and she has that bottle of Moet in her hand! Her priorities!

The vibe is dying, there's less people outside and less cab drivers shouting out 'taxi'. The lights of a white sports car, dropped so ridiculously low it's practically sitting on the ground, blink. He holds the passenger door open and tells me to jump in. Now I'm convinced he's crazy. The fuck I look like? I probably should call the police but my phone is in that bag in his hand. I know I'm tipsy but I can see him clearly now. He has a tattoo under his eye! Why does he look like a rougher version of Michael Scofield so much? Or am I still drunk? He looks super clean though, well we know Coloureds in the Cape take their clothes seriously. They slay my bruh!

Chelsea pushes me behind her and goes off at the guy, calling him every name in the book. He just stands there smiling at her with a gold tooth disturbing the neat row of white and I'm just standing here studying his face. She stops to catch her breath and he blatantly disregards everything she said and pretends like she's not there.

"Get in Lotus", he says, not waiting for her to go on. For a second there I'm scared. How does he know my name? "I really don't have all night ladies, so sweetheart take down my number plate if that will make you feel better. I won't do anything to your friend. Go home", he says. "Give me my bag, her car keys are in there", I eventually find my voice. I've decided to turn my 'nice' on. Violence and screaming obscenities never helped anybody. If he gives it to me, I'll run and we can go home. "She's been drinking so she can't drive!", he says. There's this command about his voice that screams sexy but it also borders on scary.

He waves down a cab and the driver rolls down his window. "Awe. How's it going?", the bag taker says. "Boss, business has been quite slow today so I didn't meet the target but I'll make up for it tomorrow", the cab driver says. "It's all good. Get her home safely and you'll have met your target for the day", the rude stranger says, in a friendly tone. I'm so confused!

"Let me talk to him alone Chels". Clearly our fighting is not working. She doesn't like the idea but after I convince her that I'm a big girl making sober decisions here, she takes a picture of the number plate and asks me over five times if I'll be fine and I don't know what's gotten into me but I keep nodding. "I'll be fine, go home. I'll talk to him, thank him and apologise or whatever then I'll get my bag and drive home, ok?" "Sure babes. Love you", she gives me a big hug. "Love you more Chels".

I watch her get into the cab and they drive off. She really is drunk! Sober her wouldn't allow me to remain with such a dodgy stranger on my own!

My brain must have frozen at stupid O'clock because I take a deep breath and go against logic. I disappear into the car, fold my arms and look out of the window as he drives. I have so many questions like; how does he know my name? Where is he taking me? Who is he? Why am I in this car? Is this really about drinks? Why am I in this car again?

The more the questions pass through my mind the more scared I become. Isn't this how human trafficking goes? Did I just volunteer myself? Fine, Chelsea took down the number plate but what if he has fake plates on? I jerk up but the seat belt holds me down. If he wasn't driving so fast I would open the door and jump out.

We've left the N2 and we are leaving Jack Gerwel and joining R300. I've never been in this side of town before and to say I'm terrified would be an understatement. I'm fine with our own townships but this side of town, please no. Shacks line the sides of the highway and the

billboard signs say “R300 Mitchells Plain”. Here I am driving to who knows where with who knows who at 4 in the morning. Who would have guessed that stupid is a five letter word - Lotus? I sit back and close my eyes, wallowing in my poor decision. I never should have gotten into this car.

"Hey", he nudges me gently. "What!", I respond rudely. “We’re almost there, you'll get some sleep now now”. Sleep? I'm not sleeping at a stranger's house! He must take me back home. “Look Sir. I'm sorry I was rude earlier. I'm usually not rude. Alcohol made me do it I swear. Look, thank you for the drinks, I truly appreciate it”. I sit up. Maybe had I just done this at the club he would have left me alone and I'll be in my bed by now. “That window has expired”, he says. “Please, I'm begging you. Ok, give me my bag. I'll give you all the money in there”, I'm trying hard to remain calm. “How much is in there?”, he asks, still looking unbothered. His car makes so much noise when he accelerates it's sounds like gunshots. “I don't know, R100. Isn't I gave you the other R300 so it will be R400 now”. That's all the money I have left between me and pay day but he can have it if that's what it will take to take me home. “And what exactly will I do with R400?”, he asks. I mentally roll my eyes. He can do a lot with that!

He off ramps, drives some more and makes so many short lefts I wouldn't be able to trace my way back even if I tried. He pulls into a bigger-than-the-neighbour's yard at a corner and the garage opens up. “We're home”, he says, getting my door. At this point I'm just saying silent prayers in my heart. I need to come out of this alive, whatever this is.

I follow him into the house, up the steps and into a bedroom. I don't even look around, I'm too focused on reciting my silent prayers. “Get into bed and get some rest. The bathroom is that way. I need to do some work downstairs”. He walks away, the door closing behind him, before I can even say a word. I look around the room and it's obvious there's no woman staying here. Everything looks expensive but it's mismatched and it lacks that feminine touch. Bawo! All those sneakers! Wow!

I take off my shoes and my height drops down a couple of inches. I'm not sure what I'm expected to do now but there's no way I'm getting into that bed! Ok, bathroom first, maybe I can jump out of the window and run away. That doesn't work out, we are upstairs.

Maybe he left the door open and I can sneak out. I've long decided he can take the bag and keep it, that can be replaced, my life can't. I quietly find my way downstairs, leaving my shoes behind. The plan is to get out and run. My heart stops when I'm three steps away from the bottom. He's sitting with another guy and they are counting money. At this time? Couldn't it wait? The gun sitting at the edge of the table is what made my heart stop. He really is going to kill me, isn't he! And that guy is buying me with that money they are counting, right? Now is a very good time to pray.

“Go to bed Lotus. You have that park run in the morning”, he says. Does he have eyes at the back of his head? How the hell does he know I run on Saturdays? This is getting creepier by the second.

I can barely breathe as I find my way back to the bedroom. There's no key on the door and there's nothing I can push to bar the door so I surrender to my fate and get into bed. Small tears are building in my eyes and I'm shivering. I wish I had my phone at least so I can text my loved ones goodbye.

I'm trying to fall asleep because I assume death in your sleep is more painless but that gun is haunting me. What if he's planning on killing me? But why me? I'll die for drinks? Besides, what am I doing sleeping in a stranger's bed? Why did I get into his car in the first place? What is wrong with me! Count as many sheep as I do, I remain fully awake.

PS: "Coloured" is not an offensive term in Cape Town
I know it's mixed race in some places but here we say "Coloured" and it's not derogatory at all. It's just like Black, White, Indian etc..

The door opens and I hold my breath and pretend to be fast asleep. I even snore a little to really sell that I'm sleeping. "Lotus", he says softly but I stay quiet. "You asleep?". Silence. Like I can say 'Yea I'm asleep!'. I'm not sure what he's doing but from the sound of it I think he's undressing. I stay still as he gets into bed and wraps his arms around me. His hands are a bit cold but I don't complain. I need to maintain my pretend sleeping. I can feel my body tensing and my heart is beating so loud surely he can hear it. I wish I had asked him his name earlier so that when I get to heaven and Peter asks 'who killed you?' I'll have an answer. Now I have his arms wrapped around me like a vine and I have no idea who he is.

His hand starts brushing my breasts over my dress, slowly as if testing the waters. I tense up more and struggle to remain 'sleeping'. His breath on my neck, his hand on my nipple and his naked body so close to mine we're practically Siamese twins. I can't believe he stripped down to nothing and got into bed with me. And I'm ok with this because? "Lotus", he shakes me a little. "Lotus". That voice in my ear will send me over the edge if he calls my name one more time. His voice is calm and considered and the way he's saying my name feels good. "What?", I respond, putting on my sleepy voice. "Turn around, asseblief (please)". He actually sounds polite and he's holding me like he's known me for a while. I roll my body around and it's too dark to see his face. My heart is beating fast but it's too late now to run away. He's so close, too close.

His hand slowly follows my arm down and even in the dark I feel his eyes boring through me. Electricity shoots through me at his touch making me shiver. This is dangerous and different and I guess it's that mysteriousness that has me getting excited. "I won't hurt you, I promise", he kisses me. "You know I have to ask. Are you ok with this?", he kisses me again. His voice is so husky now, I'm getting wet in all the wrong places. I nod but I guess he doesn't see it. "Yes". "Sure?", he asks. "Yes, I'm sure". I don't know why I'm saying yes but I think I just gave my consent, twice.

He takes my hand and guides it till it closes around him and gods he's rock hard. I blush on my own and again thank the darkness. I'm sure my cheeks turned scarlet. One occupational hazard of being light skinned! I'm not sure what I'm expected to do so I keep my hand grasping him, moving it slowly up and down. At least he can't see my facial reaction. There's an emergency meeting going on in my head. Half of me is screaming "Do It. YOLO!" and the other half is softly saying "Don't".

"Let's get you out of this dress", he whispers, silencing my mental voices. Why I don't resist, I don't know. I sit up with him and lift my hands up so he can pull it over my head. "This too, can I get it out of the way?", he asks, all that earlier rudeness gone. I nod, not sure if he can

see me or not. I lie back as he pulls them off me and as soon as he throws it on the floor his mouth closes around my nipple. I let out an 'aaah' to the sudden sensation and I guess it urges him on. Sucking, teasing with his tongue, little nibbles, I'm moaning in no time and my arms are holding on to him. He pulls the pillow away from under my head, lays me down and his body crushes down on me. Damn! His hands are everywhere, gently tracing the outline of my body, as if he's wanted to touch every inch of it for a very long time. Although my mind keeps asking me what I'm doing, all other senses have failed me.

I close my eyes and I so badly want to say no but my lips keep saying yes. My arms wrap around him pulling him even closer to me. I'm embarrassed by how wet I'm getting but well, Chelsea wasn't lying about me being in drought for a while now. He kisses me and I almost say "I love you". My body is coming alive in his arms.

He reaches over, opens the side drawer and I hear the sound of plastic crumpling. He keeps his one hand behind my head as he rolls it on with one hand. As he pushes my legs apart with his knee, I let out a moan. I was never ready for the intensity and my gasp says it. He's going in slowly, stopping to kiss me then back to finding his way in. When all of him finds his way in, I gasp for air and claw his back harder than I meant to. I lost my breath there for a second. I'm no virgin though, so why is taking him in so hard?

"Relax for me Lotus", he whispers in my ear and his accent sends spasms dancing throughout my body. The way he says my name does something to my soul. I breathe and try to relax. I'm already doing this so let me try and enjoy it at least. He stays there, not moving, just cradling my body like he's afraid to lose me. I can feel him throbbing in my core, eager to consume me. I try to relax some more and balance my legs in the air.

Then he moves and I'm propelled into space. He's not just hitting it he is strumming my strings and hitting those high notes I never knew I had. He's exploring, delving deep, experiencing me in a way no one ever bothered to and when I let out that soprano scream, he stays there on repeat, giving it like a reward. I'm screaming and holding on to his sheets and opening up for him more and more and more.

Just when I think I can't take anymore his lips come down on mine, kissing so gentle I can't breathe. "Turn around for me angel", he whispers in my ear, then plants kisses on my neck. Off me, I turn around and his hands guide me in the dark, holding my waist and pulling me back to him. With a flat palm on my back he pushes down and I descend, arching my back. My knees start trembling as he hits chord after chord of sweet melodies. So good, so deep, so hard, so beautiful. I want more and more and some more please. I can barely take him but I stay in formation, I don't ever want him to stop. Faster, the headboard is hitting against the wall, my screams are getting louder and my whole body is on fire turning my sweat into steam. I'm clenching and contrasting and twitching from within.

"Cum with me", he says it like he breathed it and that's the trigger I needed to topple over the edge. I'm cuming, he's cuming, we are cuming, merging our bodies together into one. I'm moaning, he's breathing, I'm yelling yes, he's going harder. I fall flat on my stomach as my body trembles and he lies on top of me, still buried in my depths. My first orgasm ever and I had no idea sex could feel this good.

There goes my celibacy in the most fulfilling of ways. He rolls off me with a sigh of satisfaction and pulls my body into his and those arms close tightly around me. "Sleep now

my angel”, he kisses the back of my neck. I snuggle closer because it’s too late to start acting like I have a brain now. Might as well ride this sexy wave while it lasts.

Probably my timing is wrong but I really need to know his name. “What do they call you?”, my voice comes forth unintendedly thin. “They don’t”, he says. “I mean...”, I try to rephrase my question. His hand gently closes over my mouth, “Ssshhh! Enough talking, now sleep for me angel”, he kisses my head. I sigh but I’m totally spent and I can feel sleep taking over. If not for the thoughts asking me what the hell I just did, I would have dozed off the moment he pulled out of me.

I can't believe I'm here right now. I don't even know where 'here' is. I've always been conservative and tried to be a good girl. I've had boyfriends before and I had sex with them but with none of them did it feel like this. Not even close! I never had an orgasm before and they never asked or cared and I never expected it because I never had it. None of them ever took proper notice of my body and their idea of foreplay was playing with my breasts here and there and kissing me just enough before beating it up like a drum. That was ok because that's all I knew. I guess that's why I managed to go almost a year without sex, I didn't exactly miss it.

Tonight I've been introduced to a whole new universe. This rude boy touched my soul and I don't think I'll ever be the same again. After my last boyfriend I took a celibacy vow. I was cut so deep I decided I needed a 20 year break from men. 'They are trash!' I decided and it's been a good road until now, in the hands of this buyer of drinks. To think I barely saw him, in the club he looked criminal but the light was dim, on the street he looked dangerous but that's what drew me to him, in the house he looked like my next mistake and a beautiful mistake he was. He might look different when I wake up in the morning but I know what he made he feel and if I wasn't so shy I would ask him to make me feel it again.

When he thinks I'm asleep, he lets my body go, plants a kiss on my cheek and goes to the bathroom. On his way back, he gets the light and I watch him staring out of the now open window. He really is mysterious but he fucked me so good I'm content. Looking at him there has me all up in my feelings right now but I'm dozing bad.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER FOUR

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It's past 7 in the morning when I wake up and it takes a minute to realise where I am. Oh no! I quickly pull the sheet over my exposed body. It must have gotten hot and I kicked off the covers. How long has he been sitting there looking over my naked body? Ok, now this is weird! He looks clean and polished, dressed complete in jeans, a red hoodie and a cap even and is sitting on an ottoman on my side of the bed watching me. That's gotta be the creepiest thing I've ever seen!

I'm not quite sure if I say good morning or what so I just keep quiet and hold on to the sheet. I need to find my dress and I hope he has hot water on. I must shower. I'm embarrassed about last night/early morning. Everything happened so fast I didn't get the chance to take time out and carefully think about it. I want to get out of bed and run, I want to ask him to excuse me

so I can dress up, I want to ask for a shower. I want so many things but I'm both too scared and too embarrassed to speak up.

Now I remember that he really didn't see me naked. He got into bed and felt me and did things with me in the dark. Is that why he's been sitting here staring now? To see what he didn't see last night? Weird! I'm not sure if all one night stands go like that though. I'd never had one before. It was passionate, sensual, affectionate, filled with love even. I felt him and looking at him now I feel like I want to feel him again. Something about his eyes is making me want to write a poem.

Fxck it, he doesn't know me so let me just tell him to leave. "Can I use your shower?", I look at him and immediately blush. I want a morning glory, one for the road but how do I ask? "Sure", he says but remains sitting there staring at me. "Uumm", I'm not sure how you ask someone to excuse you in their own bedroom. "I'll get you a towel", he comes to my rescue. He goes to the bathroom, puts a towel on the bedside and says I'll find him downstairs. Phew! "Hurry up, you need to make it to your Park Run at 9", he says as he closes the door. Alright, ok now that's more than creepy. We just met last night so how does he know I do the park runs on Saturdays? And he knows it starts at 9? He mentioned it yesterday but I was drunkish so it didn't quite register. I'll puzzle over that with Chelsea later.

He's beyond single shame or at least he's not cohabiting. Everything from shampoo to shower gel to Protex for men soap is macho. I take a quick shower, put on my panties and dress, pick up my heels and walk out of the bedroom. I know my weave is a mess after last night but there's nothing I can do about it. This hand untangling is the best I can do right now.

He's sitting by the steps looking down on his phone. I know he can hear my footsteps but he doesn't look back at me. I stop one step behind him and wait for him to say something but nothing. "I'm done", I finally decide to announce my presence. I hope he knows that 'I'm done' also means I'm done being here and I need to go to my flat as in right now. I'm hoping he'll at least drop me off. If he gives me R20 and tells me to get a taxi, I swear I'll throw a fit. He gets up and walks down without even looking back at me. I follow.

Only now do I get a clear look at the house. It's bigger than I thought and the stairs wind down to a clean living area semi-joined to a kitchen. A black granite counter top follows the walls of the kitchen, perfectly contrasting with the white cupboards. It looks too clean to be true. A brown couch sits in the living area, scattered with red cushions and a grey rug lies on its feet. Mismatch but a good try I guess. On the wall hangs a large curved screen where I assume soccer matches are watched. There's three ottomans, all black, another mismatch and white bar stools stand over there against the counter. So much space though! The curtains are half drawn, letting in some sunlight. It feels like, almost like home. I wonder why he has those high security burglar bars on the windows.

An enlarged neatly framed picture hanging on the wall captures my attention. It's of a man with a young boy sitting on his lap. They look happy, staring into each other's faces with big smiles. There is something about the picture that keeps me rooted, studying it. Maybe it's the sunlight dancing through the boy's hair or it's the background, I'm not sure. "That's my pops and me, now let's go", he says. "Where is he?", I stay rooted, still captured by the happiness in that picture. "He's gone. Now let's go....You'll be late for your run". I look up at him and that lip bite thing he's doing sends shivers up and down my spine. "I can't run today", I say and immediately regret voicing it. I mean, I'm late already and I must still go to town and get

the car, then go home and change, then drive to the park. Too much admin and not enough time. "Why not? Got all the exercise?", he says with a satisfied smirk. He laughs a bit and ruffles my already ruffled weave. I look at my toes embarrassed. "I'm sorry, was I too hard on you? You can't run now?", he flashes me that gold tooth smile. I think he's enjoying this! I blush furiously and keep looking down.

"For someone who talks as much as you do, you're awfully quiet this morning. What silenced you?", he chuckles and I keep looking down with a little smile on. "Jy is sexy! That dress my angel. Let's get going before I have you right here". He steps to me and runs his hand down my back. "Let's go", he whispers in my ear. I shake my head no. "No?", he asks, his breath on my neck. I nod this time. I can't find my voice. "You sure you're good missing a run?", that husky voice is back. I nod. "Should we go back to bed then? I could use some more of you". His hands close around my waist from behind and his hard on is unmistakable. I keep blushing and wondering what to do with my own hands. Can he stop now! Fine, I want to go back to bed with him but I still don't know him. But I really want a repeat of last night. But maybe I should go home. But I don't know anymore. "Come on, I verstaan you're tired. And if you won't run today then let's get some rest". I shrug my shoulders. "I'll only fxck you if you want me to, otherwise I'll just hold you and let you sleep", he whispers in my ear and I quiver. Goodness, he's so raw. Please no, I'm a Christian can he use respectful words.

I think I'm possessed because I nod and take his hand as he leads me back upstairs. I could use a talk with Chelsea right now but I could use sleep more and what faster way to fall asleep than investing your energy in a sexathon with a skilled stranger?

As his T-shirt comes off, my lips gap a bit as my eyes feast. I never had a guy yellower than me and this divine looking. Bloody hell, so guys who don't model also walk around with bodies like this? Wow! Maybe one day I'll get a chance to ask him about his addiction for ink. He has a tattoo of two swords crossed at the hilt on his stomach. The green is faded into his abs perfectly. Above his right breast is a rising sun with the rays radiating into tiny dollar signs. Seriously? Maybe he was young and stupid when he got that one. On the side of his neck is the head of a wolf and looking at it I think wolves should change their fur to green. There's a crown and four stars on his shoulder. There's the ones on his arms but he doesn't give me a chance to read them. There's more on his back too. I remember seeing a name there as he stared out of the window after that first time. I don't finish studying his body as he pulls me into his arms and in a heartbeat it's Versace on the floor. I think he just ripped my dress!

It's different this time because it's daytime and he can see me and I can see him. He kisses me from my lips all the way down, taking his time and studying my body as if for a national exam. When he gets down there I yelp. No one ever really went down on me. Thank goodness I shave religiously and boy I haven't lived! Other girls get to feel these things out here? Thank goodness I'm a girl, I think it's allowed for us to cum quickly.

"Lotus", he bites his lip like that when he comes back up. Ok, he really needs to stop saying my name like that. I love what I see and from his passion I think it's safe to say he loves what he sees too. It's different, it's intense, it's like a dream. This is it! I can't handle looking him eye to eye but I can handle him, if you know what I mean.

"Sleep angel. Get some rest". He kisses me and holds me close after the sexathon. I don't fight the sleep.

I wake up to voices and loud music. Tupac, seriously? I wonder what time it is! Poor Chelsea must be worried sick about me. I find my dress again on the floor and put it on and go to the bathroom to freshen up. My face is a mess with mascara smudged and some lipstick on my chin. He really went all out on me and I find myself blushing remembering it. Yea, when I showered earlier I didn't touch my face. I fix myself up as best I can and head downstairs, my heel announcing my descent.

There's four other guys in the living room, all visibly tattooed, eating and talking too loud. They stop and watch me as I go clink-clank down the stairs. They even silence Tupac! Such disrespect! The legend was still singing about Changes.

I stand on the last step not exactly sure what to do. They all stop and look at me. Ya ne, Square Root of Awkward! He's looking at me, I don't know whether in admiration or in "you're still here?" kinda way. Chelsea needs to coach me on how to handle mornings after one night stands. I keep my eyes on the floor as I walk towards my stranger. Life would be so much easier if I knew his name! I'm not sure how this will work but all I know is I need to get home now.

Can someone say something please. Their silence is killing me and I wish I could explain that I'm walking funny because I'm on heels and their stares are making me feel uncomfortable and not necessarily because their friend shifted my womb.

He puts his arm around my waist, pulls me in and gives me a kiss on the forehead. That receives unwarranted silly praises from his friends or whoever these guys with tattooed arms and necks are. I pray it's not a cult and I'm the sacrifice! Nah, only virgins get sacrificed isn't it? So I think I'm safe. They look rough though so I won't be surprised if they pull out fish knives and mug me right here, right now. Ok fine, I'm exaggerating. They actually look good if I'm being honest, except one, that one is a killer straight! I can bet my father's life on it.

His arm is still around my waist and they are talking and laughing, I'm pretty sure at me. I passed Afrikaans with level 4 in Matric but I'm hearing fokol here. This can't be Afrikaans, but it's not English either so entlek what language do Coloured people speak? Chelsea speaks proper Afrikaans though. And why are they talking so fast? What's the rush? I have to ask. Curiosity killed Lotus! I look up at him innocently. He looks down at me and his eyes you guys! His eyes! Shuuu! "What language are you speaking?", I ask in a voice dropped so low I doubt anyone else heard me. He sniggers a little. "It's ok", he kisses me on the forehead. "Don't tell me to...", I start and the idiot kisses me full on the lips! Making these other guys here whistle. Now I'm thoroughly embarrassed.

"Ready to go?", he asks. I nod. "Great. Let's go", already walking and leaving me standing there like a statue. I sigh but follow and the guys keep whistling and making stupid noises but to my disappointment they don't call him by name. I'm embarrassed but I'll live. I'm resting in the thought that they don't know me and they will never see me again. So let them judge on.

We don't talk at all in the car until we get to town. Only then does he ask where I parked. He stops in Loop Street, next to my (read Chelsea's) car.

“Not so fast. You owe me an apology”, he says as I step out of the door. “I owe you nothing!”, I step out anyway. “But I have your bag and to get it back, give me my apology and a thank you, maybe?”, with a smug smile. I walk around, snatch my bag from him and for the first time I see him, like really see him. Hold eye contact and all.

He could have been a model if not for those scars on his face and tattoos on his neck. But it's the scars on his face worrying me. He looks good but eeish, that thin cut running across his cheek, that small one over his eye, that one from his ear down to his jaw and that small teardrop tattoo under his eye! I think he could be like the face of prisons or something and be on a billboard with the catchphrase ‘Welcome to our prison, where pretty faces are rearranged. Enjoy your stay’.

Then he blinks and allows me to keep looking at him. I lift my hand and trace that scar on his cheek. I half expect him to rudely tell me to stop or to slap my hand away but he does neither. I so desperately want to ask who robbed him of what and stabbed him this many times. Bloody skollies! Who hurt him like this? I like his lips though, I could be biased because I know what they can do. But when all is said and done, it's those blue eyes that get my attention. He looks like a warrior who's fought countless battles and lived to tell the tale. I think I'll call him Brave Heart because of his warrior vibes. You know the movie, right?

“Are you wearing contact lenses?”, my thoughts turn into words unintentionally. “No, why?”, he looks at me funny. “Because your eyes look blue!”. I'm thinking duh, only white people get these colourful eyes, isn't it? “Yours look brown, so what's your point?”, he squints a little. That arrogance from last night is back! “I was asking if that's the natural colour of your eyes or if you did something to them!”, I roll my eyes. “That's not what you asked but yes if you should know, my eyes are blue, my hair is black, my teeth are white, any more parts of me you want to know the colour of?”, he winks.

Ok I'm done. I can't deal with his little attitude right now. I thought only white people have blue eyes! Ignorance is not a crime! I was also going to ask him why he's so pale and looks near-white than his friends back at the house but maybe not, he'll probably ask me why I look more yellow than black and I have no answer to that. “So? My apology? You owe me an apology!”, he brings me out of my thoughts. I'm glad he's speaking slowly because with that accent I wouldn't know if he's speaking English or Afrikaans.

Looking at his face I feel like actually giving him an apology for calling him ugly because although handsome is not a word I can use to describe him, ugly isn't either. Take off the scars and the excessive ink and the gold tooth and you have a flawless masterpiece right here. Forget his attitude. His body and memories it's coming with has me catching my breath. I mean, I ran my hands over it last night and it felt firm then I saw it this morning and I gasped and looking at it now, even through that hoodie, I know I must stay behind after church tomorrow for confession. I'm sinning all over again. Taut, hard, tall, strong and just the right size for me. “You are staring”, he says and I quickly drop my eyes. I really need to get away from this devil.

I have 18 missed calls from Chelsea and 4 from my mum. As I drive home I can't seem to stop thinking about the nameless. He didn't even ask for my number!

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER FIVE

[For those who shared the last and the last before that...THANK YOU. This BONUS is because of you]

I make it to Retreat singing along to Jason Derulo's - Love Hangover. Gosh I'm so tired! I can't even balance myself in these heels anymore so off they go. I'm carrying them and the bag that got me laid in my hands. I plan to tiptoe, get into my room and sleep. I have no energy for Chelsea right now.

What do I know! The little witch left the key by the door, now I can't open from the outside. I have to call her! Just great. At least I still have battery.

I can already tell from the way she's fighting the door from the inside that she's upset as hell. "And then?", she stands holding the door, looking at me like I'm a random person who just showed up on her doorstep. "I'm home", I state the obvious. "No Lotus! No, you can't do that! What the hell is wrong with you!", she goes off at me. "Sorry mum!", I walk past her. My energy levels are equal to zero right now. She grabs me by the arm and I'm forced to stop. "What the hell? Do you know how worried I was? Anything could've happened to you. The least you could've done is text so I know you're ok! Or answer your stupid phone dammit!". She yells at me and I feel bad actually. She's full on mummy mode, chewing my head off. "Do you know how many girls go missing every day? You wanna be part of the statistics now? You left with a stranger and you didn't think it ok to let me know you're ok? I was here worried sick!". She has a point I know, but I'm just so tired right now. I need to shower and sleep. She never sleeps out without letting me know where she is and who she's with. I wanted to do the same but then I didn't have my phone.

"I'm sorry babes. Really. I didn't have my phone. It won't happen again, I promise", I look at her with puppy eyes. "It better not! You can't go running with some guy and go silent. It's dangerous out here. Do you know how worried I was?". She sounds so concerned shame. I know she worries about me and she always jumps in to protect me. When she sobered up, she probably regretted leaving me with a random guy. She always has gone all out to save me. "I was wrong Chels but you'll understand when I explain. I swear nothing bad happened to me". She sighs out loud, dropping her shoulders in relief.

I walk to my room and she follows me. "So, dish! Who's the guy?". At least mummy mode is off now and she's back to her usual self. "I don't know actually". I look for socks in my drawer and put them on. I have zero energy to shower right now. I'll lie down first. "What do you mean you don't know? Didn't you spend the night with him?", she sounds shocked. I shrug my shoulders. "He refused to tell me his name". "That's weird. What exactly happened? Did he take you to his house or something?", she probes. "Ya something like that, somewhere around Mitchell's Plain". To be honest I don't know where that was but it's the Cape Flats somewhere there. "And?", she sits on the bed looking at me expectantly. "And what?", I'm tired though, can she let me sleep! Unlike her, I was working overtime. "Do you really want me to ask? Fine. Did you sleep with him?". I look at her and a naughty smile lights up my face. If only she knew! "Lotus Janse van Rensburg!". The shock on her face is priceless. "You had a one night stand! You? What happened to 'I'm a queen, only a king will enter my

body'?" . Whoah! Ok, let's judge the no-more-celibate girl, shall we? "He kinged alright", I bite my lower lip. If only she knew. "Spill!", she sits comfortably, ready to hear it all. "I'm tired babe, I'll tell you when I wake up". "No, you can't! You had sex with a guy you insulted, who looked like he would kill you or worse and you don't even know his name! This I have to hear right now!". Oh mann.

She wants all the deets and I dish out everything word for word. "Damn girlie! You stayed for extras in the morning? Who knew you had it in you!". She's silly. We all have a freak inside of us, we just need the right guy to awaken it. But ke I shocked myself as well. I tell about his friends and how arrogant he was but how nice he was. She keeps gassing me up and I keep spilling. She actually doesn't remember what he looked like. She must have been really drunk!

"Please tell me you used condoms", her mummy mode surfaces. "Of course we did. I'm not stupid you know". Like duh! That's a given. "Just checking. Maybe now you'll stop being uptight. You were long overdue for a service and I see my bru did you right". She's enjoying this and I smile to myself because words cannot articulate the things I felt. "So when are you seeing him again? You have to see him again", she smiles at me like an idiot. "Never. We didn't exchange numbers. I don't even know his name, remember?". That thought just put a damper on my mood. "Whaaaaat? Damn Lotus! A whole smart you mogher!? So this guy hustled you all your money then fxcked you silly and then left without even telling you his name?", she says, with that annoying laugh of hers. I shrug my shoulders and pout. When she puts it like that it doesn't sound nice anymore. I'm sure she can tell that doesn't sit too well with me so she stops laughing. "Oh well, you had fun though! It's not like you were looking for a relationship anyways. Hulk can hook you up with his friends". "No thanks, I'm not going Zimbabwean anytime soon. I still wanna walk in the morning". If you think Nigerian men are dangerous in bed then you obviously haven't tried Zimbabweans! The talk of the day is men and since I now know a thing or three, I'm not just a listener today.

I'm not so sleepy anymore by the time I'm done giving her the deets. She laughs hard at how he refused with his name. She's so annoying!

"Lotus wait", she stops like a thought just crossed her mind. "Remember not so long ago you were convinced that you were being followed?". "Yea, I do". I was paranoid I know but at the time I could have sworn that some car was stalking me. It turned out to be nothing though. "What if this guy was stalking you? You say he knows way more than he should about you. Think about it". I think about it for a second and mmm nah! "Why would a stalker be that nice and polite? Well he went back to being rude but in bed he was totally a pleaser. Like Chels, he went all out on me. Wouldn't a stalker wanna hurt me or something?". She thinks about it for a moment and she laughs it off. But her face tells me she's worried. Oh well, she always worries too much.

"I'm starving", I change the subject. "What? He didn't feed you?", she laughs her way out of my room and I can't help but laugh too. I doubt I'll be sleeping anytime soon. I need food now then sleep then a shower, in that order.

The story of how Chelsea and I became friends is a bit untraditional. I was in second year in Varsity and she was in third. Long story short, we were sharing the same boyfriend. She showed up in his room late one night and found me sitting comfortably on the bed with a heater on, eating Niknaks and watching something on his laptop. I will never forget her face

when she asked who I was. She admits that she wanted to whoop my behind but apparently I looked too timid so she felt sorry for me. When boyfriend dearest came to his room from watching soccer with his boys and what not, probably looking forward to doing me he had the shock of his life. He stood there looking from me to Chelsea to me then took off running. And that was the end of me and him and him and her and the beginning of me and her.

Chelsea and I joined forces and trashed his room before we left. We unnaturally bonded over that and helped each other through the joint heartbreak. Strange in a way. From there our friendship just blossomed like a lotus and grew into sisterhood and today she's the one person I would take a bullet for without hesitation.

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SUNDAY

It's 8 am and church starts at 9 am. I probably should wake up now but I don't feel like getting out of bed. I check my phone and Chelsea says she went out. She doesn't say where to. So early in the morning? Oh well. I text her a reminder about Dr Dirk's birthday this afternoon then text Dr Dirk to tell him I'll be bringing only one friend. He responds almost immediately with a Thumbs up emoji. Another missed call from my mum. Hay shame. I should have called her back yesterday already.

"Hi Sisi", I respond to her "Hello". I call her sisi (sister) because my grandmother raised me and that's who I called mama not her. "20 missed calls and not even a text back Lotus!". I often wonder why my mother bothered to name me Lotus if she insists on pronouncing it in Xhosa. Lothasi! And I feel that 'Tha' everytime. "I meant to call you back but life happened. Askies". "What happened that's more important than calling me?". I try to think of something but nothing comes to mind. "I'm sorry wethu. I meant to call you back on Friday but I kept forgetting". "You lie worse than your father!", she laughs and I make an annoyed face. How on earth does she finds jokes of a father I don't know funny. She knows I hate the subject but she constantly jokes about it. "I meant to tell you by the way, I wrote letters to uTatakho and Khumbule khaya! I've decided to look for my father since you won't tell me who he is". "You did what? I told you that your father died long before you were born. Now you want to embarrass me on TV? Is it my fault he died? Did I kill him? Did I? If you're tired of being my daughter bring those TV shows here. Bring them, they'll find me right here waiting for them", she goes from zero to hundred in a split second. Like sis can you relax, it's not that deep. Chill! I was joking. "Lotus! I know you can hear me. Switch to video call now". Yho! This mother of mine though. No need to be this dramatic. I was joking. Deep down I know she's lying about my father being dead. She just doesn't know who it is. "Lotus!!!!", I'm sure the whole township heard her. "Sorry sisi, hello? Hello? Can you hear me? Hello....Let me call you back. Network is bad". I hang up, put my phone on flight mode and get more sleep. I don't even know why we bother calling each other because it never ends well. But funny thing is we call each other at least thrice a week. On WhatsApp we're cool though. She tirelessly comments on my status updates. She says sweet things like "I luv dat u r gud my dota. Am hapi". If only she knew how much shorthand irks me!

I disable flight mode and send her a message. 'I was joking about the TV shows. I would never do that to you sisi. I love you lots'. She responds with many hearts and an 'I luv u 2 mabby. I luv u Lotty'. Kill me now. Lotty? 'I'll call you after church my love. Have fun with your friends *kisses*', I text her back. "Tx Lolo. I'll send u airtym 2mrw. Luv u nana

kiss". I smile as I read her text. I go through people's statuses on WhatsApp, videos finishing my data! Mxm! Why don't people put a warning that a video is coming up on their status so some of us can abort mission? Human beings bore me sometimes.

That birthday thing is this afternoon. Shucks. What will a girl wear? This is my boss we're talking about! Yazini, no need to stress. I'll pray about it. You've got to be kidding me. It's 8:40 now! But how? It was 8 O'clock 2 minutes ago! Witchcraft at its best. I jump out of bed and dash to the shower. Church is a must for me. I was raised in a strong Christian background and my grandmother used to drag me to church every Sunday, come rain come sunshine! So going to church is the only way to keep the connection between me and her alive. She's provinces away and I miss her so much. Her picture that's stuck between mirror and board in my bedroom is the one thing that makes me want to do more and be better. She says she doesn't need me and I must focus on building myself but I can't fight the urge to want to make her life better.

My mother on the other hand, we lack that connection. We fight like siblings and make up like siblings. She's more into men and alcohol and complains about everything and everyone. She never takes responsibility for anything! It's always someone else's fault! I think she loves me in her own way but I also think she resents me. I'm her only child and she had me at 16. She feels like I stole her life from her although really it's my grandmother who raised me when she went out to taverns with her friends. So she's cranky and bitter and I know she hates that job of hers saying 'next customer please' everyday. I doubt she knows the inside of a church because to her Sunday is the only day of rest and catch up with her friends. Maybe one day when these companies start paying me what I deserve, I'll make her life better and our relationship can be mended. She is a good mother in her own way. She sends me airtime, sends me R1000 every year on my birthday and on her every pay day, she transfers R500 to me and the reference always says "Sana Lwami (my baby)". So I think she loves me and I hope she knows that I love her too.

I'm running really late and the reasonable thing to do right now would be to get into bed and accept that no blessings for me today. But no way will I miss mass! I need to wash my sins clean and reset before starting a new week. There's a good reason church day was placed on Sunday, the first day of the week, so all our week's transgressions can be purified. We all walk into the house of the Lord Red Riding Hoods cloaked in crimson and walk out Snow Whites with our slates clean and white as snow. Each week we are given another chance to mess up all over again till the next Sunday, a beautiful cycle of cleanse and err.

I drive like a maniac. I stand outside the two large wooden doors channelling the warrior in me so I can have some courage to walk in. After three pumps of breath I push the door in and tiptoe. The doors fly open with a loud creaking sound, definitely not what I intended. The priest pauses and all heads turn towards the door, towards me. I've always hated attention and right now I wish the marble tiles under my feet could shift aside so the floor can swallow me up.

I quickly dip my fingers in the holy water behind the door and make a clumsy sign of the cross. I hate that people fill up the back benches so now I have to walk towards the front looking for space. The beautifully multi coloured windows reflect red light through Mother Mary's face painted on them making my dress look like it's dancing as I walk. Probably beautiful to behold but unwanted attention right now. I keep close to the wall, careful not to

bump into the statues of our beloved saints that stand silently at every pillar. It's awfully quiet. In hindsight, I should have just stayed in bed instead of rushing here.

Yes there. I'll sit there. I wish my stiletto wasn't clanking against the floor so loudly! "Excuse me", I whisper as I make my way through the tiny space between the kneeler and people's knees. For Christians, these people don't practice the 'be kind to others' code. They seem upset at me for disrupting the liturgy and are deliberately making it hard for me to pass! Forgive them Father for they know not what they are doing.

The priest only resumes after I've settled down. The old woman on my left, clothed in the light and dark brown St. Anna's uniform gives me a distasteful eye and pursed lips. I pretend not to see her although I can feel the judgement seeping through her pores. I don't understand such animosity on holy ground! I opt for kneeling to say a little prayer to let the Lord know that he can now tick me present on the register. I am late yes but I arrived and that's all that matters.

I'm half glad, half shocked when the priest says, "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world", I only join the masses on the third count and recite "Grant us peace" with a fist on my heart. This means I missed half of the mass! Good gracious mercy follow me! Good because I missed offering so my spare change is spared but bad because I missed the sermon which some argue is the most important part of mass. But thankfully holy communion is coming right up so I'll partake in eating the flesh and drinking the blood of our saviour. That's something to look forward to.

I join the queue and eventually make it to the altar. Holding my left hand over my right I receive the host and say my 'Amen'. This host here is the most important part of mass for me, I believe it and I utter my sincerest prayers after receiving. I never ask for much from heaven, all I ever ask for is for my data to last a little longer and for strength not to murder my boss. I probably should be praying for a husband like girls my age do but after my last boyfriend, count me out fam. I'm off men for a very long time. Nigga proved to me why hurricanes are named after people and I vowed from the day I said 'boy bye' that I'm strictly doing me, excuse the pun. I find myself praying for the mystery guy. Praying for a chance to see him again one last time.

I pray for my mother and grandmother back home and for Chelsea, so she too can repent and come to church with me. The three women in my life. I know I need to stay behind after mass for confession because I sinned deeply but I think I'll skip confession for today. I'll let my sins pile a little more and bring them all at once end of month instead of these weekly instalments. The truth is I'm not yet ready to ask for forgiveness for what I did yesterday.

Let me go home and get ready for my boss's birthday lunch.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER SIX

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"Chels, dress up already! We'll be late". She's sitting on her bed in boyfriend jeans, a bodysuit and sneakers. She has her hair up in a high ponytail, looking all kinds of cute. While I was at church, she dyed her hair and now it's black on the roots and blonde all the way down. "I'm ready. Been waiting for you", she says without even looking up. "Ummm", I'm not sure what to say. Boyfriend jeans are nice and comfy but they're a bit laid back. She looks up at me and raises an eyebrow like 'what?'. Only now does she see what I'm wearing. "Girlie, we're going to an old person's birthday party ok, in a farm noga! We're not going for dinner at the White House". "What? Don't I look ok?", I twirl in my designer dress and a very high heel. I thought this outfit through, how dare she disrespects Jimmy Choo like that! "You're overdressed. You look good yes but totally inappropriate for a farm style birthday thingy". I look at her and blink blink. "Come, let's find you something else to wear". She walks past me and I follow her to my room.

She'll drive me crazy I swear. She takes out my neatly folded clothes from the closet and dumps them on the bed. Before I can stop her, she pulls out another pile from a shelf and it joins the rest on the bed. She goes through my stuff and stops at a pair of jeans and a black top. "Put this on. It's winter and you have no business leaving your arms and legs out to freeze like that.Put on that red jacket. I think it's light enough". "We'll be under-dressed!", I have no desire to appear poor. My mum always says, "Rather spend money on clothes baby and eat pap. No one will see what's in your stomach but everyone will see what you're wearing".

"Trust me sweetie, you're champagne dressed for a beer party!", she sounds sure of herself. "Jeans though? What will people say?", I'm not convinced. "People? What happened to doing you boo boo? You want to stand on that high heel all afternoon? What if they laid the table outside? The sun came out to play today. Will you walk around on dirt in that heel?". I wish I had her "I don't care" attitude sometimes. I'm only trying to learn it now at my big age and it's not easy. Growing up in the township taught me that we live in a society so by virtue of that you have to care what people say. Every adult is your parent back there so their opinions count. The likes of aboChelsea always had the confidence and the middle fingers up attitude. I may be wrong but I think it's because she grew up around money so rich people of whatever colour or status don't intimidate her and she never feels like going out of her way to fit in. I'm still getting there, vigorously so sometimes.

I'm not convinced that I must dress down like that. So I wear the jeans alright but pair them with a small boot and a cute jacket. At least now I'm in between. She says I look good. She remains unbothered in her boyfriend jeans and sneakers. I probably should start using my waist trainer more, I need my waist to look as cinched as hers.

She drives and GPS leads us towards Stellenbosch. It's pretty far. You mean to tell me that my boss drives this distance every day yet still gets to work before me? Wow! I need to re evaluate my goals in life.

We're in the farmlands. I wonder if this is still Stellenbosch or it's now Franschhoek? We make it to our destination. A typical wine estate, where you off ramp from the tarred road, drive on dust in between vineyards until you get to the Cape Dutch building with white washed walls, multi-paned windows, green roof and a decorative central gable.

We park and find our way to the other side of the building. There's people everywhere and stalls selling everything, from 'home made' food to 'Authentic African' beads to 'handmade'

jewellery to 'organic' honey. As a Food Scientist I know most things that claim 'organic' are not exactly organic in the strictest meaning of the word but it's a weekend and my brain should be allowed to not think deeply. I think it's a Sunday Market. And there are dogs everywhere! I hate dogs, those things bite but their owners are always quick to say "It doesn't bite. It just wants to play!". Well, I play with my food too but guess how the game always ends...with the food eaten.

Let me call Dr Dirk. I think it's silly to throw a party at a Weekend Market but different strokes for different folks.

"Sir, we're here". "Great. When you get to the white building, turn right and follow the road for 3 km. I'll wait for you outside". "Ok. Dankie. See you soon", I hang up. Yerrr! I always find myself speaking Afrikaans words to this man. That's how much he unnerves me. I'm just glad the party is not here. The dogs would spoil it for me.

We find our way back to the car and drive down to the the farm houses. Wow! People are living out here! Such bug houses surrounded by nature's finest.

There's Dr Dirk looking as chilled as a freezer. Shorts, a plain golf T-shirt, shades and Havaianas. "Welcome", he opens his arms for a hug which I reluctantly give, then he hugs Chelsea too. Awkward for me. We've never hugged before. "Dr. Dirk, this is...", I start but he cuts me short. "Please, call me John. We're not at work". I doubt I can call him by name so now I'm not sure how to proceed. "Hi John. I'm Chelsea. Nice to meet you", she saves the moment. She has so much confidence shame. Straight posture, eye contact, firm handshakes, stable speech. I can only wish to get there one day. "Nice to meet you too Chelsea", he shakes her extended hand. "So are you owning or are you renting?", Chelsea says, her eyes looking at the big farm style house in front of us. "Well, let's just say I'm one of those 30 something year olds who never moved out of their parents' houses", he says casually. When is he so friendly? "Between renting and staying at your parents' big ass house on a farm, stay at home kiddo!", she brushes his arm and he looks down at her. "So, why are you not wearing your ring. I couldn't help but notice a missing band on your left hand". "Oh that, I suppose it's harder to get married when you're still living under your mother's roof", he says and they exchange naughty smiles. I'm just here blinking and thinking 'what?'. "That can't be it John. Science says, it's harder for good looking guys to find a partner. So there now you have the reason", she laughs a little and brushes his arm again. Wow Chelsea! "Thank you my lady. Now shall we go and join in the festivities?". "I thought you'd never ask. I'm famished! And you can tell, I'm a girl who loves her food!", she giggles and turns around, popping that ass and giving Dr Dirk a view to die for. "I can tell. If food is the reason you look like this, then all I can say is keep eating". Oh wow! Do they need a room?

I clear my throat to remind them that 1) They just met and 2) I'm still here. "Lotus, you made it on time", he turns to me. I flash him a lazy smile. I don't know why their flirting is annoying me. They just met for crying out loud!

Dr. Dirk leads us to the kitchen inside the big house. We say "Hi, Hi" to the few people we bump into. There's finger food but nothing calls me. Cheeses, olives, small tomatoes, raw salmon, funny looking pie like things, sushi.... No, those are acquired tastes and clearly I still need to acquire some taste. Chelsea picks up chopsticks and I watch her effortlessly pick up a California roll, dip it in a Wasabi + Soy Sauce mixture then put it all in her mouth. She loves sushi and she's been trying to teach me how to hold chopsticks. The best I can do sushi-wise is cooked sushi for now and I eat it with a fork.

"You're just on time. Come, let's go meet everybody. Food will be served shortly", a lovely older woman says. She didn't even ask who we are! Chelsea is still laughing with Dr Dirk and discussing some facts about sushi origins. Oh wow! They are shamelessly flirting in front of me.

The three of us follow the older woman to the courtyard at the back. How big is this place exactly! A long table has been carefully set and I immediately feel small. It happens a lot when I feel out of place. Let me be politically correct and say "I'm the only person of colour in this place". Well, Chelsea falls under the same umbrella but she's not black so today I'm excluding her in my definition. It's tiring because of my reality and where I come from, I easily feel like I'm beneath more privileged people. That always gets my guard up and I think subconsciously I'll be waiting for someone to say something racist or to just treat me differently. That's exhausting to be honest and it takes away the fun.

Phew! I'm gladder than glad that Chelsea took me out of that outfit. Everyone is chilled in jeans, shorts and simple dresses. We go around the table being introduced to everyone and end up sitting with the lovely lady who brought us here on my left, Chelsea on my right and Dr Dirk on her right.

People are living out here. I've been to wine farms and restaurants on farms before but never to a farm house. I grew up in a township, that's all the home I know so this place is making me feel some tyfa way. It's beautiful make no mistake. Grandeur is the proper word I think. I guess it makes me sad to know that dream as big as I might, I'll never get to this level of success. It will generations before we get here.

As usual, everyone exclaims at what a beautiful name I have. I don't remember half the names of the people at the table but they are fun and the woman who played usher with us is force feeding me. We've been eating! Chelsea is sorted and you would think my boss and her have known each other forever!

I'm going easy on the wine because I'm representing an entire race here, I need to keep my head fixed on my neck. When the birthday boy gets up and goes somewhere, Chelsea turns to me. "You said he's a dick! What do you mean? He's an absolute sweetheart!". Really now! She must work for him one week and let's see if she'll still think he's a sweetheart!

I'm curious if these serving girls bringing food and wine are a catering company or they are servants. I don't know who to ask or how to ask to be exact. A band with saxophones and other fancy instruments is playing slow boring jams and a few people are dancing, if I can call these movements dancing!

Wine is working on the lovely lady next to me and she's telling us how awesome John (Dr Dirk) is and how he's self made and worked hard to start his own company. Self made huh? Eye roll! "You have to make sacrifices to get where you want in life! John fought tooth and nail to get his company off the ground. We are so proud of him. And you darling, are all he talks about!", she says. I was ready to tell her to stop it until that last line. "He talks about me? What about me?", I'm shooketh. "He says you're his right hand man and you keep his company afloat. He thinks very highly of you Miss Lotus", she says with a smile. Yeah right. If he valued me that much, wouldn't he pay me more or maybe give me a permanent position? "Let me tell you a secret about life. In life you have to work hard to reach the level

of success you want. Nothing comes easy. Many people in this country expect handouts but it doesn't work that way. You have to work hard or be content with your poverty!", she says. I look at her long and hard then pick up my glass of wine and take a few gulps. "You find these lazy people complaining the loudest and burning down everything. How do you help someone who doesn't see the value of something? You give them something they burn it down! Pure laziness if you ask me". She sips on her wine again. I finish my own and turn to face her. "You're wrong!", I look at her straight in the eye. "Excuse me?", she looks back like I've crossed a line. "Hard work in this country of ours doesn't translate to a successful life. Our people work the hardest, we do the tedious long hours of manual labour. We clean your houses, work your land, work in construction sites, stand on our feet all day long. At street corners, who do you see sitting there, waiting to do whatever piece job they can get? Who do the construction trucks pack up at 5 am on raining winter nights? So lazy? We do the hardest work but see where we are. Still at the bottom of the totem pole! So no, being poor doesn't mean we are lazy. The odds are just against us and guess who's responsible for that. Take a wild guess or should I bring a mirror?". I'm getting worked up and I've raised my voice a little, attracting attention. I probably should stop talking now but not before I say this.

"As for saying we are violent and we burn everything? Do you even know why we resort to that or are you so sheltered you can't see what happens out there?". She's looking at me scared! "Why are you being so rude? Did I say your people? I said human beings in general! We all suffer alike", she starts sniffing and tears actually fill her eyes. Are you kidding me? "Please, don't insult my intelligence. We both know who you meant!". I think I'm going to need more wine. I didn't mean to get this worked up but I'm tired of people saying the reason we're poor is because we're lazy! We work long hours for peanuts. So, lazy? Try again.

Dr Dirk must see that a volcano is about to erupt here so he comes around and with a smile, he tries to blow out the flames. "Ladies. My apologies for lack of manners. Can I take you on a tour of my place? I mean, my family's place". I'm about to say "I'm not done here" when Chelsea jumps in and says "Sure". I need a glass of water and my boss gladly gets me one in the kitchen. "I'm sorry Doc, I didn't mean to ruin your party". I'm not sorry for what I said but I didn't mean to cause tension. "Never apologise for speaking your mind", he says, resting his hand on my shoulder. Chelsea gives me a reassuring nod and I feel better.

I'm naturally not a jealousy person but this is making me feel some kinda way. This place is too much for one family. The house is humongous. What's with an entire room designated just for storing wine! Then a pantry bigger than my bedroom. So much wealth for one family should be illegal.

"Can I use the ladies', please John", Chelsea says so seductively I can't believe it. "Sure, down the corridor, turn right, you'll see it on your left", Dr Dirk says. Usually I would tag along but I'm too busy being upset at these people for being rich.

"Lotus. Thank you for coming through. I appreciate it", he says. It's just the two of us and the large space suddenly feels small. His Creed scent is rich in the air and I have nowhere else to look but at him. "Thank you for the invitation. My friend and I are honoured", I force a smile. "Back there, you made valid points by the way. Don't feel bad about it at all". I look at him not sure what to say and I mumble my "Thanks". "I need to use the restroom too. I'll be right back", I scurry away before he can stop me. Phew! That was uncomfortable. Reassuring yes but he was too close, I felt the walls closing in.

I find Chelsea looking at herself in the mirror. Such vanity! "I'm proud of you", she gives me a kiss on the cheek. "You are?", I look at her with eyes begging for reassurance. "I am. You're finding your voice. Keep at it". She kisses me again and says maybe we must leave the party and go order pizza and catch up on Vampire Diaries. I agree.

Dr Dirk makes sure we leave with a crate of 12 wines. He also wrapped up one of the platters of food assortments in foil and gave it to us. Yazi we didn't even bring presents but look at us leaving with food.

"He's hot! There's something about him", Chelsea says as she drives us home. "Really now?". I don't think of him like that at all and I guess I don't expect Chelsea to as well. "I like him. He's different and mature and he exudes sexiness. Plus I like a challenge. He looks like a hard nut to crack", she says and I'm afraid she means it. "Please date him, then in one of your pillow talks, ask him to give me a raise tu". She laughs and says most definitely.

Never happening.

We pull up to our place and I know that car parked near the gate. "You've got to be kidding me!". "What?", Chelsea looks at the car I'm pointing at but it doesn't register. "The guy from last night!", I whisper, as if he can hear me with our windows closed. "What? Lotus, did you give him our address?", she looks at me accusingly. I shake my head no. I can tell she has more to say but I'm excited and butterflies are flapping in my stomach. "Get the car in. I'll be up in a minute". I don't wait to hear what she has to say. I get my door and thank the Lord for that bathroom break before we left Dr Dirk's house. At least I got to brush my weave and touch up my face. I put on my serious face and walk towards the car.

I'm not sure whether I should jump into the front seat or I should go around to the driver's seat to talk to him. Luckily, he gets out and I find myself staring. He has his hood over his head and he looks clean from head to toe I could swear he washes himself with Handy Andy.

"Lotus", he nods at me like I'm his homeboy and passes me. He gets the passenger door and nods at me again. I swear I don't want to get into his stupid car but look at me. I get in, fold my arms and look out of the window. I'm thinking he'll say something but nothing. He goes around and starts the engine and before I can say "stop" the car drives off. Mann, that bursting sound this car makes scares me. I hate it!

When he joins the main road, what option do I have than to fasten the seat belt? I so desperately want to ask him so many questions but since I entered here with attitude, I don't know how to swallow my pride and snap out of it. I wish I could tell him about my confrontation with the woman who went from lovely to racist in minutes. I feel bad deep down. Maybe I embarrassed myself in front of my boss. But he said I did nothing wrong. I hope he wasn't just being kind.

We keep driving and I'm looking in front now. So he thinks I can't see that he keeps stealing glances at me? Pshhh!

The Cape Flats are so far. We've been driving for a while now and I keep wishing he'll get tired of keeping quiet and break the ice. 20 minutes in and still driving, I've lost my will to keep my mouth shut. I brave it at a red traffic light and turn my face towards him. What's the worst that could happen?

"What's your name?", I ask with an innocent voice. Not knowing is really killing me. He looks at me and does that lower lip bite that turns me to marshmallows. "Did I ask you what your name was?". "No you didn't, but...". "But I know what it is. Lotus, isn't it? Lotus Janse van Rensburg". "Yes but...", he's frustrating me and I hate that he knows so much about me but I know nothing about him. "But nothing angel. Don't make your problems mine", he scoffs and unlucky for me, the robot is green now and the car is bursting on. "Fine! Treat me like you treat all your other one night stands!". I fold my hands and look away. I'm hoping throwing a tantrum will get him talking. It gets him talking alright but not what I expected. "One, it was morning so it can't be a one NIGHT stand. Two, how do you know how I treat my other one night stands? Three, who told you I do one night stands? Please answer me in order", he quickly glances my way before looking back on the road. I have no come back so I keep looking out of the window.

We pull up at his place and he gets my door like a gentleman but he doesn't wait for me when I step out! The door is open and I can hear laughing and music from inside. I follow in and it's three guys watching a game and drinking beer. I'm not sure if it's the same guys from yesterday or not, I wasn't paying attention. "Alright, party time is over. I need my house to myself now. Get out", he takes the remote and switches off the TV. So it's not me, he's rude by nature? Good to know. "But the game is on bru. We'll leave at half time", one of them says. "No. You leave now. Close the door on your way out", he dumps the remote and walks up the stairs. It's not long before the TV is back on and those guys are laughing. I keep thinking maybe he'll turn around and shout at them but he keeps walking up. Oh well, I'll get a headache if I try to figure this guy out.

"So, you owe me another apology", he sits on the bed and takes off his shoes. "For what?", I lean against the wall and purse my lips. "You kept me waiting outside your place! I'm not a very patient guy you know", he says it like we had an appointment! I didn't even know he would show up. I'm glad he did though. I prayed that he would so I guess prayers get answered after all.

"I need to take a shower. Make yourself comfortable". I just look at him and mentally roll my eyes. When he's gone, I take my phone and text Chelsea 'I'm fine. I'm with Mr D. I'll be home soon'. We're calling him Mr D because of the drinks and well, you know what else. She replies with a 'Be careful babes. Get back soon. Call the police if you suspect anything'. She's melodramatic.

I go through my messages and when he comes back, I fight the urge to look at his naked self. I want to look but I need to play cool. I keep waiting for him to come at me and give me some, I'm more than ready. Why is he dressing up instead of undressing me? My heart breaks a little when he dresses all the way up and says "Let's go". I'm thinking maybe to get food then come back and do the things. Obviously, he wants me.

Those guys are still downstairs. He completely disregards them and walks to the car, gets my door and we are gone. I have my fingers, toes and everything crossed that we will get food and come back to his place. I want him I can't lie. Nope, silence and we drive all the way to my place. As he parks, I'm thinking 'so this guy came here to take me so I can go and wait for him while he showers?'

I'm looking at him and he's looking at me. He's not being rude or silly right now. I lean over and kiss him. Thank heavens he didn't pull back instead he cups my cheeks and kisses me back. It must be the awakened emotions because I pull back and whisper in his ear, "Can we go back to your place?". He stays silent and I feel his breath on my neck. "No we can't", he eventually says. Just like that! "Why?", I'm hoping my voice is not sounding pitiful. "Don't worry about it", he says, so seductively you wouldn't believe he's rejecting me.

"Lotus, look at me", he pushes me back, away from him until his face is in front of mine. I keep staring at him, waiting for him to say something. "Look at me", he commands. "I'm looking at you". My finger involuntarily goes up and traces the scars on his face. I trace each one with my finger as if I'm measuring them. He lets me and I can't explain the look in his eyes. It surely can't be fear. What can he be scared of? Could he be scared of me? What a joke my darling.

"I'll trade you a question for a question. Ask me anything and I'll answer truthfully and I'll ask you something back and I'll expect the same. Just one question, go", he says. "Are you serious?", yippee, finally I get to know his name. *Internal happy dance*. "I'm dead serious. There's your answer now it's my turn", he says. "What? I haven't asked yet!", my eyes pop open. "You asked if I'm serious and I said yes. I answered your question, now it's my turn". Wow! Tjo! I didn't see that one coming. Now I know why referees are important.

"Answer me truly, are you scared of me?", he asks. I find that question bizarre but I promised to answer truthfully so I shake my head no. "I'm not scared of you" and that's the honest truth. "Thank you". He kisses me on the forehead, then cups my face and kisses me Frenchly. When I'm getting into it he stops, gets out of the car and comes around to get my door. I'm confused and a little hurt as I step out. I wanted more and I feel cheated. I wanted to ask him who he is and how he knows me.

"Goodnight Lotus". He doesn't even wait for my "same to you". Before I know it he's driving off and I'm left standing on the pavement thinking "What is this? What just happened?".

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER SEVEN

"All animals are equal but some are more equal than others".

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THURSDAY.

The audit is tomorrow and I'm terrified to say the least. It's been a crazy week. Everything hurts, especially my feet. I don't remember sitting down this week. It's been crazy getting things ready and forging more than half of the paperwork. I'm so tired even my tired is tired but there's no rest on this side of the grave, is there?

I just finished preparing the staff for tomorrow. I need them to be in their best behaviour and unlearn all the bad habits we often let slide. We're cutting production by half tomorrow so only half of the workers will come in. The fewer people we have in the factory, the better for audit purposes. They will be easier to manage and to keep an eye on. I hate being the mouthpiece of this company! I have to 'threaten' the workers that if they fail to do exactly

what I'm telling them to do or decide to tell the auditor the 'truth' about how we really run this place, they will be fired. Mind you, some of these people are older than my mother and I'm here forced to talk to them like they are primary school kids! But it is what it is in this hellhole, to the workers I'm the traitor who thinks my being light skinned makes me white. Some even say I'm sleeping with the boss that's why I get royal treatment. Royal treatment? If only they could see my payslip, they would give me a hug and tell me it's ok.

"That will be all. I can not stress enough how important it is that you do exactly as I said tomorrow. I know I'm sounding harsh but this is for our own good. If this company gets shut down then all of us won't have jobs. So bring on your best behaviour tomorrow". I smile and dismiss them. They don't like me at all. I don't get it but it's fine, as long as it doesn't subtract the two zeros in my salary then I'm good.

"Us'qhela kakbi lomtana! Tshini bethuna (This child undermines us)", one lady says as they return to their stations. She doesn't like me at all but she always smiles at me graciously. "Did you say something?", I look at her innocently. "No, just talking about work my child, nothing important", she says with that smile of hers. "Oh, alright then. I'll leave you to it".

Yes I'm Xhosa but no one here knows that. I communicate strictly in English. My surname throws people off as well. Most think I'm Coloured anyway but what business do I have controlling people's thoughts? I enjoy hearing them gossip about me. I can't wait for the day I'll lose it and respond with my deep Xhosa. But right now I have bigger problems to attend to.

I think I mentioned that we break every rule here and parting with money is something Dr Dirk is allergic to. You won't believe the things we do here. Employees have to wear the same hairnet for a week. Do you know how thin that material is? It's called "disposable" for a reason. The workers pay for their own protective clothing. When they start working here, they're given all the required work gear then R100 is deducted from their salary until all the money is paid off. I know R100 doesn't sound much but trust me, it's a lot. That's a train ticket for a month! And oh, every employee takes the protective clothing home on Fridays to wash them. I think all these practices are illegal.

So ya, only half the staff will report for work tomorrow. It's bad because although it's not their fault that they can't come to work, they still won't get paid for it. Yep, they get paid per day and a day off, sick or not, Doctor's note or not, voluntary or not, means no pay. "No work, no pay", Dr Dirk always says. It's sad really because I know the Labour Laws but do you really think I would march into my boss's office and start reciting the rights of workers? I'll probably be fired faster than I can say CCMA.

What makes me sad is the racial divide in this place. The black people work the floors and the manual work, while the guys in the offices (all white): The Accountant, supervisors, marketing team and all those with proper job descriptions are treated like kings and they walk around this place like peacocks. I have to work with everyone and often play mediator. It sucks really because what they've done with me is give me a fancy job title but keep my salary at floor level. I think I should re read my contract to see what my job description is exactly. I feel like I do the job of five people on my own! Nd'yaqheleka sana! (They don't take me seriously).

I've had a very hectic week. There was so much to do and my boss wasn't making it any easier! He's been breathing sulphur and fire down my neck and shouting at everyone as if it's our fault that this company of his is this messed up! He acts like we didn't spend last Sunday drinking wine and him flirting with my friend. Human beings confuse me. I get that he's frustrated but I'm even more frustrated. He will fire me if we fail and I don't know where I'll begin looking for another job.

My favourite time of the day is now after work when I get to make supper and listen to Chelsea. She's a lawyer in the making, still doing her articles and Miss beauty and brains is having it easier than me. I don't understand half the stuff she does and this working with clients business and the whole shebang but I love watching her eyes come alive when she talks about her work. Sometimes I think I envy her and wish I could be more like her. She has it all: the looks, the brains, a job she's excelling at, a family that loves her to bits, a boyfriend that sometimes loves her, other boys that drool over her and a personality to die for. I draw most of my positive energy from her and half of my wardrobe of course. I can't wait to call her Advocate Chelsea one day. She'll make a kick ass lawyer I know.

It's getting really late but I had to print out all the required documents for tomorrow. I'm back at my desk sorting the papers from the printer. I really don't get paid enough for this! The last of the batch is definitely not mine. It's a CV of one of the supervisors and a payslip! Screw confidentiality, I'm going through this stuff. I sit back on my chair and my heart sink. I think I'll have a panic attack, a heart failure and a stroke all at once. She earns four times my salary and has benefits! How?

Maybe the CV will explain. I'm so mad I want to tear this whole place down. This woman is not even qualified to work in the Food Sector to begin with! Which explains a lot by the way. Fine, she did a short course in Hotel and Catering but that's not the food manufacturing industry! How did she get the job? Is this even legal? And her position is below mine so how exactly is she getting paid so much more! I practically do her job for her since she never knows basic Food Technology concepts. I never got it before but looking at her CV, I get it now. I'm pissed and I wish Dr. Dirk was still here so I can give him a piece of my mind and flip my middle finger in his face! Why am I bothering so much with this place when clearly I mean nothing? I'm not done preparing for tomorrow but I'm so out of here. It's not even like I get paid overtime! They can go hang, all of them!

I get home after 9 pm and unfortunately Chelsea is already sleeping so I can't vent. I can't go to bed this angry though. I'll have nightmares! I buy airtime and immediately curse the day MTN introduced XtraTime. Now I'm forever on the negative and you don't know pain until you recharge and MTN sends you a "Thank you" message and reminds you that you still owe them R10.

Mark Zuckerberg, bless your heart for keeping WhatsApp alive for us. I video call my mum and I know she doesn't know half the things I'm going on about but she's listening shame. She agrees with me that it's ridiculous and that she knows exactly how I feel.

"But you can't quit my baby. Don't quit a job when you have nothing to fall back on. Find something better first then you can quit!".

"But sisi I'm exhausted. They pay her so much more but she does half the work I do! I'm going to write a resignation letter right now!".

"I know you're angry my baby. But don't make long term decisions when you're angry. Sleep and if you feel the same in the morning then do it, just don't do it right now". Since when is she so wise?

"Wena you think you have problems! Let me tell you about my friend at work", she has a dramatic way of talking when she's telling gossip. In no time, I'm laughing and all that anger is gone. She's telling me about a friend of hers who lost her ID last year and didn't report it and now she wanted a new one and when she got to Home Affairs they told her she was married and had to bring her marriage certificate. It's not funny I know but the way she's saying it is killing me. I must thank her for cheering me up. I feel so much better now.

"I love you sisi", I just had to tell her. She looks at me suspiciously. "What do you want? I'm broke", she says. "Nothing. I'm just telling you that I love you. Yazi you people who don't know how to be loved are a problem! Just say I love you too Lolo!". She gives me an "I don't trust you" look. "I know you want something. You'll send me a message before you sleep, I know it". Mxm. Can't I just love her without wanting anything from her? I mean, she cheered me up without even trying.

"Data is not free mtase. Let me sleep. I have that stupid audit tomorrow", I blow her a kiss. "Really? What happened to resigning?", she laughs. Mxm. We had a good chat and I won't let it go south now. That's how I know it's time to say my goodnight and hang up.

I text Chelsea goodnight and text my Grandmother too. She's sleeping now I'm sure. I wish I could text that guy from last weekend but how can I without his number? I've been hoping he will show up but it's Thursday now and it's almost as if I imagined the whole thing. Chelsea said one night stands without numbers exchanged end there. It's a once off thing and I shouldn't be crying over it. She said I must go on Tinder and I'll get good sex if sex is what I want.

I'm sad. I don't know if it's his mysteriousness or his arrogance or his face that I miss. I don't understand how I fell in love after only one night! Maybe not love but whatever this thing is that has me thinking of him all the time. I wish I could see those blue eyes one last time and run my finger across that scar on his cheek. I wish he had just told me his name then maybe I wouldn't be so curious. He showed up in my space uninvited, gave me magic and then disappeared like a dream. That's not fair and try as hard I can, I can't forget him.

I mention him in my bedtime prayers anyway.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER EIGHT

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FRIDAY.

I'm at work at 6 am. I'm jumpy and jittery and nervous. I need to pass this audit, my life might just depend on it. Dr Dirk is nervous too and damn right he should be, he knows his company is a whole bag of wrong. I did my best to cover up the mess with a clean paper trail,

mostly with made up numbers but I did it so well even forensics wouldn't pick it up. I briefed the staff to put on the act of their life today. They all look nervous but they will be fine.

I worked hard yesterday. We had to rearrange stuff and I now have a table strategically covering the broken parts of the floor. I had to colour code everything and just put on a front. I tried my best. There's nothing I could do with the ceiling though. But that payslip is not sitting well with me. I'm getting angry just thinking about it but now is not the time.

"Good morning Lotus. Are we all green lights on?", Dr Dirk disturbs my anxiety. I look up at him and I feel a wave of hatred sweep over me. I don't even bother smiling. "John, can I ask you something?". He looks shocked by my confidence and my addressing him by his first name. I'm shaking inside so I should speak fast before I fall apart. "Why did you hire me?". He raises his eyebrow and I clutch my hands under my desk. "Why?". "I believe I have the right to know". I think it was for BEE accreditation but let's hear his lies. "If you should know, we hired you because you aced that interview and you were a perfect fit for the job. And having worked with you for the past months, I realise we made a good decision. You're good at what you do". How weak! "Where's all this coming from Lotus?", he looks at me and my walls go tumbling down. "I ehm I was just asking Sir...I'll do my best with the audit". He doesn't believe me I can tell but well I don't believe him either. "I trust you. I'll leave you to it then". I watch him walk away and I'm so mad at him! One day I'll drink wine and confront him! I might need legal advice from Chelsea yazi. Is it a crime to see someone's payslip and then confront your boss about the figures you saw there? Could I get fired for it? Can interns go to CCMA?

The auditor shows up at 8:30. He looks as serious as he looks cool, with a neatly manicured beard, navy blazer and jeans. He's very refined and speaks with that rwarwa twang of UCT. For a moment I imagine what he looks like without clothes on then quickly pull myself together. Last weekend really messed up with the wiring in my head. It reignited a fire in my womb that I had put out for a long time. Now it's lit and it's blazing and I'm wondering if this fine tall glass of water can put it out.

"Good morning Ma'am. I'm Dalubuhle Mthethwa, with DM Auditors. I'll be working with you today", he has on a courteous smile and a formal posture. "Hi Mr Mthethwa, welcome", I give him my hand to shake. "Call me Dalu. I'm not that old", he shakes my hand. "How old are you?", that was random but he brought in age! "30". That was easy. I didn't expect him to respond to that. "I'm Lotus. QC manager... please come with me", I flash him my rehearsed smile. He holds my hand longer than he should and I swear he's staring. I could also be imagining it you know, my hormones are all over the oka e these days. He's making me nervous and he looks like the proper everything-by-the-books type. I can already smell a 'FAIL' approaching and a "you are fired!" from Dr Dirk tomorrow. See my life.

Looks are deceiving because he turns out really nice. So far I'm doing great but it's because it's just checklists and I faked those very good although I might sleep in jail today! I faked not 1 but 3 certificates of analysis (COAs). I pray that he's not finicky and triple check everything.

By 10 am we are sharing coffee on my desk and talking about University. I was right, he went to UCT and like most trust fund babies he's complaining about his multi-millionaire dad trying to control his life. Rich people problems! Sooo exhausting!

"I wish he could back off and let me do my thang! I got this. I want to build my own legacy, you know, build my own empire. I'm tired of walking in his shadow, you know?". I smile. No I don't know, I have no clue whatsoever. All I've ever wished for was to have a father and a rich one would have been a bonus and here is this good looking brat complaining about being over loved! Kill me now! I keep the smile though and gas him up. Being nice to people usually returns to them being nice to me so I'm banking on that.

By lunchtime I'm flirting hard and it's working I think. He actually missed a couple of errors on my side. I'm cooperating big time, making it look like I have nothing to hide and it's also working. After lunch we do the floor, staff checks and I'm ashamed of how I make sure he doesn't look under the table hiding the broken floor.

"I think we're done here. I need a few minutes to go through my score sheet and I'll be with you", he says. "Sure thing. Use my desk and let me know when you're done", I smile unashamedly flirtatious. I need to give him that extra motivation to give me extra points. I take him to my desk then go back down to thank the staff for putting on a Broadway Show and tell them they are free to go home. One asks if they will get paid extra since they came earlier today and left later than usual. I say I'll speak to the boss just to give them hope but I doubt it very much. This company and money don't part easily.

The 20 minutes of waiting for Dalu are the longest of my life.

I (the company) pass the audit with a whooping 87%. He did me a solid I know, there's no way. I forgot to tell you, when he saw that the management documents were not signed and that pest control had not been done in over six months and that I had no record at all of Chemical dilutions, I spun him my sob life story. I told him about my sick grandmother who's actually not sick by the way and how I'm sure I will lose this job if I fail the audit and how that would be really bad because I don't have a father, I was raised by my grandmother and I'm the first graduate in the family. I lied and said I'm the breadwinner in my family so I must keep this job no matter what. Lying is not always bad, lying for a good cause is just what might be needed sometimes. That hit the spot because well rich people feel sorry for poor people, isn't it? So I got my 87%, undeservingly so but numbers don't lie.

I don't remember ever seeing Dr Dirk this happy. He even gives me a kiss on the cheek! I'm sure it will rain popcorn today.

"Well, that is it and well done Miss Lotus. You're holding this fort down very well", Dalu says, packing up his documents. It's getting late and all the staff has left but I still need to sit with the boss and go over these results and all that shebang. "Go home Lotus, we'll talk next week. Have a lovely weekend and try not to be late on Monday", Dr Dirk says but for the with a big smile. "You too Meneer", I smile back but inside I'm thinking "I hope you fall down the steps and die!" At least I don't have to stay any longer here.

"So let's do drinks sometime", Dalu hands me his phone to put my number. "Sure, why not?". Maybe Chelsea is right, that guy was a one stand and I need to get that through my thick skull and move on. And Dalu looks like hot chocolate with marshmallows on a winter

night and boy I could sip on that and ask for another round. He looks exactly like what I need. I'll do drinks and see how that goes. I'm not celibate anymore mos. It's been a long week and I'm exhausted to say the least, so drinks sound very tempting. "How's tonight?", he packs away his MacBook. "Tonight is good. I've no plans. So tell you what, let me go home and freshen up". I'm doing this baby. "Awesome. Need a lift?", he asks. "No, I'm good. I have a car", I thank him. "You have a car?", he can't even mask his disbelief. I don't blame him. Remember, I told him I'm the poorest of the poor then boom I have a car. "It's not my car, it's my best friend's. She lets me drive it sometime". Phew! See the problem with lies!

We walk downstairs together and his eyes linger on that ugly hole in the ceiling. I'm sure he's already regretting giving me a pass for this audit. Even the staircase doesn't comply with the regulation, there's a gap between it and the wall! He sighs. "This place is a disaster Lotus. On the next audit make sure everything is in order and I don't just mean on paper". "I will and thank you really. Thank you", I reach for his hand and quickly let it go but not fast enough to ignore that spark that just flew between us.

"See you soon", he closes the door of Chelsea's car. "Cool. Where did you park?". The only other car left in the parking lot is Dr Dirk's. "I hate driving, I prefer Uber", he says. "So you wanted to offer me a lift in an Uber?", I chuckle. "Ya something like that", he smiles back. He's got a great smile, beautiful teeth and all but it just made me remember a certain smile with a gold tooth. "Ok Mr I-hate-driving. See you later". "I really hate it, I'm not lying. Been driving since I was 16 and I'm tired now. Ain't you tired?". Ill take that as a rhetorical question. I can't with rich people problems!

As soon as I get home, I kick off my shoes and get into bed. I know I promised Dalu I would hang out with him but I don't feel like it anymore. My mood changed along the way when I realised I might just end up sleeping with Dalu and spend all of next week hypnotised by him. See how I spent this week crying over a stranger? I can't give these men so much power over him. They are trash! How did I forget? All men are trash! Besides, I had a long week and apart from being broke I'm really tired and I just want to sleep.

After Chelsea finds me hiding under my covers, I tell her about the plans I'm cancelling and brief her about my day. She already likes 'this guy' and is convinced I need him to heal me from that blue eyed devil. She tries really hard to convince me to go and meet this Dalu guy but I'm feeling meh so not even her persuasion works on me today. She says rich boys are the best and they will go all out on you with flowers, fine dining and vacations but I wouldn't know. I wasted my life on boys on campus and at least one of those gave me Chelsea. Then I thought I'd leave these kids alone and date a grown man you know, to save myself growing pains. But that went south fast and he left me thinking all men belong in the garbage bin.

She's back on with the Hulk and so they are partying it up tonight. "You look stunning!". I compliment her when she finally settles for a little red dress. "Don't I always?", she turns around looking at her backside over her shoulder. She has a great ass and she knows it! I laugh with her. She's such a dream. "Enjoy babes", I say from my heart. "You know I will", she winks. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do", I throw her usual statement back at her and she sticks her tongue out at me. "That means I'll do nothing at all", she chuckles.

Without me she has no reason to worry and she can have her best night out. I hate that she has to babysit me sometimes and when the Hulk is around she always looks torn between us. I was a little fragile for a while but I'm over it now but she always feels the need to defend me

and just make sure I'm ok. I could never trade her for anything. I want her to have her best night and I'll stay right here and sleep. "Call if you need anything", I say it as a courtesy. I'll probably be fast asleep if she calls and I think I'll put my phone on silent because I can't deal with her drunk calling. "Hulk's outside. See you tomorrow or on Sunday or Monday, if he behaves", she kisses me on the cheek and runs out. Can sleep come already!

My phone beeps and only now do I remember that I forgot to silence it. It's a text from an unsaved number.

'Lotus', it reads.

'Hey, sorry who's this?' my palms are sweating at the possibility of it being that one night stranger.

'Dalu, from the audit'. How disappointing.

'Oh ya, I was about to text you', I lie. I don't have his number.

'We still on, right?'

'Ya about that. I'm not feeling so good. Rain check?'

'Come on. Just one drink and you'll leave. I'm flying out to Joburg tomorrow'

Before I can respond he's texted again.

'Just one drink is all I'm asking for. On me...'. Ok, that solves the broke part at least.

I stay silent for a while staring at the ceiling debating with myself. I hate disappointing people and that's one of my major weaknesses. Fine! I decide to throw caution to the wind and just go.

'Sure, where are you?', I text.

'By my place in Rondebosch, should I come pick you up?'

'No, you hate driving, remember? *laughing emoji*'

'I do yes but for you I'll drive to Europe if I have to'.

We got there pretty fast, didn't we?

'There's no road from here to Europe Silly'.

'I know. For you I'll build that road first then drive there *wink*'

Gosh, he's so easy to talk to. I save his number and only then do I see his profile pic. Yeah, he may say he hates being rich but that picture with the Tag Heuer on the hand holding a Mustang steering wheel tell a different story. I see you baby boy. Ka ching!

'Share your location, I'll shower quickly then I'll be right there', I text before I change my mind.

'Sure. I'll be waiting'.

His next message is a live location. I smile a little, he does sound fun. Plus he's tall, young, rich and not ugly. I can do drinks with that and who knows what else. I probably need to stay in my race.

I quickly text Chelsea 'Change of plans, I'm going out with that Dalu guy'. To my surprise she responds almost immediately, 'Cool. Carry your own condoms. Get a pack in my panty drawer'.

'Are you in Longstreet?'. I don't know why but I want to ask if they are in Club Lotus and if maybe perhaps somehow by any chance she saw my stranger.

'Nope. We're in Green Point with some of Hulk's homeboys'.

I'm not even going to comment on that, I know how wild those parties of theirs get and I'm glad I'm not there.

Hulk is that on and off, mostly off Zimbabwean hookup/boyfriend of hers. We call him Hulk because try as hard as we could we couldn't pronounce Anatswanashe. I suppose we could

have called him Ana but that's too girly mann. So we settled for Hulk because he's quite muscular and big and always looks angry. He's bad for Chelsea but I would like to think she knows what she's doing. She says the sex keeps her going back to him and I didn't understand that before but after last weekend I get it now. When it's good it's good.

'You still online honeychild! Shouldn't you be showering?', a text from Dalu. I reply with a see-no-evil emoji and run to the bathroom. As I shower, I remember how broke I am. That guy didn't give me back my R300 and I couldn't ask for it in the morning and end up looking like I'm asking for payment. And my last R100 is gone. I guess I have to swallow my pride and ask Dalu to either Uber me or to come and fetch me.

My phone is ringing and by the time I make it to my room I have 4 missed calls from a private number. Can this boy chill already. I said I'm coming so I'm coming! Don't tell me he's that impatient! So unattractive. I hear hooting outside, so loud and so annoying. I can't see the street from my window but whoever is hooting needs to stop. Why are human beings like this? No regard for others whatsoever!

My phone rings again.

"Hello", I hope he can hear how annoyed I am.

"Come down, I've been waiting for you for 20 minutes now! I hate waiting", a male voice snaps at me. Seriously? I almost drop my phone. I know that voice. I know I've been wanting him to show up but now he's just being creepy! And he's really going to show up and yell at me like he knows anything about me? I have Dalu waiting, I don't need him anymore. I throw my phone away and continue drying myself. Who does he think he is?

The hooting won't stop and the phone won't stop ringing! It keeps going on and on and on. I could switch off my phone I guess but then the hooting won't stop. I answer the phone and yell "Go away!". He keeps quiet for seconds and I feel embarrassed for a second. "I won't stop hooting till you come down", he eventually says. "I'm not coming. Go away", my voice is still raised but not so high this time. "Suit yourself" and he hangs up on me. The nerve!!!

The hooting again. It just won't stop. Lord give me strength. We live in an apartment block for crying out loud. Aaaarrggghhh!

I sigh deeply and put on slippers and a night gown and head downstairs. I will tell him to get lost then come back, dress up and head to Rondebosch. What the hell is he doing here!

CHAPTER NINE

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He's hooting still and I'm worried the caretaker will give me grief. How can he embarrass me like this! I walk over to his car and stand on the pavement with my hands folded. He gets out of the car smiling and looking happier than Pharrell! "Finally! I was about to drive away". He stands in front of me still smiling. "How are you?", he tries to brush a strand of my weave but I step back. I'm seriously annoyed yet my heart beat tells a different story. I'll fight this. Tonight, I'll kick it with Dalu. "How are you?", he asks again. Weird. "How do you think I am?", attitude loading. "I think you're ready to go", he says. "Go where?", he must have lost

his damn mind! "Where else?". I can't do this. He can hoot all he wants, someone will call the police on him I don't care. I'm done playing his games. "It's cold out here. Let's go", he rubs his arms. It is cold but who said he should wear a short sleeved T-shirt?

"Look here wena Pick n Pay No Name, you can't just show up here uninvited! What the hell?", I clutch my gown and keep my voice firm. "Why not?", he leans over and kisses me full on the lips. He caught me off guard and I stagger backwards a bit. He catches me and steadies me then does that lip bite thingy. I feel myself melting just looking into his eyes. It will be in my best interest to turn around right now and walk back into the building, so I do just that. Before I've even taken two steps, he holds me from behind and turns me around. Before I can insult him, he picks me up like a baby, glues me to the car while he opens the rear passenger door and shoves me in. "Mind your head angel!", he says it like I'm in agreement with this kidnapping of me he's doing. Now I'm pissed! I swore to myself that no man will ever man handle me again! Yet this feels almost different. Like he doesn't mean to hurt me.

"Are you good?", he asks, looking genuinely concerned. Of course I'm not good! I'm half sitting, half lying on this leather seat and I'm pissed as hell. He closes the door and goes around. I try the door so I can get out and run but it won't open. As he gets into the driver's seat, I slide over to the other door. It also won't open! "Child lock", he says. Honestly, I can't do this. He starts the engine and the car drives off. I'm convinced he's mental. Let him waste his fuel. He'll bring me back. I let him do all the talking as he drives towards the Cape Flats. I give him one word answers and I hope he can read my body language. NO LONGER INTERESTED! He's chatting me up like we last saw each other this morning!

"How was work today?", he sounds interested in fact.

"Fine!"

"And your girl? How's she doing?"

"Fine!"

"What exactly do you do in that company Lotus?"

"Work!"

He laughs. He can tell I'm not feeling him today but it doesn't stop him from talking. He keeps asking about work and so many things he really shouldn't know about me. I mostly respond with a "Fine!"

"Talk to me. Let's talk about whatever you want", he looks through the rear view mirror and I hope he can see that I'm pouting. I think I've just been given a free pass. I want to ask him about the gun and the money I saw and why the hell he went silent on me all week and is only resurfacing now. I want to know what game he's playing and who he is to begin with? Most importantly I want to know where he got my number from and why he's so secretive. But I'm so pissed off right now, I have no desire to strike a conversation with him.

I'm still busy being mad when he says: "So, how was the audition?"

"What audition?", I'm thinking maybe he's confusing me with someone else.

"You had an audition at your workplace today, innit?"

It takes a minute to register then I break out laughing. I was never ready.

"Audit you mean?"

"Ummm ya whatever. I thought you were auditioning for Master Chef or something".

I can't help laughing, not as loudly and ratchetly as I normally would but ya I'm in stitches.

"Mara why would I audition for Master Chef though? How did you even know about that (audit)?", I'm trying to stop laughing. I think I should be concerned but that 'audition' got me.

"Well, you're a food what what, innit?".

Join the Ignorant Club dummy! I'm a food scientist not a chef! We do not cook! I don't know how many times I've repeated that to people.

"We're home". He gets out of the car and gets my door. I need to get it together. No smiling at him anymore. I'm giving him too much power over me. I shrug off his hug and I hate how he just lets it go. I hate how he just showed up! I want to stand right here and refuse to walk but I know better than to argue with his rudeness so I follow him into the house. I keep thinking I have to get back home and dress up and go have drinks with Dalu. He's waiting.

"Have you had something to eat?". I can hear he's asking but I'm not sure he's offering me food. I mean, he just dumped himself on the couch like a sack of potatoes. I murder him with my eyes. Who does he think he is! "Oh well, guess we'll just talk then. I missed you, you know that. I wanted to see you but you were stressing so I left you alone". Wait, what? Was he watching me? I think now would be a right time to be scared. Why am I not scared? "Come talk to me baby", he readjusts himself on the couch but no can do. I remain standing, holding my gown closed. "Are you going to ignore me all night?", he looks at me amused. I shrug my shoulders but keep staring daggers at him. Can't he see my face? Can't he see I don't want to be here?

What would Chelsea do? For starters, she wouldn't be here right now. She would have put this man in his place and he would have run for the hills. She's scary and intimidating AF. I sometimes feel sorry for the guys in the club who try to get with her. Chelsea would stand up straight (I readjust my posture), wipe weakness off her face (I put my serious on) and command respect with a firm voice (let me try that!). Why is he looking so amused though? Can't he see I'm trying to Chelsea up here?

"Can I ask you something?", with my seriousiest tone on. After I'm done murdering him I might post a picture of his corpse on Facebook and I would like to tag him so can he out with the name already! "You had your chance to speak but you kept shaking your head and folding your arms. So it's my chance to speak now", he says, with that stupid smile showing that stupid gold tooth that's growing on me. "Let's talk about last weekend? Tell me about last weekend", he says. I start blushing but quickly remember to stand my ground. Last weekend was amazing and he did unimaginable things to me but I don't know him still and that's not ok. Besides, he didn't attempt to speak to me all week so I shouldn't entertain him right now.

"Tell me your name right now or take me back home. Pick one". I'm dead serious, on the outside at least. He looks at me and I can tell he's not a bad person mann. He has a soft side, I can just tell. But it's hidden beneath layers and layers of tough. Why am I bothering with this member of the Trash Squad again? Men are trash, how can I forget! "Come sit by me and tell me about your day". He looks super delicious in that red T-shirt. Mama Mia, I want to throw him on a table and eat him up like a buffet. But no, I won't be easily swayed today. "You look cute as hell when you're mad", he chuckles. Mxm. I'm annoyed by him right now. "Come and sit. Let's talk, I'm serious now". I can tell that he's not asking and although I want to refuse, I sit on the edge of the couch. Two can play the game.

I tell him how great my week was. Lie. How I passed the audit not audition! Truth. How the Bostwick consistometer fell and broke so I couldn't measure the viscosity of the puree. Lie. But let him chew on that word! "The what did what and you couldn't what?", he says. His facial expression is priceless and I can't help laughing. Maybe I'm bipolar or tripolar or All-polar! The way I've been swinging through different moods tonight can't be normal.

He goes back to asking me about my week and I keep telling him how amazing it was! I think he doesn't buy it though. Then I get to telling him how him showing up to my apartment and calling me even though I didn't give him my phone number is beyond scary. It's stalkerish behaviour and it's creepy.

"So why did you come down if it was creepy?", he asks with a smile.

"To tell you to leave me alone and to make you stop hooting!".

"Is that what you really want? For me to leave you alone?", his expression turns serious and the blue of his eyes is penetrating the brown of mine deeply. I look down. I don't know what I want, to be honest.

"You didn't talk to me all week then you just show up. So what must happen now? Pretend like everything is normal? What am I? A weekend special? A booty call?".

"You can be whatever you want to be pretty girl, Mandela went to jail so you can be free", he says. Ok, I'm done. Fxck him, I'm outta here.

I get up and get two stepping. Don't ask how I plan to get home. He catches me by the door and holds me by the shoulders. "I'm sorry ok. It's just, it's complicated you wouldn't understand", he says. "Then uncomplicate it for me", I say. "No drop it, you won't understand! It's fxcked up man...Look, sorry for going silent on you all week but I'm here now, so come and sit and let's catch up", he says. He's acting like I last saw him this morning and his sorries are empty! No can do. "Please Lotus. I'm asking you, please". Sigh! 'Death by a Stranger' will be written in my stone.

I'm back to sitting at the edge of the couch and he's leaning back all chilled. Looking at him is giving me the chills. I know I should be frightened by how much he knows about me but instead I'm intrigued. If only he could give me straight answers. "So you said how is work at that silly company of yours? Do they treat you good?", he sounds genuinely interested. He's been going on about my job tonight. What's up with that? "They treat me ok".

"They better!", he says. I'm thinking 'or what?' But nah, won't say that.

"Do they pay you enough?". He continues the interrogation.

"Enough to pay the bills".

"How much do they pay you?".

I look down thinking. I think my salary should be kept confidential. Besides, it's quite on the low end of the spectrum. You know what, let me humour him. 'Being Chelsea' failed dismally, let's see if I can get through to him by holding a conversation with him.

"So? How much do they pay you?", he asks again.

I raise it up by R2000 just for control. He should think I'm monied so he can show me respect. Why do you think people ask what you do and how much you earn bla bla? It's so they can calculate how much respect to give you.

"R7000", I say confidently, feeling like a CEO. He looks at me and I don't get it until he starts laughing. I'm so confused right now. To me, R7000 is a lot. And him laughing reminds me of my colleague's payslip and I don't want to think of that.

"R7k? You mean to tell me you survive on R7k a month?". He keeps laughing and I'm not sure whether to respond or not. It's not funny.

“What do you do with those peanuts?”.

“Everything!” I respond defensively. I work hard, 8 to 5, 5 days a week! He should show some respect for the grind!

“Easy Tiger. I'm not attacking you. I admire you for doing things right. I like you for it. It's just that I would rather shoot myself in the face than get R7k a month!” he says.

“How much do you earn?” I return the question to him.

“I don't earn, I make”, with that arrogance that I strangely find sexy. Mxm! So obnoxious.

“How much do you make then?” if I wasn't so curious I wouldn't ask. He's tiring.

“Enough”, he says. Second eye roll.

“Fine, what do you do for a living?” if he can tell me that then I can Google his market related salary later.

“I do whatever I have to”, he says it like he means it. What a bore!

“Whatever! How do you know so much about me? Let's talk about that for a minute”. Maybe he can give me straight answers if I ask about me.

“I named my club after you sweetheart so of course I know about you”, he says that so calmly like it's the most natural thing on earth. Did I hear right? I blink blink blink. What did he just say?

I remember laughing when the waiter at Club Lotus saying 'He says congratulations on the opening of Club Lotus'....So he meant it? Whaaaaaaaat? How? Why? Where? Why would someone name their club after a stranger? I'm blinking unnaturally fast right now yet he still looks unbothered. Club Lotus is actually named after me? No ways! He's lying. I sit up straight and breathe in, breathe out. I need that to sink in first. Nah! He tripping! I've thought about it and I've decided he's lying but what if he isn't?

“You mean to say Club Lotus is yours? And you named it after me?”

"Yes and yes".

"Why? Why me?"

Wow. Issa lot. Shuuh! Such a mind fuck right now, I can't think.

“Yeah of course it is. You are my muse. I watched you for a very long time before I decided I had to have you”, he says. I probably should be flattered or terrified, but I'm too shocked to decide.

“What? You're so messed up. You decided all on your own that you had to have me? You were stalking me, weren't you? Were you stalking me?”, I can't believe this. So I wasn't imagining things. I really was being followed!

“So many questions skat! How am I supposed to answer 21 questions all at once?”, he makes that 'you're being unreasonable Lotus' face.

"You decided you had to have me after stalking me! That's so messed up! You're messed up!", my voice is rising.

"Why are you accusing me of such things angel? I didn't stalk you, I just researched you a little bit. And ya I decided we made a good fit and clearly you've decided too, you are here”.

I hate how he is so chilled. I hate that he's taking this lightly. I hate that he looks like this is not serious. But mostly I hate that I don't hate him right now and I don't want to leave just yet.

I just can't wrap my head around the fact that he owns my favourite club and that he named it after me! It's a mess in my head right now.

“Can we go back to talking about your salary? I was still talking! You'll get your turn and you can ask me your 101 questions”, he says.

I swallow hard and I have a million thoughts racing through my head. What the hell!!!!!!

“Seriously Lotus, R7k? That can't even buy you one gun! Let's see, a good straw of ice is about 50 bucks these days? At full blown you need about 4 straws a day to get by. So even a junkie would barely survive on R7k a month”. Is he for real? I find those examples pretty strange.

“What is ice?”, I missed that example.

“Ice? What do you call it? Tik? Crystal Meth? Ice baby, you know”, he says. Another red flag up!

“How do you know so much about drugs? Are you on drugs?”. It could explain the faulty wiring in his brain. He laughs, he laughs so beautifully though I have to look away to avoid awakening sleeping feelings!

“No, I’m not on drugs. I love my body too much to feed it poison! Do I look like I hate my teeth? Have you seen the teeth of a junkie on ice?”.

"Well you have a gold tooth so clearly you don't love your teeth enough!". He has a good set though, I love his smile.

He gives me a look I can't decipher.

"Don't judge things you don't know!", he says.

“You don’t say anything about yourself so I have to work on assumptions here”. My mind is still on that Club Lotus thing.

“First of all, this is not a tooth, it's a cap! Have you ever seen a tooth like this? Secondly, my tooth got chipped so I covered it with the cap", he says with squinted eyes. I feel bad because he's making it seem like I'm judgemental.

"But why gold though instead of...!", he cuts me off before I can finish my question.

"Never mind. Ask me another day. We were having a good time talking about work! Can we go back to that conversation?".

I hate how he dismisses me.

Let me go first before he controls the talk.

“Where do you work?”. Surely running a club can’t be all he does.

“Wherever I want”, he says.

“What exactly do you do?” I snap, I didn’t mean to but I’m getting agitated. He’s flippen annoying.

“I run”, he says.

“Oh cool. You are an athlete? I run too”, that's interesting, I can work with that. He just smiles at me and changes the subject right back to my salary.

“That R7k you make in a month, I make in one day from the taxies that use my road”, he says. I'm thinking, alright he's got to be joking. Club? Taxies? What else? My mind refuses to look at the possibility of what he's saying. Racketeering? “Your roads?”, I look at him hoping his face can give me more. “Yep”, baby boy ever so chilled.

“What do you mean? Are you a...? I mean these roads belong to the municipality so where do you get off calling them yours?”.

Yazi, I’ve heard of gangs and I think they are found in this side of town but no it can’t be. It just can't be. I would know a gangster if I met one, right?

He stays silent.

“By taxies you mean cabs right? You own cabs, right? That’s what you mean?”, I’m desperate for his confirmation. “Yeah that too. Actually let’s go with that. Only that”, he says. The shock on my face!

I need to run. But at least I need to know his name, for memory's sake. What would Chelsea do if being firm failed? Seduce the guy stupid! I slide closer to him and take his hand in mine. Would it be wrong if I asked him to do me one last time before I run? For memory's sake? I brush his arm and trace a tattoo on his arm with my finger. I stay there tracing the ink and collecting myself so the million thoughts racing each other in my head don't reflect on my face. When I have controlled my face, I look up at him with puppy eyes and bite my lower lip and slide my body up his. "You smell really good", I whisper in his ear and breathe down his neck. "Really good", I tease his ear lobe and caress his neck. I'm getting myself wet for no reason! His hand closes around my waist and I know I must abort mission. I pull back, take his hand in mine and play with his fingers.

"What's your name?", I ask without looking up at him.

"No one really uses my name. Everyone calls me Alpha", he says. I heave a sigh of relief. ALPHA! Mama I made it. I got his name or what they call him at least!

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER TEN

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I have this triumphant grin on my face. I feel like I'm finally getting through to him. Now he must tell me everything. He must talk fast, I really need to get back home now. Poor Dalu!

I kinda like the name Alpha, it's short and sweet. "Alpha!", I'm so happy I can't even hide it and it's making him happy I think judging by the glow in his eyes. I'm smiling at him with his fingers intertwined with mine and I could swear he's blushing. Such a puzzle I have here. He said some concerning things but I'm not scared of him at all. How can I be? Look at him! All bark and no bite. The mean looking ones are the sweetest and the sweet looking ones are the psychos. You can quote me on that.

It hits me that he named a whole club after me and shoot me but that's the biggest thing anyone has ever done for me!

"So Alpha, you said everyone calls you Alpha but it's not your first name. Does that mean it's not your birth name?". I think that's what he said.

"Depends what you mean by birth".

"Come on Alpha!", I brush his arm. He can't close up now! We're making progress. He must stay with me.

"When I was born again I was named Alpha"

"Born again? As in baptism in church?". No judgement but he doesn't look like the church type. He just laughs and gives me no response.

"I told you you won't understand!", he says, running his hand through the length of my weave.

"Try me", I look at him and close my eyes. He's chuckling so it's working. I'm going to be extra cute tonight until I get all the answers I need.

"I'm an alpha Lotus. The leader of the pack", he says. A what? Don't tell me he doesn't know what an alpha is! I can't help laughing. He's so hilarious!

"What are you? A werewolf? You lead a pack of what? Wolves?". Men! So they don't call themselves dogs but wolves now? It's hella funny.

"I'm also not Lotus. I'm the Lotus. Owner of the club!"

"No baby you don't own it. It's just named after you", he says. Wow! Talk about bursting a girl's bubble.

"Ok Alpha, I'll trade you a question for a question. Nothing but the honest truth". Fingers crossed. I'm relieved when he nods and this time I won't waste the opportunity.

"You go first", I give him the platform.

"Before me, when was the last time you had sex?". Ok. That's quite invasive but ok.

"Over a year ago". He nods in satisfaction. My turn now.

"What's your first name that was given to you after you were born and was written on your birth certificate?". I'm not losing this question this time! He laughs and my word, the way he laughs gets me in my feelings. He stops and looks into my eyes. I want to look away but I want to look at him more.

"Donavan. My name is Donavan", he says. Finally! I feel like I won a trophy. Yippee. I actually throw my hands in the air and say a loud "Yes!". I've made it in life! I cracked the hardest nut on earth and it's like I won the lotto. I can't explain the joy. I try to get it together but my happiness is overflowing.

Donavan! That's a unique name. I once heard it in a movie I think. He pronounced it with a rounded accent making it sound bouje! Wait until he meets my mother and she Xhosarises it to 'Hey wena Donavani!' UmaDonaDona. That has me giggling but I can't share the joke, he won't get it.

"So what does it mean?"

"It doesn't mean anything. My mummy's name was Donna and my pop's name is Evan, so together they made a Dona-van, me", he says.

People do that? Mix their names to name their kids? So if me and him make a child we will have Lotavan? That sounds like medicine! Maybe Dontus? Now that sounds like a disease. My poor child. Why am I thinking kids with Mr Arrogant again? Must be this calm, intentional I-don't-care demeanour about him. You know a part of me keeps whispering "He's in a gang. RUN!". Could he be in a gang? No ways! But maybe that explains all those scars and tattoos. No man, no, I need to stop imagining things and ruining the moment!

I'm staring at him and I'm feeling things I shouldn't be feeling. He's poison and if I'm not careful this night will end with me in his bed, again. "Ouch", I hold my chest. I'm playing him like a guitar tonight. "What's wrong? Are you ok?", he jumps to concerned.

"I just felt an itch sorry. Think you can help me with it?", I look at him innocently. "Sure. Where?". Before he can say anymore, I move my gown aside at the top, freeing the nipple. I take his hand and wow who knew he can be so obedient? I make his hand cup my boob and squeeze. Just like that. Mmmm. I'm torturing myself too but I'm winning tonight at all costs. I'm torturing him more. Ya maybe he's a wolf, the way he's looking hungry right now!

"Ok that's fine now. Thank you", I dismiss his hand, lean in and kiss him full on the lips. I let our tongues do the tango and run my hand down his body, down his thigh and stop. He's horny AF and that's how I know I'm winning. I push him back. He tries to hold on but I gently push him back until he gets the message. He looks at me like I'm evil or something and I look back innocently. We're done with his rules, let's play by mine for a change.

"So what does this tattoo mean?", I trace the ink of a wolf on the side of his neck. He's so serious about this alpha thing shame, bless his soul. Maybe the wolf is his spirit animal. You know how some of us claim animals without their consent and start saying they are our spirit

animals and have these powerful quotes. I do that too and start saying things like “I’m a lion. The beast in me is sleeping, not dead”, you should check my WhatsApp status and see the things I put there.

I love the way this tattoo looks. I would never get a tattoo but at gunpoint I would pick this wolf one. The green pops out of his yellow skin and it’s enchanting to look at, it looks alive. “Couldn't you have gone with something more fierce like a lion or something giant like an elephant or at least cute like a Tiger?”, I find myself smiling. His hand keeps trying to reach into my gown and I keep holding it back with my free hand. “I'm a wolf, I don't perform in circuses, I told you I lead a pack!”, he says with squinted eyes.

“Oh-kay Mr Wolf!”. Defensive much? But let me go with it and see.

“So you lead a pack, huh?”. Everything he’s saying to me right now is screaming GANG ALERT but nah, gangsters are not this soft!

“Yes. Get it?”, I don’t but I nod anyway.

Let me just brave it and ask,

“Are you part of a gang?”.

“What’s a gang?”, he laughs and pulls me towards him and locks his lips with mine before I can register what's going on.

“You really talk a lot Lotus! I would watch you and your girl chit chatting all night long in my club. Girl, you can talk”. I don’t know how he doesn’t find that creepy at all.

“So Club Lotus is really yours and you named it after me?”, I look him in the eye. I still think that he’s playing tricks on me. “I told you yes already! Any more questions Miss chatterbox?”, he says. I part my lips to say something but my words freeze and I just stay there staring. There is something about his eyes that draws me in and the shape of his lips makes me quiver. Does he have to look this dangerously enticing though?

His hands glide up my thighs and I throw my head back slowly, listening to his touch. I lift off as his hands grab my ass. He squeezes a bit too hard and my chest goes up. I’m not that girl but if I’m to get what I want, I might need to lead him. I open my gown and let the twins out. His mouth closes on my nipple and I let out a moan. Damn him. I’m in the zone and feeling it. He stops and takes off my gown. My phone falls to the floor but I ignore it. I help him out of his T-Shirt and I did say I’m in control today. He stands to take off his jeans and I rise with him. “Let me” and he let’s me. Belt off, zip down, everything yanked down and he looks so yum, I could devour him. But he needs to know who is boss. I go down on my knees and take him in my mouth. He looks a bit shocked when I look up at him but when I open my throat, his moan tells me to keep going. I'm not the most experienced girl out here but how hard can it be? I had many years of practice on lollipops.

“I need you my skat”, he says with his husky voice. He helps me up and lays me on the couch and my oh my! He's giving it to me like we're on honeymoon.

I’m laying in his arms and trying to catch my breath. I must keep my mouth shut because if I open it I might ask him to tell his uncles that I’m ready to pay lobola for him. He keeps brushing my stomach and I feel safe and loved. I could live right here.

My phone rings and I plan to ignore it. He loosens his hold on me “Answer it, it might be important”. I don’t want to answer it and I have my reasons (Read Dalu). I’m hoping it’s Chelsea or my mother or anyone else but Dalu. I have to sit up to reach the floor and what do you know! “Who’s it?”, he asks, still laid back. “Dalu”, I don’t think fast and I suck at

making up names. "Who's Dalu? And why is he calling you at this time of the night?". Is that a tinge of jealousy I hear in his voice? "No one really. It's the auditor, maybe he forgot something at work I don't know". "Then answer him", he says. "No, I can't risk him stressing me about work. He can wait". I feel guilty as I put my phone on flight mode and back into the pocket of my gown. I lie back down, fitting my body into his and his hands coming back around me.

"I've killed people for much less you know", he says with a dropped tone. My eyes pop open and my body tenses. "Relax, I'm not in a killing mood these days!", he says that with a monotone voice. That's so not funny! I turn around and face him. I actually want some more right now. How long do you wait between starters and the main meal by the way?

"You've got a lot of tattoos! Which one is your favourite?", I ask, trying to run away from the Dalu and the killings talk.

"This one", he points to the little tear beneath his eye.

"What does it mean?"

"It means a lot of things". I roll my eyes. Are we back there? After I've screamed for him, he will do this?

"It's a symbol of all the tears I'll never shed. It's a relic of those I've lost and a reminder that some of them I lost by my hand. It's a tribute to my mummy for all the years of my life I could have spent with her and a thank you to my pops for what he did for me....Oh man, girl, why you getting me all emotional? Come here", he wraps me in his arms. I wish he could bare his soul more, I like this side of him he just showed me. I snuggle up to him. I won't lie though, that 'a reminder that some of them I lost by my hand' isn't sitting well with me but I can't ruin the moment by asking who he killed, where, how and why.

"I should be working right now, you know", he says.

"You just finished working on me nje baby"

"So I'm baby now?", he sounds amused.

I will neither confirm nor deny that but what I will do for sure is bury my face in his chest.

"What are your plans for tomorrow?", he asks.

"I'm running at 9 then I don't know after that"

"Cool. You'll come with me then. Be ready at 2"

"Come where?", I shift to fit in better.

"You'll see. You trust me, don't you?", he says with sincerity in his voice.

LMAO! Is that a joke? Trust him?

"I need water", I plant a kiss on his face and get up. I pick up the gown and find my way into it then head to the fridge on the other end. Bottled water! Fancy, are we? The fridge is full too! I wouldn't have guessed that he's a grapes and yoghurt kind of guy! Kanti what do rough guys eat for breakfast? I don't know but I doubt they eat yoghurt. I eat five grapes and drink my water. I have plans for the rest of these grapes but not right now.

He's sitting back on the couch with a cushion over his you know what, looking hotter than hell. His body is exactly why I don't function half the time. And the way his eyes light up when he smiles showing that gold cap. I was rudely told it's not a tooth! He showed me a glimpse of his soft side but quickly let his guard up again. I wonder who hurt him, shame. It's like he's scared of letting me in. Like he really wants to but doesn't want to, if you know what I mean.

I'm a few footsteps away from the couch. He's been staring at me the whole time without even being subtle about it.

"Stop...please", that stop kinda startled me a little. I'm glad he added that soft please. I halt, surprised. He's looking at me like he just saw his favourite meal.

"Lose the gown". He has this commanding voice on. I think I'll cooperate and see where it leads me. I drop the gown. I know he saw me last week and he just had me now but it's uncomfortable standing here stark naked. I cover my boobs with my hands. I didn't know what else to do with my hands. It's kinda hard to just stand there naked you know.

"Drop the hands baby let me look at you", he says. Who died and made me this obedient? I'm trying to look at myself through his eyes. I have enough curves and although I'm not as sexy as Chelsea, I'm good. I'm just a bit low on confidence nje. I want to act all cool but there's no point pretending like I'm not turned on, my nipples have long betrayed me.

"Turn around for me". His voice is going lower and deeper. I smile in my head, he likes what he sees, doesn't he? I'm glad he asked me to turn around because now all those months of doing squats get to display.

Ass I have.

When he got behind me I don't know but his hands are riding up and down my front slowly, feeling every part. Planting kisses on my neck, lingering on my nipples, nibbling on my earlobe, grabbing my ass, breathing down my neck. I feel him pushing against my ass. He walks me towards the kitchen counter, takes my arms, runs his hands along their length and whispers my name. I don't know how he does it but he has an electric way of saying my name. My arms go on the counter and he pushes me forward. I stand on my toes and arch back and he finds his way into me. Slowly, holding me there against the cold counter. Height difference must be standing in between him and paradise so he lifts me off the floor, remaining inside me the whole time. We gym and work out for a reason andithi? Strong arms keep me balanced on the counter and my feet off the floor. His hand comes between my stomach and the countertop edge so I don't get hurt. Now he's just murdering me. He grabs a chunk of my bum and it hurts a little but I love the pain. He slams into me and I arch my back more. There's nowhere to run so I take it like a pro and moan my approaching orgasms for the whole neighbourhood to hear. My screams are getting louder, my body is beginning to shake and I'm wetter than water on a rainy day. Just before I come undone, he pulls out of me and lets my feet kiss the floor. I was almost there! How cruel.

He twirls me around and catches me in a stronghold, then pulls me closer and our eyes meet. He gives me a few moments of grace before lifting me so high in the air, if I was any taller I would touch the ceiling. My thighs rest on his shoulders and his lips meet my other set of lips. Pure fire runs throughout my body. I can feel a stream ready to gush out and I want to close my legs and stop it but the hold he has on my thighs has me immobile. I drop my head back and let the neighbours know that 'I'm coming'. I can't help the mini shower that sprays on his face. That's a bit embarrassing but he keeps me there a few seconds longer. He lowers me down and eases his ehmm into my uhmm, then just holds me there looking hella satisfied with himself. My body is still trembling and he's just holding me there.

"My angel" he says with that voice before starting up slow strokes. Holding my ass in his hands, his arms have me in place like I'm feather-light. I've seen this in movies and I thought I would need to be a gymnast to pull it off. I didn't know I just needed a guy like this to show me things.

"Donavan", I moan his name onto his neck, struggling to maintain my composure. That seems to gas him up. The slow strokes get deeper and he picks up the pace, bouncing my

body on his. I'm screaming unashamedly and I'm all yes yes yes. My climax comes from feeling him climax. Now I'm really shaking. I think I'll call him daddy from now on, he earned it.

He stands with me there as we catch our breath.

"Should I take you home now?", he whispers. I shake my head no.

"Wanna take it upstairs then, you getting pretty cold here". I nod.

"You can't talk now? What happened to our voice Miss Talk-A-Lot", he laughs and kisses me on the forehead. I blush and look down. He steadies me on my feet and takes my hand, "Let's go upstairs", but I remain still.

"Don't tell me you can't walk already! I haven't even started with you!"

He picks me up and heads towards the staircase. I guess I'm sleeping here tonight.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER ELEVEN

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"Good morning sleepy head!" he says it like "oh finally she wakes up!"

I want to be happy to wake up to a 'good morning' but it would be better if that came from someone lying next to me, cuddling maybe but definitely not sitting there watching me.

"Slept ok?", he says with a naughty smile.

"Did we even sleep?", I yawn and stretch myself. We went all out last night and he showed me heaven in so many ways. Shuuu, he's so strong.

"I know you did. And it's cute how you snore", he says.

"I don't snore! You snore!", I don't know if he does or not but I know I don't.

"Yes you do my skat. It's cute", he says.

Whatever!

"What time is it?", I have to know because I start my Park Run at 9. I missed it last Saturday, I can't miss it again. Goals are written down for a reason!

"8:55".

Oh no! I'm missing the run again! Because of this guy again! Damn it!

"I woke you up at 6 and you told me to leave you alone so I left you alone", he says looking all innocent.

"And you listened to me because?", he should have just forced me to wake up!

"I should never listen to you?", I can tell he wants to laugh but I have no idea why.

"I'd made you coffee but it's been sitting here with me waiting for you to wake up so it's cold now".

Maybe "made you coffee" means something different in Afrikaans because I see the McDonalds paper cup. But it's sweet really. No one ever brought me coffee in bed.

"I'll make you another one. Come, let's get you into the bath".

I think I'm way past acting shy and covering my nudity with him. I let him lift me up and carry me to the bathroom. Ncooow uMadonadona bethuna! He ran me a bath! I know it's no biggie but my heart is dancing right now. He feels the water with his hand before gently sitting me in the warm water.

"Do you have foam bath?"

"No. Foam bath? Hey, look I don't ever use the bathtub so I have nothing that goes with it. I had to run you a bath though because umm, I just, well, it's just... know what, never mind, let me leave you to wash", he aborts the sentence midway. "You just what baby?". I'm learning him and I've realised that when I talk softly and endearingly to him, he opens up but when I scream and yell, he shuts down and turns his arrogance on.

"I just, umm after all the fxcking and shit last night I thought maybe I went too hard on you and maybe you're sore or something, so I went to the pharmacy to ask how I can make you better and the lady said I should make you sit in these bath salts for a little while and you'll be fine".

He looks away and I can't stop smiling. He went to a pharmacy to try and get me an after-fxck calm down? He's on his own level of special.

"Did I hurt you?", he asks looking a little guilty.

"No you didn't. I loved every second of it". I'm feeling a bit puffy though but in every war there are casualties and nunuberry down there is today's casualty.

"I'll leave you to the bathing then".

There are no roses or champagne or bubble bath just warm water infused with bath salts and a shower gel for men, yet my heart is melting faster than ice on a hot stove. It's by far the most romantic thing that has ever been done for me and I felt it. Not to say my ex was useless, no, he would buy me flowers and gifts but the timing was always wrong. They always came as apologies so I hated them. Now I'm here with this obviously not romantic man who woke up, went to a pharmacy to tell a poor pharmacist that he fxcked a girl hard all night and so needed to soothe her, then got her coffee on his way back. How is that not the sweetest thing ever?

I don't bother lotioning, I'll shower again when I get home anyway, with feminine products. I put on my gown and slippers and head downstairs where I know he is, judging by the voices and laughing. When did his friends get here?

I walk up straight to him and give him a hug. "Thank you", I stand on my toes and he reaches down and kisses me. You think I care that we have an audience? He turns me gently so I stop trying to kiss him and face his tattooed friends. I say hie and they say hie. One of them is so drawn he looks like a newspaper. There's no skin left untouched, not even on his face! He has deadly eyes and his front teeth are missing. One day I'll ask Don why his people take out their front teeth. I've always wondered. He does vague introductions, just "Lotus my brothers, brothers Lotus". He tells them he will see them later and we leave. He must really trust his 'brothers', he leaves them in his house without a care.

"You were amazing", he says out of nowhere.

"I was?"

"Ja. You the sweetest thing walking. You're addictive", he says with that voice.

#BlushingLotus

This guy is a drug and I'm quickly getting addicted. He talks rough and acts like he doesn't care but when my body is in his arms he makes love like he wrote the karma sutra. I can't believe how fast I'm catching feelings.

As he drops me off in front of my apartment and tells me to "Be ready at 2 pm", I can't help being happy. He switches between commanding and sweet, I can't keep up. He's really something else. He gets out and comes around to get my door.

"All the way from here to my house to back here with no panties on Skat? And you think I would have left you alone?". Yazi he gets me blushing without trying much. Speaking of which, remind me later to Google 'How not to blush'. "Later", I let him kiss me goodbye.

I walk into the apartment. I can feel his eyes boring into me so why not give him something to watch. I pull my gown tighter and I pick up a step, swinging it and shaking it like I'm auditioning for Jason Derulo's Wiggle Wiggle. Maybe I should slow down on the squats, it's not jiggling much anymore. I want a rounder ass not a stone hard one.

I hope no one sees me. It's quite embarrassing to be dropped off in the morning. Then people see me in my long dress tomorrow morning going to church? Please let's not confuse the people of the Lord in this apartment block. At least when we go partying, we leave late and those Judge Judys will be sleeping then.

Chelsea is in the kitchen making her hangover concoction. She's in just a small T-shirt and her hair tells a story of a hectic night. I'm sure mine also says "me too chommy!". She pinches her nose as she downs the gross mixture. Yuck! I didn't expect her to be back so soon but ok. I wonder if she broke up with Hulk again and had to come home. I hope not.

"Damn girl! You went out for drinks with your auditor in a gown!", she says.

"No man, I went out with Donavan".

"Who's Donavan now? I thought you said his name was Dalu".

"Dalu didn't happen chommy. Disaster nje. Donavan is Mr Drinks from the club, uLast week guy".

"I thought you hated him and you said you would die first before you gave him the time of day!"

Trust Chelsea to remind me things I say in anger!

"I gave him the time of night, not day. And it's not like I planned to go with him. He sort of kidnapped me and we ended up at his place".

"Kidnapped? With a smile like that? Kidnapped must have changed its meaning then"

I keep replaying the 4 am sex we had. It was a slow, emotion packed, sensual, kissy ride.

"You are one busy girl missy! I need all the deets later. For now let me go back to bed. I feel like death", she says. She gulps the rest of her yucky green mixture and downs it with water.

"I hope you using condoms babes", she says. About that. Last night kind of got out of control and things happened. But it's 3 days till my period so I won't be breeding any mini Donavans.

"Chels, I need a favour"

She stops to listen. She was already walking her lace clad fine ass to her room.

"Please buy me data".

I'm so broke it's not funny. She laughs and walks back to where I'm leaning against the counter.

"Didn't Mr D give you anything? I'm not saying pay you but give you some money. He has money!", she says.

"I don't know how to ask him. I don't want to come off as a golddigger. I barely know him Chomp".

"Ask him, not directly but dry beg. Tell him how it sucks not having data, how you wish you could buy that Woolies salad but you have to wait for payday. How the price of petrol went up and now you have to walk. Get creative, subtly inform him of your problems. A real man

will take the bait and solve your problems a Wussy will say nonsense like 'things will be fine, hang in there'".

"Ha a Chelsea! I'm not that kind of girl! I'm independent!"

She laughs and I regret asking her for that data. She's too much but ke I missed these sessions of ours. Just us talking about nothing and everything at the same time.

"Independent only works when you're a rich bitch with a bank balance that looks like a phone number. You my friend must stop being delusional. Make that man spoil you!", she says.

"He should spoil me without me begging for it!", Eye roll.

"How many times must I tell you that men are dumb creatures? You need to tell them what you want. They suck at guessing! Hint, hint, hint until they get it. If they don't get it then spell it out for them!"

It always works for her. But that's because she's a different breed, all confident and so blunt you can smoke her truth.

"I'm going to shower mna Chels. I'm a Christian and I won't make men buy me stuff. Please, I won't miss heaven for 300 MB, count me out".

She laughs because I always throw in my faith to justify why I won't do something.

"Let me educate you St. Lotus. Do you know why Eve ate the apple?", she says getting all serious on me.

"Who's Eve now?"

"Eve, the first lady. Adam's hunn", she says.

I already want to laugh because my friend here knows nothing about the holy book. Zilch! Yet she has the most interesting Bible based theories.

"Eve ate the apple to show Adam that women get hungry. Note that 'hunger' was metaphorical. She wanted Adam, on behalf of all men, to see that women need to be fed in every way. Their stomachs, closets, bank accounts and everything else needs to be fed. So now that you know why, the next time you see that devil, tell him all your needs. Don't let Eve eat the apple in vain! It was a Granny Smith apple, they're bitter".

I'm in stitches. The way she's so serious! Fam, she says I'm not hearing her!

"Then Adam took the apple from Eve and ate it up. Men! Adam had one job! One! To feed Eve but he took from her and as a result he got kicked out of the garden of everything. But Eve, being a woman therefore being loyal, took the fall for him, she even sacrificed herself and asked to take the harsher punishment instead because she knew men (Adam) wouldn't survive serious things like period pains, labour and the whole shebang".

Chelsea!!!

"How about the snake though? In this theory of yours, you're forgetting the snake!", I'm quarter to rolling on the floor laughing. This girl is crazy.

"Nah babes, snakes don't talk. That's just a case of being at the wrong place at the wrong time. When she got caught she said 'The snake made me do it'. Of course she didn't mean it literally. It's like you everytime you do bad you say 'The devil made me do it nywe nywe'. Now the moral of the story is teach Mr D how to feed you. Bye!", she walks to her room, leaving me laughing like an idiot.

I'm laughing all the way to my room. When I recollect myself and I'm lying on my bed I think of last night. Poor Dalu! He crosses my mind and I quickly disable flight mode.

First in is an sms from MTN saying 'Your recharge was successful'. I quickly *141# and my data balance is 3.04 GB. Oh my Chelsea bun!

Dalubuhle Mthethwa! I stood him up! Messages come through all asking where I am and if I'm still coming. I feel terrible. At least he's online so I can spin a quick lie. My heart is beating fast and my palms are sweating. I'm a terrible liar. I text a long apology then delete. Text. Delete. Then decide to just text:

'Where are you?'

'Airport', he responds.

'Where exactly?', I text.

'Why do you care?'

'Please Dalu, I have to explain. Please tell me where you are'

That Dalu is typing.... lasts for 2 minutes then he sends

'Wimpy'.

'I'm on my way'.

'I won't hold my breath'.

'I'll be there just now, I promise. I'll explain everything'.

Blue ticked. Ignored.

I spray on my perfume to drown the remnants of Donovan's shower gel. There's no time for a shower. I don't even bother lotioning up. I jump into the first pair of leggings I see and put on a jersey with nothing underneath and I'm ready to go. There's no time!

I can't find the car keys on the kitchen counter so they must be in Chelsea's room and I hope she fueled up. I know she will murder me if I knock and wake her headache up so I quietly open the door and creep in.

I know it's wrong but I stop and stare. I didn't know she had company but it's a beautiful scene. Hulk has his big arms around her like she's a doll and her head is resting on his bare chest. They look so serene. I wish that for her and I love how he's holding her like a precious little thing. If anyone deserves the best of life, it's Chelsea. She has a heart as big as her mouth and she deserves a guy who will treat her like the princess she is.

Thank the heavens they are covered from the waist down, I do not wish to see that. I see the bunch of keys with our favourite furry ball key holder. I grab them and sneak out as quietly as I came in.

En route to Cape Town International Airport.

I park and run in as if I'm chasing a flight. Escalators up, past KFC and there's Wimpy. I can't tell where Primmi starts and where Wimpy ends, it looks like one place.

"Table for one", a clearly disinterested waitress says. Tshini! Greeting us with this attitude then giving us bad service and then saying "Black people don't tip". We don't tip because tips acknowledge good service!

"I'm meeting a friend. A guy, black, tall...". I describe to her.

"Lotus", a voice from behind.

Oh there he is with a Louis Vuitton travel bag on his feet and a MacBook Pro in front of him. Maybe I'm trying too hard but I kneel with one knee on the couch thingy and side hug him.

He remains unresponsive so I let it go .

"You made it this time!", he says when I sit opposite him.

“I’m so sorry about last night. You’ll understand after I explain”.

“Lie to me, let’s hear how good you are”.

“Don’t be like that! I had a traumatic night. I don’t need any more grief from you!”, I say, faking some pain in my voice and making a sad face.

“What happened?”.

Good, now I have his attention. I hope he will believe me.

“My friend got mugged last night. I got a call just after I finished bathing and ready to come to you. So I rushed to the hospital and I ended up spending the whole night there. My battery died and it was just a mess. I only got home this morning and the first thing I did after charging my phone was text you”. I’m getting better at lying. Yes!

“Oh really? I’m sorry. Is she alright?”, he seems genuinely concerned.

“She’ll live. She’s just traumatised but she’ll be alright”.

“And there I was sulking all night thinking you stood me up for no reason”, he says.

I swallow hard.

“I’d never do that”.

“Have you eaten? Let’s get breakfast. My flight leaves in 2 hours so we have some time to kill”, he says.

I could eat to be honest, I was working hard all night and I’m famished.

“I’m sorry I can’t stay”.

“Why not? You just got here”, he says.

“I kinda parked in the pick up zone and the first 20 minutes is free. I don’t have money to pay for parking, it goes to R45 per 30 minutes I think and so ya I gotta run. I just had to come and apologise in person”, I decide to tell the truth. Maybe if I tell enough truths they will cancel out my lies.

“Sit, don’t worry about that, I got you”, he says. I smile at him. He’s so sweet.

If it came down to him and Donovan he would be a better match, not that any of them want me like that anyway.

“Keep your heart guarded Lotus. They are all trash! ”, I silently repeat my mantra to myself.

“Hey”, his voice brings me back. I’d zoned out to a place so dark I never wish to visit again. That bastard ex of mine almost left with all my strength and I’d be damned if I let any other man come into my life and break me again. Men are trash and I have no idea why I’m playing in not one but two garbage bins!

"Your friend will be alright. Don't stress about it", he reaches for my hand and holds it. Tears fill my eyes and I rub them off.

The waiter is waiting to take my order and I sniff as I ask for my eggs well done. I assure Dalu I'm good, it's just the whole hospital thing scared me and made me realise how short life is.

We are eating and chatting and laughing carefreely. He's unlike Don. He's not trying to get into my pants and his language is clean, twangy rwarwa but no swears. Classy and snobby as fxck, excuse my French. There's no tattoos on his skin or scars on his face, he's just clean and that beard, I wonder how much time he takes grooming that. And those eyebrows can't be real! They are bushy but are neat and I want them.

“When is your birthday?”, I ask. What I really mean to ask is how old he is. I think he said 30 that day but I don't quite remember.

“It was yesterday actually. I spent it working with this clever girl with the most beautiful smile I've ever seen. Then she promised to have drinks with me and so I spent all night on the balcony staring at her profile picture on WhatsApp hoping she'll come through”, he says. At that time I was clinging on to Donavan's back, my legs around his waist and singing melodies. I feel bad.

“I have a proposition for you Lotus”, he says after the waiter has cleared the plates. I had a large breakfast, I don't remember the last time I ate breakfast out so I had to make it count. Dalu just had a black coffee and a plain omelette.

“Let's hear the proposition”. I place my arms on the table and lean forwards.

“I want you to work for me?”, he says.

“What? I have a job”. Besides, I may not afford parking fees but I won't clean his house and wash his dirty takkies, I'm sorry.

“Leave your job and join forces with me. With you on my team we can build an empire”, he says.

I raise my eyebrows and he gets my ‘tell me more’.

“Join my auditing company. DM Auditors is mine”, he says.

My jaw slowly drops at the realisation. I was too busy focused on getting things ready for the audit, I didn't bother to research the auditing company. DM - Dalubuhle Mthethwa.

“You mean, you mean to tell me that you own the company?”, I can't believe this.

“Yep and I want you on my team”.

“But you don't even know my qualifications or if I have any to begin with. You know nothing about me so why would you want to hire me?”.

“I know a gem when I see one. That company you are working for is bullcrap but you my lady managed to plant flowers all over that shit and all I saw was a beautiful garden. You covered everything to the T and that takes skill. Skill I need in my employees”, he says. I blush at the compliment at the same time embarrassed for being called out for covering up dirt. And he swears. Palm to face. Is there anyone left on earth with a clean tongue?

“How much will you pay me?”. I'm still in disbelief.

“How much are you earning now?”.

“R5000”, I say in a dropped voice.

He almost chokes on his water.

“What? What do you do with that little money?”. Middle finger up, mentally. Not him as well!

“Ok I'm sorry. I'll pay you what you want. How much are you worth?”.

“Are you asking me to put a price on my own head?”, I ask, with a silly grin on my face.

“Yes. Price yourself. You know your skills and everything so price yourself”.

Since he's being this playful let me play along. “I want R30000 after tax”, I laugh as I hear myself. It's impossible, I know.

“Great, R30k it is. Should I have HR draw up a contract when I get to Joburg?”, he says. Wait, I think he's actually serious!

“Wait. I can't start immediately! I need to think of relocating and Chelsea, I can't just ditch her like that. Plus I need to save my month's notice”.

Getting the money is tempting but the reality of it is coming up with so many complications. And there's Donovan. I don't know what's happening there but he named his club after me and when I think of the things he makes me feel I get goosebumps.

“Lotus, you're young. Think of yourself, it's ok to be selfish pretty girl. We'll relocate you to Joburg and put you up in a hotel for a month so you can get your own place. We'll pay for your auditing courses and certifications. As for serving a month's notice, someone paying you that little doesn't deserve notice, just saying”, he says. Such news should make me happy but it's so stressful. Had this happened last month I would be over the moon right now. With R30000 I can finally afford to pay rent, buy a car, send money to my mother and grandmother and do so much more.

But Donovan. I can't up and leave him. I know me and him are nothing but we are moving towards something. I just know it. This is so hard, Chelsea will know what to do.

“Can I think about this?”

“Sure, sleep on it but don't wait too long”.

“When will we have the interview?”.

“Consider this an informal interview and you've passed. Like I said, I know a gem when I see one. So when you are ready, just pick up the phone and the job is all yours”.

I sigh deeply. Why am I being tested so!

His flight will be boarding in a few minutes so we go down the escalators towards the security checkpoint.

“I'll be back on Thursday, think we can hang out? Like proper hang out?”. How can I say no? He gives me R500 to pay for parking and my smile grows from ear to ear.

“Hey pretty girl”, he calls from the other side of the barricade. I smile at him and wave.

“It's your world, conquer it”, he says. Such a prince charming.

I've never been more confused in my life, confused by two guys who didn't even say they want me. I want to take that job but I'm scared of change. I want the money but I'm comfortable here. I'll give it this week and see how that goes maybe mother nature will be so kind as to send me a signal.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER TWELVE

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2:40 pm

I kinda fell asleep when I got back from Dalu. The whole job offer messed up with my mind and I'm more confused than ever. I need the money but I'm terrified of throwing caution to the wind and starting over on my own, in a new province. I'll speak to my mother and Chelsea and hopefully they'll help me make up my mind. I need the money to be honest but I'm scared. I'll take all week to think about it and when I see Dalu sometime this week when we 'properly hang out' I'll have an answer. I passed out in the middle of debating about it in my head, weighing the pros and cons. Everything in me says 'take it!' But I don't know

mann. The pros by far outweigh the cons but I don't know. I'll pray about it tomorrow and ask the priest to help me through it.

I was rudely woken up by Don at 2 pm. I'd forgotten our appointment. In true Lotus fashion (i.e complain about it all) I got up, refreshed and dressed up. When I got outside he told me to go back in and pack an overnight bag. I whined and complained but you guessed right, I went back in and did just that. I packed a change of clothes and toiletries then left an 'I'm off with Mr D. See you tomorrow' note on the fridge. Then I remembered Chelsea's wise words, 'When going away with a guy, pack matching lingerie, a swimsuit just in case, a jacket, pack a little bit of everything. Rather have more than less'. So I added to my bag and headed out. Then we were on our way to secret location.

We drive towards Gordon's Bay, leaving the populated areas behind. I can never get used to the wealth divide in Cape Town. Kilometers after Gordon's Bay, we off ramp and drive towards a house. It looks pretty simple but there's never anything simple about a house sitting a stone's throw from the beach. Like many upper echelon vacation homes, it stands far from its neighbours and has no perimeter. I guess thieves don't work on this side of town. It's pretty big and it looks like construction is still underway on the other side. I wonder why anyone would extend such a big house.

Two mini buses are parked outside and there's four other cars next to them. I'm hoping it's not a party! That would be cruel of him. I'm here in jeans and a ripped jersey. I look cute I know but if it's a party I don't want to look cute, I want to slay!

"Whose place is this?"

"Mine. Used to be my mother's...Come, let's go meet them".

"Meet who?"

Before he can respond, a woman, probably my mother's age emerges from the front door. Her face immediately breaks into a smile and she hurries down the three steps with her arms open.

"Alpha!", she gives him a big hug before turning to me and giving me a hug and a kiss on the lips. Eyy people! Kissing on the lips is not in my culture please.

"Hello. You must be Lotus. I'm Merishka", she smiles generously at me.

"I'm Lotus. Pleased to meet you".

"You look so young and so beautiful. I love your hair. It's beautiful". I get why she thinks it's mine, these 360 closures do the most and I have it in a high ponytail, who could blame her for thinking it's mine? We own these weaves now, we wear them better than the owners of the hair.

"You're very beautiful Lotus. Just like Alpha said you are. What do you do to your skin? I can't get rid of the acne on my face!", she sulks. Oh-kay. I should introduce her to Chelsea, their energy levels will match.

"I'll share with you my DIY masks and my 3 step routine", I smile back at her.

"I would love that! I love your jersey, where did you buy it?". She makes me turn around. It's a distressed jersey and not to be rude but it wouldn't look nice on her.

"It's old. I got it from Mr Price in Waterfront. It was cheap, I think R80 or so".

Yazi Chelsea always tells me to stop doing this. Everytime someone compliments something I'm wearing, I downgrade it and make it look like it's not that special. You could say "Nice shoes Lotus" and instead of saying "Thank you" like a normal human being, I'll say "Aa these ones? They were R30 in China Town". I need to unlearn this bad habit.

"Are you coming with us? It will be nice to have you. Don't worry, you'll know all their names in no time. They will absolutely love you". She has so much energy, good God, how much sugar did this woman eat! I can't even ask where I'm going with them, who are they, what is this? What if it's some sex cult? And the 'they' are other women!

I look to Don for help but he has this smile and this happy look on his face. Doesn't he get tired of watching me?

"Are they ready? Jammer (sorry), I was late. Lotus took her time getting ready".

"And it shows. Look how beautiful she looks....Come, they've been waiting since morning. They're excited".

Merishka leads the way but she walks so fast she leaves us behind and disappears into the house. Don holds my arm, stopping my step, and turns me to face him. He cups my face in his hands and stares into my eyes. I just look back into his, not quite sure what's up. "Thank you", he kisses me. I have no idea what for. Before the kiss can go any deeper, I hear happy shouting and yelling. I jump for a second thinking maybe we're under attack. I see this mob of kids crowding the doorway, fighting to be the first to get out. They come running towards us shouting "Boet (brother)". I quickly look at Don, who dumped my face and lips the moment these kids started yelling like DJ Khaled all up in here! Just like that, I'm forgotten!

He looks happy and that glow on his face is giving me life. I step back to avoid being trampled by these over excited kids whoever they are. They swarm him and it's nice watching them talk over each other and push trying to get to him. He's high fiving them and trying to respond to a dozen things. The noise!

"Lotus, come", Merishka calls from the door and phew! What a save. He doesn't even notice I'm gone, he's too busy being attacked by happy kids. I look back and I can't help but smile. Seeing him so free and playful is enhancing those feelings I caught last night. My poor heart.

I scan the house as I follow Merishka. I wonder what this place. We pass a living room and there's bags, mostly backpacks on the floor and colourful books everywhere. Do those kids stay here or? Who are they?

Drawings on paper are all over the wall, I guess they were done by those kiddoes. I look at a few and hay some of them are ugly! They look like something I would draw with my left hand, with my eyes closed! Why do people lie to kids and say "you're so talented!" when they do nonsense? That's how we end up with people embarrassing themselves kubo Idols and SA's Got Talent! I think I'll tell my child the truth, like say "You can't sing my baby. So make sure you always sing SOLO, So Low no one can hear you. But mummy loves you anyway", then kiss them and give them sweets. That way they will stop focussing on the wrong dream and try something else until we find something they actually can do. Talent is not skill, you can't learn it so no, if my child wasn't born with it I won't hype them.

"Come Lotus, let's take these to the car....Caleb, where are you? (Shouting for someone named Caleb)...Eina! I wonder where he disappeared to now". She's busy shame, touching this, calling for Caleb again, touching that. I give her time to calm down.

"What's this place?", I decide to ask, maybe she can channel her energy towards me.

She looks at me suspiciously and I don't get it. Should I know? How though? I know I look holy but I'm not a prophetess.

"How can you not know? You've been in Alpha's life for months now and you don't know?". Months? I met him last week. But I don't want to explain myself so I shrug my shoulders.

"So? What's this place?", I ask again.

"It's Alpha's house. He and Caleb made it into this. Every weekend, some children from the neighborhood come here so they can study and play games you know, keeping them off the streets type of thing. Alpha pours his heart, soul and money into this project. He pays all the kids' fees and makes sure they are taken care of", she says.

I'm stunned! He has such a big heart?

"So we're going on a trip today to Aquila Game Reserve. Most of the children you see here have never left Cape Town. Some have never even left the Cape Flats except to come here. All they see is violence and deaths and drugs. Most, their parents are in jail or dead".

Oh my! That's heartbreaking.

"Communities like Alpha's are infested with drugs and guns. The children grow up thinking the only way to survive is to be a gangbanger. It's a bloodbath everyday, they get harassed going to school and end up being forced to join a gang for protection. So Alpha wants these kids to know that there's a bigger world out there and that they can make it out of the ghetto and be something. He makes".

"Lotus...Sorry Merishka, can I borrow her for a second", Don interrupts. "Sure! Now call those brats so they take their bags to the car. These kids will drive me crazy. Where's Sasha? Caleb!".

Don takes my hand and leads me down the corridor to another room, a bedroom. It looks prim and proper with its monotone colours, plain bedding, fitted wardrobes and a picture of a boy and a man on the wall.

"We are going to Aquila Game Reserve, it's a 2 hour drive from here. I'm sorry I didn't tell you. Caleb said this is not romantic and I had no right to just drag you here without discussing it with you first". He sounds like he was told exactly what to say and he's reciting. "It's fine. I don't mind", I assure him.

"What is this place?", I'm not mad at all but information would be good to have.

"The team and I are taking the laaities (young ones) to a game park so they can see the big 5 the TVs talk about. So I wanted you to come with us, with me. I want to wake up to animals in my backyard and screaming children on the other side and you in my arms", he says.

That's sweet!

"How do you select these kids?". They seemed very fond of him.

"It's open to everyone who wishes their child to spend time out of the flats. Merishka takes care of everything, from the guardians giving consent, to making sure school fees, uniforms and all that are taken care of and to trips like this. I just make sure she has all the money she needs. It's just a few of them. Not all parents trust their kids around someone like me, unfortunately".

"How many kids are part of this program of yours?".

"We have 44 all in all but we're going with 23 today. The oldest is doing matric and the youngest is in Grade 4. We're a growing family".

"That's nice. I can't wait to get to know them", I'm thoroughly chuffed.

"You went to varsity right? And did Science things?", he asks like he just arrived at a realisation.

"Yes, I did".

"Think you can talk to the laaitie about things he can study next year? Or maybe know someone who can help him decide?"

"Yes, of course. I'll gladly do it". With pleasure. Carreer guidance is lacking in township schools, I know, I went to one.

How many personalities does he have exactly? I love this man in front of me. Yes LOVE but no I'm not stupid, I won't tell him.

"Why do you do this for these kids?". I'm sure it's starting to sound like an interview.

"Because they still have a chance".

He kisses me and when he says

"Let me lock the door" I know to start unzipping my jeans.

All the cars remain behind and we take the mini buses. There's 29 of us in total. The other ladies help Merishka and there's a female driver for the one minibus. Caleb drives ours and I sit at the back with Don. I met Caleb briefly and he's very sweet, total opposite of his brother over here. He too has tattoos. I spied the wolf on his neck, some writings on his knuckles and a small X on the side of his face. Don calls all his friends his brothers, I don't know what's up with that.

I'm enjoying watching him interact with the kids. You can just tell that they love him and he loves them. I'm warming up to them too but eey Coloured names! Yhuuu! It makes sense now why Dona-Van (Donna + Evan) had his combo name. It looks like a common thing in his community. Mark-Lea (Mark + Leandra), Tyra-Leigh (Tyron + Mona-Leigh) and Jacquin (Jacqueline + Quinton). Some of them have simple names but it's these combos that made an impression.

I alternate between giving them my attention and talking to Chelsea. She's super excited for me and keeps giving me tips on how to woo Don tonight. She's crazy! No way am I doing a strip tease, dancing to some explicit song! Tshini thiza! (Exclamation of disbelief). I want to tell her about Dalu's offer but I think I'll tell her in person tomorrow.

Dalu texts: 'In Joburg now babe. My battery died and I just didn't recharge it'

I cringe at that 'babe', I hate it when guys call me babe, sweetie and the likes when we're not dating. Totally cringeworthy!

I reply with: 'Awesome. Let's catch up later, I was about to take a nap'.

'Ok babe', he replies.

Rhaaa! That unsolicited endearment again!

'Laters', I text back.

I say byes to Chelsea, Flight Mode Enabled, then full attention to Don giving full attention to kids.

"So what's the itinerary?", I ask him when we drive into the game reserve.

"What's that?", he looks at me.

"It's plans like umm what will we do tonight and tomorrow. The plans nje".

"Oh, I don't know. Merishka knows everything".

"Ok. We'll have fun, I can feel it!".

I'm trying to act cool here but mamela, I'm jumping up and down inside. I've never been to a game reserve before or to a baecation for that matter. My Insta is gonna be lit! This counts as a baecation, right?

We're grouped together listening to Merishka's instructions. She and the other ladies she works with takes the kids towards their lodgings and tells us to meet back here in 10 minutes.

"Alpha, don't keep us waiting this time. Go and leave your bags in your room and return here. We are doing the sunset game drive!", she says. I love her! She talks to Donavan like he's a child.

"Yes ma'am", he says and picks up my bag and his.

An employee of Aquila Game Reserve leads us to our cottage. I'm ecstatic when he takes us to one of the private cottages, sitting pretty at the foot of a hill. It has that 'We are sleeping in the jungle tonight' ambience with its stone work on the outside and a thatched roof.

It looked ok on the outside but the inside!

"Wow! Don! Wow!", I can't hide my excitement anymore.

There's a fireplace and I'm already picturing us cozying up in front of the fire later, with cups of hot chocolate with marshmallows.

The bathroom - mirrors, corner bathtub, big walk in shower...purrfect! I snap a picture and send to Chelsea.

The bedroom opens up to a patio with views of the Game reserve. I can't wait to watch the sunrise right here tomorrow morning. And there's a jacuzzi. A whole jacuzzi! I think I can start captioning my pictures 'living out loud' or 'living my best life'.

The bed, you can just tell that linen is expensive. You don't have to be told. There's no time to marvel at the place, Merishka made herself very clear.

We find everyone already gathered, waiting for us! How? We were not gone that long. We divide into two 4x4 safari trucks. I can't hide my excitement anymore. I'm grinning and laughing easily and snuggling up to Don's arm. I don't know if he's excited or not, he's just indifferent. The ride is bumpy and uncomfortable because of the terrain but who cares right now! The game ranger keeps telling the children to hush so they don't scare the animals off. You think they listen when they see four elephants chilling not so far from the road?

I take pictures and I'm all happiness lives here. It's like the driver knows exactly where to find the animals. We drive on and a few minutes later we are face to face with a rhino! I've only seen it in pictures and 'save the rhino' campaigns on TV and of course on the R10 note. They must be using filters in all those pictures because wow! It's so ugly in real life! What exactly is it? A hybrid between a hippo and a demonic unicorn? Shuuu! Ayimbi sana! But ke it's part of the big five and it's one of the most talked about animals in South Africa these days so a picture is a must.

"Take me a picture Don, make sure I'm in and the rhino is in the background". He takes decent pictures yena shame. I take the rhino alone and a few selfies then stop and watch. I take the children random pictures as well, I'll send them to Merishka later. Something tells me she'll appreciate it.

The same story with the Buffalos, the driver doesn't struggle finding them. These kids wow. So much noise! Their excitement is contagious though, bless their little hearts. I marvel, then snap pictures, then selfies, then make Don take me a few more.

The driver says he can't find the leopard, making me wonder if it stays in the same place. He just pulled up and said "The leopard is not here!". But what do we know?

Then the lions, the beasts! The animal that inspires many motivational quotes. I don't know why they are caged but I'm happy to see them. Actually, I'm glad they are caged! I once saw a video of a woman being mauled by a lion in Joburg Lion Park so by all means, keep them caged. We see other game as well but my highlight was the big four/five.

It's getting very chilly and Don suggests that we cut the drive short because the kids are getting cold. We were given small blankets but still, the wind is harsh and he's worried they might catch a cold. I wanna sulk but he has a point. These little people easily fall sick.

Dinner is at the Boma and I sit with Merishka. It's buffet style and overly African themed like most of these places that want to attract tourists. It's beautiful though with the high thatched roof and large fire places giving the impression that we're outside, around a bonfire.

"You make him very happy. Just be patient with him", Merishka says, when we go for dessert.

"What's his story? He never tells me anything", I'm hoping she's one of those aunties who have no problem discussing other people's businesses.

"It's for your own good", she says and I look at her confused.

"He's a good man. Patience is all you need. It's harder for him than it is for you", she says.

"What do you mean? Please tell me", I plead for an explanation.

"It's not my place to tell. You're with him so he will tell you".

I doubt I'll get anything from her so I drop it and discuss the animals we saw earlier and how happy the kids are and how delish the food is.

She talks!

Back at our excluded cottage, I voice note Chelsea just summarising everything. I ignore Dalu's messages and back to Flight Mode. I won't risk Dalu calling here and messing up my dream weekend.

Love making slaps different when someone has treated you to an amazing surprise and foreplayed you with compliments all afternoon then fed you!

I wake up in time to see the sun rise. Don is not in! What happened to waking up with me in his arms? So it's just me, my cup of coffee and a chair on the patio, waiting for the sun to rise. I can see buffalos from here and I believe I have taken enough photos to flood my Insta all month. I never thought I'd ever attach such sentiment to a mere rising sun! But today, I'm letting the rays dance on my skin and through my hair like little diamonds. Love makes us poetic! My selfie on Instagram captioned 'Sun Kissed' sums it up.

Breakfast is buffet style and it's galore. I love my bacon crispy and plenty, so I dig in. I shy away from carbs. My diet is mostly high fat, low carbs in nature. Vacation or not, keeping in shape is a full time job. We all know, a moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips. So I eat

wisely. Besides, I studied Food Science and since I don't get paid much for it I might as well use the knowledge to sculpt my body.

I feel like the other ladies are giving me attitude, except for Merishka of course. Even yesterday, I greeted and tried asking about them but they were dryer than Savanna. Today seems worse but they can go hang. I'm not going to spoil my weekend wondering why some people who don't know me don't like me.

I still haven't seen Don. I'm not worried though. He's a big boy, I'm sure he's alive. Speak of the devil! How does he do it? Look so clean, I mean? How does he keep a white hoodie looking this white and new?

"Hey. Sorry had to go somewhere. I didn't want to wake you up", he kisses me on the forehead and keeps me there. I can feel the eyes of those women who decided not to like me drilling holes through me.

"Ever been on a quad bike before?"

"No, never been".

"Let's go and break your virginity then. I know you want to spend some alone time with me, dressed. So let me give you that"

"Oh, so I want alone time with you now?"

"Don't you wanna be with me for an hour or three?"

"I do but..."

"There you have it. You want to be with me so let me give that to you. Why are you fighting it?"

Sigh.

It's not that hard actually. It's like go-karting but on a bigger bike. We ride on, following a game ranger. I struggle a bit now and then and I keep braking out of fear of falling but he's patient with me. I can't believe I once thought this guy was a murderer! Murderers can't have hearts so big and so much patience.

We stop at some giraffes and he takes me mean pictures.

"Let's take a picture together", I realise we don't have pictures together. He looks so Bae, I want a picture with him.

"I don't do pictures. And don't you ever take a picture of me and put it on the internet".

"How will you know?", I stick my tongue out and mock him.

"I'm serious Lotus. Don't ever put a picture of me out there".

Oh kay. I heard you. Gees! Suit yourself grumpy pants. He makes me swear it and I do.

Weird but ok, some people are private like that.

We get to a small hill and he asks the guide to give us space. We sit on the ground and look out into the greener beyond.

"Are you enjoying it here?", he starts.

"A lot, yes".

"Good...I don't wanna talk much. I just want us to sit here and look at nature. My mother loved this place".

He never talks about his mother and all the pictures, albeit few, have been of him and his father, yet I get the sense that he had a strong connection with her.

"Where's your mother?", I brave it.

"Dead", he says bluntly.

"I'm sorry to hear that. What happened to her?", I wrap my arm around him.

"I don't want to talk about it. I said I don't want to talk!", he snaps and I take my L in silence.

The snapping at me stings a little but watching him looking out into the distance, lost in his thoughts, I can't help moving closer to him and resting my head on his shoulder.

When his mind comes back to me, he asks what I think we should do when we get back. I suggest that we go to the spa and get pampered.

"No way. I'm not doing that shit. Take Merishka with you and get whatever done. I'll never do that".

There goes my #CoupleGoals

"So you like those kind of things? Spas, expensive dining and all that stuff girls do?", he asks.

"I do. I just can't afford it so I never go really. There isn't much left of my salary after I pay the bills you know. I can barely change my hair and I never do my nails because it's so expensive".

I'm doing that thing Chelsea said, dry begging. What he doesn't know is that I don't do my nails because the food industry doesn't allow it and I actually change my hair more often than I should.

"And data is the reason I'm poor! It's so expensive. I wish I could also afford things like other people but well, we all can't be the same. Some of us must suffer".

I'm not that poor (Thank you Chelsea!) but listening to me now you'd swear I'm a hobo.

"Oh ya, I owe you R300, don't I? Here", he takes out a brown envelope from his pocket and hands it to me.

"How much is in there?", he asks.

I take out the notes and count, yhooh! This money looks like those moneys people take out in buses back home. The old, crumpled, over handled notes. Some look new but it's clear that these came from many different people.

"R1670", I say after counting.

"Only? Someone has answering to do! It should be R5000. Why do people do this Lotus? Why don't they just hold their end and pay what they owe instead of this? Why do they push me like this?"

"What people baby? What do you mean?"

Please don't tell me he has "Loan Shark" on his CV!

"Never mind. Take that change, I'll give you back what I owe you when we get back. Tell you what, why don't you write down everything you need and I'll make sure our runner gets it for you".

"Runner?"

"Yes. Get me that list and I'll sort you out....Come let's go".

I was expecting a kiss-nyana but he jumps back on his bike, whistles for the guide and we're headed back to everyone else.

I do the spa with Merishka and the ladies who don't like me while Caleb and Don look after the kids. The hot stone massage, Indian head massage and the chilling in the heated pool afterwards is to die for. I'm sad to walk out of that heaven.

On our way back to Cape Town in the evening I'm down. Just like that my dream vacation is over. But we really bonded, me and him. Red flags keep popping but the Green flags are more, so positivity.

Donavan and I are chatting about cars and I'm asking him why he has different cars. He likes the one but his garage has three others. He laughs and says "I don't like being identified sometimes. If I need to get away, tinted windows and a fast car do the trick". Red flag. No matter how hard I try not to associate him with crime, he goes out of his way to make me think he actually is involved in crime. Which is confusing because look at what he does for these kids! This can't be the act of a criminal.

The reddest flag of them all waves when I tell him I wish I had a car that looks like this other red Renault Captur one of my former lecturers drives. He says, "Would you like to have that exact car?". I nod because well, it's cute and if I had the money I would buy it. He says to me, "If that's the exact car you want, get me her address or tell me where she parks it and I'll have one of my brothers get it for you".

The shock on my face! Like he would have the car stolen? What does he mean? "Or we get you a new one. Write it on that list if that's what you want", he quickly adds. But no mann. What was that?

"Donavan, do you steal cars?", I look him straight in the eye.

"Me? I don't", he says and I believe him. So what was that about? Was it a dark joke that I didn't get?

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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SUNDAY

Thoughts that tomorrow is Monday are killing my vibe but I'm trying my best to remain on cloud nine. Apart from gravity, nothing should bring me down!

The drive felt shorter because we left the Game Reserve not so long ago and now we are here. The kids are tired and most are sleeping. Don and I were talking the whole way. Actually, he was asking questions and I was answering. He knows nothing about what I do but he was interested. It felt like Open Day, educating someone about my career. I bid everyone goodbye with a double hug and a kiss on the lips for Merishka.

On our way to Retreat, I'm over excited and Don keeps saying "you talk too much my Lotus" but I don't think he's complaining really so I keep telling him my stories. Even this drive to my place was short! Agh! Why is the universe trying so hard to keep Don and I apart though!

He takes my hand in his and just keeps it there. I love the silence and the feel of his hand grasping mine. Damn feelings! I'm so Boo'd up right now and I don't even know his last name.

"Can I have your number? Then we can chat on WhatsApp", I break the silence. It's only right that I get it. He calls me with a private number, the few times he's called me at least. Our relationship is way past exchange phone numbers level I think. I mean, we at the no condom stage now so umm I mean!

"I don't have WhatsApp angel. Look at the phone I use", he shows me a small tilili Vodafone phone. Those ones, text, call, play snake - end of functions phone. I couldn't help laughing at him. Who doesn't have a smart phone in this day and age?

"I can help you get one. You can afford one, right?"

"I can afford one, I just don't want one".

"So how do you chat to people?"

I don't get it. I would die without WhatsApp. How would I talk to people? Please don't say "you call them", my salary doesn't allow for serious airtime purchases, thank you very much.

"Fine. Give me your number, I'll sms you".

"I have yours", he says and leans to silence me with a forehead kiss.

He opens the glove compartment and I want to ask why it's packed with so many brown envelopes. He pulls one of them and hands it to me.

"Is that, is that a gun?". When he pulled the envelope I saw something that looks like a gun.

He stops my hand from reaching in and closes the glovebox.

I'm about to go off when his phone rings with that annoying tone. He goes on in hurried Afrikaans. I hear nothing.

"I got to run angel".

Kisses and a hug later, I'm running up the steps with my bag.

"Chels!", I find the door unlocked and she's preparing to make supper.

"Forget cooking babes. We ordering in tonight!"

"Hello to you too lover girl", she gives me the biggest hug ever, as if we didn't see each other yesterday.

"Did you win the lotto?", she asks when she lets me go.

"Something like that", ratchet laugh and I'm waving both envelopes in the air.

R14000 in the one he gave me! R14 flippen thousand! This is the most money I've seen in my life. Add that other one and I'm rich baby!

"This is all the money we've spent on drinks in Club Lotus! It's come back to us". Chelsea rejoices. Money excites her as much as it does me.

I have so much to tell her. She doesn't believe that Club Lotus was named after me! She says he just said that to charm me. Hater! The more I tell her, the more she's convinced he's a hard core criminal and I should stay away from him.

This was meant to be a catch up session but she just had to kill my vibe. Can you believe she says I must return money to sender then cut him off! She refused a share of it! Sulk. I know someone who will appreciate it, I'll make the deposit tomorrow and make her day.

Now I'm in my room sulking and wishing I had Don's number so he could cheer me up.

TUESDAY

My life has been turned upside down by thoughts of Donavan. He's all I think about and I find myself daydreaming about him at work. That body and the whole mysteriousness about him. And now that I have a name I find myself writing it out in my notebook.

Chelsea and I made up. She apologized for playing mother on me and said if I feel Don is right for me then she'll support me. She says I must research him some more before I'm in too deep. Now that we're cool, I can tell her about Dalu's offer from heaven and my skepticism. "TAKE IT", she replies in Bold Capitals. She calls me immediately.

"I'll be fine without you babes. I'll manage. I want the best for you and I'd be a terrible friend to tell you to let this pass. I love you and this is your break, take it".

"But I don't want to move and I don't want to be away from you!", I try to reason with her.

"You're unhappy at your job and I'll see you on weekends and we will video call all the time, so what's stopping you?"

"How about Donavan?", I argue in a lowered tone.

"What about him? Don't make me naar Lotus yeerrr! You will give up your dream for a guy who's been stalking you and you know nothing about? What if he has a wife and kids? Have you thought of that?"

"I love him Chels!", she doesn't understand!

"Love him? She's trying me Lord, your daughter is trying me! Stop that nonsense! Call Dalu right now and tell him you're taking that job! Gee Lotus Janse van Rensburg! Use your head!"

"Wow! Is that necessary?", she hurt my feelings

"Yes it is! Think of yourself for once. We'll talk when I get home. U eina! This child!"

Did she just hang up on me?

Oh well! I'll make my own decision. I'm boss of my life. Deuces. Peace signs. I have period pains and my mood is off so she must tread carefully. It's day $\frac{2}{3}$ of my period. It came early this month. Ya I only get 3 days, 2 and $\frac{1}{2}$ to be exact. I'm God's favourite!

Back to work.

Dr Dirk is all smiles. He is nicer to me since I aced that audit so he's letting me work on my own pace since it's clear now that I know what I'm doing. I could swear he's flirting with me but I hope not. I'm having enough problems with Don and Dalu, a third D (Dirk) is not welcome, he should sit down and be humble.

On Donavan.

I haven't heard from him since he dropped me off on Sunday. It's not sitting well with me because I miss him I won't lie. I've been thinking about him and I've decided he's not a gangster. I'm not stupid ok, if he was a gangster I'm pretty sure I would know that by now.

I've been meaning to write 'the list' but everytime I start it looks ridiculous. He's not giving me much attention and he hasn't called me since weekend so aahh! Inspiration to write a list is non-existent. He drives me nuts. I'm considering swallowing my love and keep it moving like a rumour.

Then there's Dalu.

If I'm being honest I only chat to him to stop myself from thinking about Donavan. I've been chatting to him a lot. Don't frown at me, men use girls all the time as rebounds so I'm taking

one for the girls here. He's everything yena if we pick partners theoretically. Young, black, tall, handsome, rich, owns his own company, educated, mean beard, drives and not a GTI but a Mustang fam, has his own places in Cape Town and Joburg. Did I mention that he's 30? He's everything Don isn't. I doubt that Don has much of an education, but that's the thing, he's street smart and they don't teach that at school! Anyways, I'm meeting Dalu on Thursday. We're proper hanging out then I'll be able to make my own judgement of him. Chelsea says what's better that getting a dick that comes with a fat salary but I say those two should never be mixed. Oil and water.

A month ago, I was living my best life, unbothered, then these men came into my life unprovoked and look at me now! All stressed up and having multiple relationship problems with guys I'm not dating! It's tiring.

THURSDAY

Woke up excited at the prospect of a new relationship. With my sick voice I call Dr Dirk and report myself sick.

"What's wrong Lotus?", he says.

"I have a severe headache. I won't make it to work".

He can't say no. The employment act says I have 30 or so sick leave days per 3 years and I've taken zero this far!

"It's alright Miss Lotus. Drink lots of water and go to the doctor", he says.

"My job doesn't come with Medical Aid and I can't afford a doctor on my salary, so water therapy it is!". It's the post period hormones talking, can never be me.

"Oh", he says and stutters over inaudible words.

I stay quiet. He knows he does me wrong in that shitty company.

"Tell you what. Go to the Doctor and pay, bring me a receipt and I'll process a refund for you. Get better and hope to see you tomorrow".

"Thank you". I'm so faking that receipt and cashing in.

Chelsea took her car so I walk to Main Road and take a taxi from Retreat and drop off in town and walk the rest of the way to the Red Bus stop in Longstreet. Dalu is already there looking as clean as a whistle in a navy blue cardigan. I give him a hug and we jump on the Red Bus about to leave. We race to the top and get a seat at the back. I was blessed with a versatile personality so I get along with most.

Shades on to keep out the wind, we snuggle and I let him drape his arm over my shoulder. He smells really good but he's too affectionate for my liking. I let him though, nothing will spoil my sick day.

I've never looked at Cape Town this way before. It's beautiful. A perfect balance of the rocky mountains, the blue ocean, the city's skyscrapers, the greenery of Kirstenbosch and the luxury of the Waterfront. I'm all pictures. We make a full loop without jumping off. Just looking out, talking and getting to know each other. He's 30 and as I already said, a typical trust fund baby! He laughs easily and smiles effortlessly and his hugs are warm. Maybe I have an affinity for multiple partners like my mother because I'm actually enjoying him and having ideas about our future. I can see me and him living the perfect white picket fence life with our two kids and a dog.

On the second loop, we jump off at Kirstenbosch and take a lazy stroll past the sunset concerts lawn to the boomslang bridge. The walkway winds and weaves around the trees like a snake going higher and higher until the views of Table Mountain are in front us. We stop there side by side, watching the mountains and saying nothing. The air is still and a few birds are chirping in the trees and there's no one else in sight. That movie type of serenity.

He pulls me closer, his hand wrapping around my waist, making me face him. He pauses searching my face for a reaction. I close my eyes and I feel his lips brush mine. Soft, cold and fresh. I part my lips as his tongue finds its way into my mouth. I'm hardly kissing back but I'm not resisting either.

"Sorry, I just...", he says when he pulls back. "Don't be", I give him a hug. It's awkward for a minute but we bounce back and we make our way back to the bus stop. We are laughing and it sucks being me! My spirit animal must be a queen bee! You know how it attracts males ne? I'm liking Dalu harder than I should right now. Sigh.

We drop off at Constantia Nek for the wine tour and pay for the Imizamo Yethu township tour. The tour seems to break Dalu's heart and he keeps saying "Oh no, the government must do something. Human beings shouldn't live like this". It doesn't faze me much because I come from a township very similar to this so such is life as I know it.

We drop off at Camps Bay and grab the most expensive ice cream I've ever had. "It's not just ice cream pretty girl, it's Gelato", Dalu says when I ask why the f it's so expensive. I'm not complaining though. Life is pretty good when you are not paying! I could get used to this. We sit on the benches watching a woman fighting with the waves as she tries to fill her 5 L bottle with sea water. It's cold and windy. I ask him to take me picture and I pose with my cone as if I'm advertising ice cream then Instagram and caption #IceCreamInWinter. Guys, Insta life is a full time job.

"Are you hungry?", he asks when I'm done eating the cone of my ice cream. "I'm starving!". It's almost 5 pm and I haven't had anything solid today. "Let's get an Uber to Kalk Bay for sundowners", he says taking out his phone. "Alright", I say. I'm hungry now and there are plenty plus restaurants here so I don't see why we have to go all the way past Muizenberg to get a meal. But I smile and say ok.

He's getting pretty touchy feely in the backseat of the Uber and we kiss more than once, the last was quite passionate and if Donavan hadn't crossed my mind I might have enjoyed it. The day ends in Brass Bell in the ocean, eating mussels and seafood curry and listening to the waves crash on the walls outside. Watching the winter sunset over the ocean while the ocean gently hums in the backdrop with Dalu's arm around me, is the most beautiful view I've seen in a very long time. Now I understand why he picked this restaurant.

"My friends and I used to come here all the time when I was in UCT", he says.

"Thank you", is all I can come up with.

By the time we leave it's dark and Chelsea has started blowing off my phone. I have to keep assuring her that I'm fine and safe. We Uber to his place in Rondebosch and four floors later we enter the most quaint two bedroom apartment I have ever seen. It's like a luxury hotel room with minimal furniture and high end finishes. The simplicity of the matching stainless appliances in the kitchen, the wide-plank vinyl plank flooring, the high ceilings, the large glass window covering the entire wall opening to the balcony. People are living out here!

“Want something to drink?”, he asks, opening the double door fridge.

“Just water, thanks”.

“Sparkling or still”.

“Still, thanks”.

He tosses me a bottle and I hold it with both hands still amazed by this place.

“So today...”, I start. “...was the most fun I’ve had in a long time”, he finishes and I smile at him. That’s not what I was going to say but ok let’s go with that. We chill with the wines and I’m feeling like the girl.

He takes my hand and leads me to the bedroom. “Wow”, I say out loud. It is wow! Exquisite to a fault. In my next life can I please come back rich. “What?”, he says, gently pulling me into his arms and planting a kiss on my lips. I kiss him back, trying hard not to ask myself what the hell I’m doing. I’m on the bed on my back and he’s topless on top of me, kissing me and his hands sliding under my top, his hands squeezing my boob. He smells really good but, fine I’ll say it! But he’s not Donovan, there I said it!

I push him back because a minute longer and I’ll be here all night long repeating mistakes.

“I have to go now”, I whisper.

“What? Why? Did I do something wrong?”, he asks a little out of breath.

“No it’s not you. It’s just umm it’s embarrassing”.

“Tell me”, he says, nibbling my earlobe awakening my inner freak goddess.

“I’m on my period”, I play the oldest card in the book. I’m not, kinda got done with that yesterday.

“Damn! Really? Shit”, he says sounding really disappointed.

“Ya and this making out has made me umm you know, flow like River Jordan, so please take me home”.

He has to take me home before I change my mind and tell the truth then wake up with regrets.

“Ya sure, of course”, he says getting off me. He’s trying to hide his disappointment but it’s too vivid.

We go down to the basement and baby boy drives a black Mustang. Now I see it in real life. How can anyone hate driving when they drive a Mustang? I would drive all the time just because! He doesn't even need a key to start this car, he just pressed a button. Whaaaaaat! Unlike Donovan's that sounds like it's about to explode when he takes off, this one is dead silent. It's like we're floating inside a bubble. It's my first time inside a luxury car and although I'm trying not to look impressed my eyes looking all around and me asking “What's this?” about everything is selling me out.

“Drive down Main Road towards Wynberg all the way I’ll tell you when to turn when we get to Retreat”, I respond when he asks for my destination. The talking is short, the laughing is forced and the aura in the car is awkward. Must be the near-sex moment we just had. We have run out of things to say by the time we pass Claremont. Weird for people who spent the entire day talking non-stop.

I guess it's true that music speaks louder than words. Ok no one ever said that but it sounds like it should be a quote. Dalu scrolls through his touchscreen and pauses on a song. “Is that Chris Brown?”, I ask when it starts. “Just listen to the words... please”, he says, his free

hand closing on mine. I nod and I'm hoping it's not some raunchy Chris Breezy freaky dicky, it's awkward enough as it is! I grasp on to the words and I think he's driving slower on purpose. I love me some Chris Brown and this song, this. It's the one. "Up To You - Chris Brown".

When it says:

'Girl are we going down, I don't know
But from here now baby I'm gonn leave that up to you.
I'm gonna leave it up to you'

Forget Donovan, this is my future right here nervously smiling at me right now.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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A part of me wants to tell Dalu that I was joking about it being that time of the month so he should make a U-turn and go show me what he's got. But again if we are going to build something together then rushing into the bedroom might mess things up. See how things worked out with Donovan? My point exactly. I should do the 90 day rule with Dalu. I'm looking at him driving. He looks like a promise to love and a future to hold and who knows, I might just find myself living it up in that apartment in Rondebosch. He's the 'bring home to mama' type of guy. My grandmother would approve and her approval means a lot.

But he doesn't have that thing, I like him and I can see us being more of friends than lovers. He doesn't get my adrenaline pumping the way Donovan did. But positivity please, love grows if you water it so baby steps, there's no rush in Africa. I don't know why I'm feeling guilty, feeling like I betrayed Don. I should be mad at that tattooed good looking muscled mess. He used me, didn't he? Is that club even named after me? What if Chelsea is right and he lied to get into my pants? He'd been in them already but what if he wanted to make me fall in love with him so he can leave me hurt? There are people who draw pleasure from hurting others, I think they are called sadists or is it Christian Greys? Why did he take me to that Game Reserve? I fell in love dammit!

And now I'm feeling guilty for thinking about Don when I'm here with Dalu. These men will drive me insane. Let me explain. Don is an emotional decision, he doesn't make sense but I hunger for him more than I've ever wanted someone before. I want to giggle with him, laugh with him, drown in his eyes and let my hair loose as we drive in a convertible with my hands in the air. I want to kiss him in the moonlight, make love to him under the stars, cook his favourite meal in nothing but his T-shirt on, write him little notes with little hearts and trace every single one of his tattoos with my tongue. He makes me daring and wanting to try dangerous things. It's crazy, I can't find the right words to justify it. He's the type of guy that would have me taking a loan from the bank and messing up my credit record just because he asked. Senseless!

Then Dalubuhle. He's a logical decision. He makes sense. He has a bright future no doubt, stable financials, clean credit record, properties in his name, planned vacations and everything we were taught made a perfect family. He is well spoken and UCT did a good job

making sure he knows his place in the world. UCT kinda does that to these kids; inflating their egos and making them think rolling their tongues when they speak will bring back the land. In short, Dalu is safe and we would be perfect. But also he's giving off fxcckboy vibes so I don't know. He looks cute though and that beard is more manicured than trees in rich people homes.

"We are in Retreat. Give me directions", he draws me out of my thoughts. I sit up and look out trying to see where we are now.

"Oh shucks! Turn right right here", I point at a road on our right.

"Right here?"

"Yes!", but he's passed the turn already.

"For someone who drives, you suck at directing. How can you say turn right here", he laughs. Ncoow, he's so cute though. He's right about sucking at directing, we were in the inner lane even! We have to drive down the road and make a U-turn and two turns later we are in front of my apartment.

I'm glad it's night so he doesn't really see it. It might have been beautiful once upon a time, maybe during apartheid, but now it's run down. The paint on the walls is peeling off and the caretaker doesn't seem to notice the overgrown weeds and the rusting roof. It looks like a building from a horror movie, eerie and ancient. Ok I'm lying now. It's not that bad but after seeing Dalu's apartment, it's hideous. I wonder what exactly they use our levies for! We settled for it because the rent is affordable and the interior is not bad at all. The rooms are big, the kitchen with its old cupboards is spacious and our bedrooms are huge and not so old looking. It's home and it's cool. Oh that's not the main reason, the main is that Chelsea had to man the rent alone so we couldn't exactly go for a mansion in Clifton.

"See you tomorrow?", he says as he puts his gear on P(ark) in front of the gate. Maybe I should accept his job offer and buy myself an automatic as well. Clutch control in high heels always makes me question the intelligence of the people who invented manual operated cars.

"Lotus...Can I see you tomorrow?", he repeats himself. I'm zoning out pretty bad shame. Red Flag: He can't hold my attention for long so I'll be dead bored with him.

"I have work tomorrow". I reach for his hand and smile at him. I don't own a company like him. WTF!

"Saturday then?". Persistent, aren't we?

"I'll check my schedule and confirm. We'll talk". I think I wanna kick it with Chelsea this weekend but we'll see. We could all go to Club Lotus and I can make out with him and make Donovan jealous.

"I leave it all Up To You then. Let me know", he says.

That song! It strung the strings of my heart.

"Thanks for today. I had a wonderful time", I mean it. I really did.

"Me too", he kissed the back of my hand and I'm here waiting for butterflies to go flap flapping in my stomach. Nothing Maybe they are sleeping shame or he didn't kiss me hard enough.

"Gave that job offer a thought? Been meaning to ask you all day but I've been distracted", he looks at me with LUST written in his eyes but my butterflies remain sleeping.

"I'm still thinking about it. I'll get back to you".

"Don't take too long. Be selfish and take care of you", he sounds so sweet, it's cute. Yes cute, not hot.

"Ya sure. Bye. I have to go", I squeeze his hand and quickly open the door before he can kiss me or worse get out to say byes. I think I saw someone approaching in the mirror and my gut tells me something is wrong.

"Lotus wait...".

"Later. I really have to run. 911", with obvious urgency.

"Sure. Later then", he says, sounding disappointed again. I bang his door and walk away from his car. Did he think I would invite him in?

I freeze and my heart jumps to my throat. I'm shivering where I'm standing and I suddenly feel like I want to pee. If Dalu knows what's good for him he better drive away right now because I smell a war approaching. What in the name of all that's good is Donovan doing here! And is that a gun in his hand? What the hell!

I exhale deeply when Dalu drives away. At least one problem down, I'm not ready for a confrontation. What in the nine hells? I reach for my phone in the back pocket of my jeans but it's too late. He grabs my hand and looks me dead in the face. I'm trembling and if Anger needed a face I think I just found it one.

"Don, what's this?", I try the act naive and all innocent act but my voice comes out a quivering mess. I sound guilty if anything.

"Don? Call me Alpha!", he says.

Ok, he's not playing. I'm so dead.

He leads me to his car. Not the usual one but a black one with tinted windows. He shoves me in the back seat and gets next to me.

"You hurting me. Stop!", I whimper, rubbing the part of my arm he man handled. My heart is beating fast and my tears are already falling. I'm scared for my life. He has a gun I think.

"Let me out. Let me out!", I yell, ready to kick and scream.

"Lock the doors", Donovan says to someone in the front. I've never heard this tone of his voice before. It's cold, low and murderous, if there's such a thing. All doors lock and I start sobbing. He's going to kill me. But what did I do? What did I do?

He grabs my arm again and I try to swing it out of his way but I'm too slow and the place is small, so he holds on to it tight, way too tight. He smiles at me and I'm confused and terrified at the same time. Why is he smiling like that? As he smiles, his grip gets tighter and tighter.

"Donovan, stop. Let me go", I'm four five seconds from crying like a baby. The tears are here but I haven't started screaming yet. I sort of don't scream, I retreat and whimper like a wounded puppy, tears streaming down my face. My voice died over a year ago. I would slide down the wall, gather my knees, rock myself back and forth and whimper just like this. But I can't get into that memory now.

"Leave her man, you're hurting her", someone says from the passenger's seat in front. I don't see his face. There's someone else sitting in the driver's seat. Two guys! I don't know why I'm relieved that we have an audience. I guess it's that hope that he won't necessarily kill me in front of his friends, or can he? Oh Lord have mercy on my little soul. What did I do wrong? Me and him are not together.

"Where the hell 've you been? I waited for 30 bloody minutes out here for you!".

That smile is gone from his face and I couldn't look at him anymore so I cast my eyes down. Silence from me.

"I'm giving you space, leaving you alone without anyone on your tail, then you betray my trust like this?", I can feel his eyes staring daggers at me but I keep mine lowered.
"30 minutes waiting for your ass. Then you have the nerve to show up with some stray cat", he sounds deadly monotonous.

Dalu a stray cat? Hay kabi but between him and Dalu, he's the stray cat and Dalu is those white people's cats with Medical Aid.

"Lotus, I really hate talking alone. So I'll ask again. Where the fxck were you? Who's that dwaas (fool) who dropped you off?", he asks again.

Sob. Sob. Silence. I keep quiet, rubbing my arm and hoping it doesn't bruise. One side effect of being light skinned is that when you bruise it shows.

"Are you fxcking him? Did he fxck you?" he yells out and I jump, hitting my elbow on the door. He went from zero to crazy in a heartbeat. I could say it's an Uber but a Mustang? He isn't stupid. He's mad! I slide away and slightly turn to face him. For the first time I see his face tonight. His eyes look animalistic and he has his jaw clenched like he's fighting a losing battle against his self control.

"Alpha man, cool off", the guy in the front says.

"Stay out of it! Some boy poms my girl and I should do what? Pick up the phone and thank him?"

Silence from the voice of reason in the front.

"Fxck this shit. I'm tired of talking alone!"

He pulls forward the hand he's been hiding behind his back. I yelp before screwing my eyes shut. I feel the cold of steel on my forehead. And because I watch too many movies, I lift my hands up in surrender and whisper "Please don't shoot".

'She loved the dick and she died for it' will be written on my tombstone. It feels like I've been transported into the middle of some action movie and I'm that terrified girl who'll need therapy for the rest of her life.

"Alpha! Stop it. Put that thing away. Have you lost your mind!", the voice of reason in the front again.

He swears in Afrikaans but drops the gun. My teeth are chattering. It takes a minute before I can open my eyes again.

"I'll ask you again. Who is that guy?"

Must be the adrenaline because suddenly I have my voice in full.

"No Donovan. You don't get to pull out a gun on me! I've never ever had a gun pointed at me before! You don't even get to shove me around and interrogate me like I'm a prisoner! You can't just come and go as you please! I'm not your toy".

He looks at me and he laughs a little.

"Who the hell is that guy who dropped you off? What were you doing with him?", he asks, as if he didn't hear what I just said.

I fold my arms and keep quiet. I don't know if he can tell that I'm shivering or not.

"Lotus Janse van Rensburg, don't try me! Don't fxcken test me! You don't wanna see that side of me believe me", he says.

"Alpha, ease off man. Let her go", the guy in the driver's seat says.

"Stay out of it Caleb, this is between me and my bitch and I'll deal with her how I see fit".

Oh no he didn't! Did he just call me a ? Oh hell no. He's crossed a line. Clearly he's never seen a Xhosa girl pissed before!

“Your bitch? I'm your bitch now? That's what I am to you? A bitch?”, I can't believe he just called me a flippen bitch. That really hurt to hear. How degrading! I'm all out in here giving him Bae status and he thinks of me as a bitch?

“I've been stressed out all week, looking at my phone countless times wishing you'll call. Cause you know why? Cause I thought I actually meant something to you but I'm just another bitch to you? To use and throw away as you please?”, now it's my turn to yell.

“You know I don't mean it like that”, he says, calming down and dropping his eyes.

“Then how do you mean it? Of course you mean it like that. Is there another definition for a whore? See how you dragged me from over there like I'm a prostitute who owes you money? Then you dare hold a gun to my head? Are you kidding me? What the hell are you?”, I yell. 'Trash. That's what he is, like the rest of them. Trash', my inner voice reminds me.

“I waited out here for you and you were out with men. Address that and stop deflecting!”, his voice rises again. Clearly nothing I'm saying is getting through to him so I resort to call him every name in the book, in my head of course. Outside, I sob sob but keep my mouth shut, trying to control my anger. I'm a boiling volcano now, ready to erupt. I want to punch him, kick him, bite him then strip off his clothes and ride him and when he's about to cum, get off and pour ice on him. Ok, I need salvation. How can I think of sex right now!

"Lotus, why would you do this? I'm out here minding my own goddamn business, trying not to add to my body count, trying not to waste bullets on useless boys then you push me like this? Why do people do this to me? Tell me Lotus, why?". That's gotta be the creepiest thing I've ever heard, said in the calmest of ways. Is he saying what I think he's saying?

"Answer me! Did he fxck you? Today? Ever? Answer me!", he snaps at me.

Now he's just pushing me. I'm scared yes but above that, I'm angry! Fxck him, who the fxck he thinks he is! Does he know who the fxck he's fxcking with. Yeah, I wish my voice was as bold as my inner beast.

“Donavan or Alpha or whatever your name is, you waited for me because you are horny. Right? You waited so you can take me to your house and fxck me all over the place and make me confused so I can fall for you then you drop me off tomorrow morning and forget about me until you need another fxck! Did I say it right?”.

He looks away from me and swallows so hard I hear him.

“You don't care about me! You don't care about how I feel! You don't even bother calling me to check up on me. All week Donavan, I thought about you, all I thought about was you! I wished you'd call me”, oh Lord why am I crying now?

“Last night I cried myself to sleep wondering why you did this to me. Why you had to show up in my life uninvited and make me fall in love with you for you to just ignore me like I'm nothing”, I can feel my voice cracking. Oh no no, I can't cry now. I can't be weak now.

He stays quiet.

“So yes I spent the day with that guy, he's just a friend from university. I didn't even go to work because I cried so hard last night thinking about you I woke up with a headache. So I called my friend and asked if we can hangout. I met up with him so I can ask him to give career guidance to that boy who's doing Matric that needs help with degree choices next year! I spend time with him for you. Now that you have your answer. Can I go?”.

“Lotus”, he reaches for my hand. It's his turn to look guilty now.

“Don't Lotus me! I hate you. You're cruel and evil and I hate you for it. Why did you have to do this to me? You could have left me alone but no you just had to come Alpha yourself into my life and hurt me then pull out a gun on me and accuse me of sleeping with my friend”, I yell, hitting the seat in front of me.

“I didn't mean to hurt you. I'm sorry I pointed the gun at the wrong person”, he says, all the cheekiness in his voice gone. Wait what? Who does he think he should point the gun at?

“I hate you, whatever your name is! I hate you and I want you gone from my life”, I keep hitting the seat in front of me with my little fists.

“Is that how you feel? You really hate me angel?”, he sounds hurt. I turn and look at him. The light has been on and I can see the blue of his eyes staring back at me. My mascara must be running down my face and try as hard as I can I can't stop the tears.

“I don't hate you silly! I love you. I love you way more than I should. I love you”.

The words just run out of my mouth and it's too late for me to take them back. I don't know what that which I see in his eyes is but he moves closer to me and pulls my head down to his shoulder. I resist. I'm crying but still facing him. Let him see the pain he's inflicted on me. And tears always solve problems so kill one bird with two stones.

“Caleb drive”, he says.

“Where to?”, Caleb starts the engine.

“Home”.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER FIFTEEN

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I lie with my legs folded on the seat and my head on his lap. I'm still sobbing and he's rubbing my back up and down. No one in the car says anything and besides the bursting of the car, the only sound is my sobbing. I'm overdoing the sobbing I know. I need guilt to eat him up. I'm crying yes but I'm scheming in my head. He's mad and today we're going to fix his broken brain. I'm my mother's daughter after all. I've seen her handle men with words and I thought she was too ratchet. Now I realise a listen hood is necessary. Isn't he's acting like a child, throwing his toys around because Lotus wasn't home when he wanted her. So I'll treat him like a child.

We are at his home in no time. Caleb gets our door from the outside. Child Lock again? He doesn't have kids (I hope), so what's up with the child lock? I make it out of the car looking timid and hugging myself. It's just an act right now. I'm no longer scared but I need to appear so, so I can play at his feelings and make him feel terrible. What's that saying Bra Shakes (Shakespear) wrote in MacBeth by the way? "Look like the little flower but be the serpent underneath". Yes that one. I know I'm looking all cute and vulnerable but trust me I'm pissed. How dare he acts like a bitch then turns around and calls me the bitch! What sorta bitch move is that? Who sent him?

Caleb and the guy I don't know start walking towards the door so I follow and Don brings the rear.

"Caleb", I gently reach for his hand as he tries to unlock the burglar bars.

"I'll take that, thank you", I say in Xhosa and he looks at me like I'm not making sense. I hold my hand open. Since he decided not to understand my language let him understand sign language, that's universal at least. I took up Afrikaans at school and although I only speak enough to ask for food, money and maybe directions, no one can gossip about me in it. So they should have also taken up isiXhosa.

Good boy Caleb, he gets it and puts the keys in my palm.

"What's up?", Donavan asks me and I look away.

"Open the door Caleb, let's do that thing then you guys can go home and I'll talk to her", he says.

"No. Caleb and you big brother (the unnamed) please go home. I need time with Donavan.

"It's urgent Lotus. You can't", he gives me a shocked look.

"Yet I just did. So guys please go home and you, please open your door", I dismiss his friends and give him the key.

"Alpha?", Caleb says, obviously looking for a way forward.

"It's ok. I'll come around your place later", Don says.

It's already evening so I wonder what time later is exactly. The two guys look thoroughly shocked but they get two stepping anyway.

Bye!

There's an awkward silence between us as he opens the door. I follow him up the stairs and into the bedroom. I don't even know what the hell I'm doing here! I shouldn't be here.

He stands and I stand. He crosses his arms and I cross mine. He laughs in disbelief, I do the same. I might be an only child but I know how to treat children. Silence. Silence!

"Look, I didn't mean to say you're a bitch. I didn't mean it that way. Plus you not just a fxck to me, you are more than that Lotus. I named my club after you, that should tell you something", he decides to go first. He looks at me probably expecting me to say something but I remain quiet. I'm calculating. He sits down on the bed. Make that 'dumps his fine self onto the bed'.

"I was angry ok! The thought of my girl with another man threw me off balance. I didn't mean to hurt you. I could never hurt you Lotus", he says.

Did he just say 'my girl'?

"So pointing a gun to my head is you just playing?", since he wants to talk, let's.

"You were not answering me!", he says it like it's justified.

"So?"

"So I needed answers!", he's getting frustrated. Good. If he gets worked up and I remain calm, I'll have the upper hand.

"So?"

"So I always get answers when the gun goes to the head! I did it out of habit. I wouldn't have pulled the trigger".

"Why do you have a gun?"

"I have guns".

Ok, honesty is a virtue!

"Why do you have guns?"

"For protection".

"Really now? Guns kill people everyday and you are proud to have several? All day there's a shooting reported in Cape Town and you'll proudly say you have guns?"

Where's his moral campus bethuna?

"Guns don't kill people, people kill people", he says. I think I should leave this gun topic alone and ask what I really want to ask.

Silence. Silence!

"Why were you so mad?", I decide to leave the guns alone.

"How the fxck you gonna ask me that? You know damn well why I was mad! Do I look like the type to share? Do I look like I'd let a guy touch what's mine?", he looks me straight and I

shake my head no. He looks like the selfish type. The 'I'll kill you and the guy you're fxxking with' type.

"But I wasn't with that friend of mine like that!", I say, desperate to be believed.

You know with lies, you have to repeat them until you believe them yourself.

"I know now my angel. That guy is your friend and he's going to help my boy with varsity things I know nothing about. I appreciate that you did that for me".

Phew! Lies are necessary people. See, I'm winning.

"Why did you disappear all week? We had a great weekend and I thought we finally bonded. Then you went AWOL again".

Stop Lotus. Breathe. Calm yourself. Don't be all sissy here. Didn't your mama tell you never to act desperate? Never ever to beg a man to love you? ... my inner voice chastises me.

"Bonded? Of course we bonded. What do you mean? We're bound me and you!".

Is he serious?

"We are bound?" What does that even mean?

"Ja we are. You're mine, all mine and ask any of my brothers, they'll tell you how I guard what's mine".

"Wait wait...I'm yours? Since when?", I'm shocked but those words made me so happy I can't explain it. Finally, he says it!

"Since I decided you were!", he says.

"And when was that?", now we're talking about me, I'm interested. Chelsea always says I'm a bit vain and I love hearing about me. Good things only of course.

"I don't keep dates very well. Do I look like a calender?", he says. That arrogance is creeping back.

"Dude! Relax yourself ok! I'm asking you simple questions here. Give me straight answers", I say calmly.

"Ok, whatever you say my firecracker", he smiles for the first time today. His smile my Lord, it makes me have non Christian thoughts.

"What are we?", I decide to throw caution to the wind and be straight up. Let's label this once and for all.

"What do you mean? We're human beings I think?", he laughs. He's mocking me I see and it's so frustrating.

"You said I'm your girl! When did we start dating?".

"You slept with me. I asked and you said yes. You're mine. What do you mean?", he says with the sincerests of sincerities.

"So sleeping with you makes me your girl now?", I give him a 'nigga please' look.

"Doesn't it? Do you sleep with people you're not with Lotus?", he raises an eyebrow.

"Well umm well, of course not. But I mean...", I stutter badly and there goes my feigned confidence.

"You're mine Lotus. Relax. Don't rush it, you'll get to know me. You have forever to do that. Isn't you said you love me, your words not mine", he smiles smirkingly, feeling himself I suppose. Eeish that I love you Fada Gourd, it wasn't meant to come out.

"Do you love me Lotus?", he stands and is in my face, I step back until I'm up against the wall and he's in front of me.

"Tell me. Let me hear it one more time, please", he sounds like he's begging. Like he yearns for it. Like his very life depends on it.

"I love you Donovan", I confess. Mara why am I this person? Why am I saying these things eh! Who bewitched me? Show yourself!

"You what?", he leans closer, placing his chin on my shoulder and his ear is right in front of my mouth.

"I love you", I whisper. I don't know why he's making me keep saying it.

He stays there and I let him. Feeling him this close to me is making me realise how far gone I am. He has me now. We have a little moment that I don't understand but I like.

"Can I trust you Lotus?", He moves his face back and looks at me. His eyes look serious lie a lie detector. I nod yes.

"Are you giving me your word?", he says.

I nod again. I'm saying yes, not sure what to.

"Good. In my world, giving your word is like a signature on a court document. So I'm glad I have yours. Loyalty and allegiance are all we have in my world. The price of betrayal is too high of a cost", he says.

What world is that? I want to ask but his words sent a cold shiver down my spine. Can I ask him if he's a mercenary or a, what do you call those people who hide on the roof, sleep on their stomach and look through a hole in a gun and shoot? A sniper? But how do you ask someone that?

"Look baby, about earlier, I might have overreacted a little. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hurt you", he says ever so charmingly. I told you, 'She loved dick and she died by it!' . I'm melting over here but trying to keep it together. He pointed a gun to my head and handled me but I'm here. So you see what I mean?

"I'm sorry too that I yelled at you in front of your friends. It's just, you really were hurting me and acting the fool!"

He pulls my head onto his shoulder and holds me so tight, I feel myself blending with him.

"That won't happen again. I will call you until you beg me to stop calling. I'll see you until you tell me to back off. I'll be there wherever you look", he says with a silly laugh.

"Please no! Promise me Don, promise you'll stop stalking me. It's creepy, unattractive and it raises so many red flags. You need to stop it". I caress his face and look at him with puppy eyes. He nods. "Give me your word", he says.

"I'll give my word if you promise that I can trust you. My word for yours", he says.

Dalu crosses my mind. He's an issue that I'm about to adjust, sorry but three is a crowd lover boy. I give him my pinky so I can promise. He looks at me not understanding until I explain that he should give me his right pinky. We pinky swear: Lotus to be trustworthy and Donavan to retire from his stalking career.

His phone rings and he says "I gotta take this" and walks out of the door. That gives me a chance to pay attention to my own phone. I need to text Chelsea before she gets worried. First I text Dalu and thank him for today and say I'm going to bed early tonight. I can't just throw him away. He's a man so I must be gentle about it, they are weak these people. Then I text Chelsea and say I'm with Mr. Drinks, to which she responds with a rolling-my-eyes emojis. She's one to judge! She's with the Hulk! A certified heartbreaker.

I feel terrible that I confessed that I love him. I didn't even know I loved him enough to tell him. I knew that I liked him intensely but I wasn't aware that I had fallen flat on my face in love with him. Ya ne! I put myself in this one. Did you see how satisfied with himself he was?

Dalu is long forgotten and all my faculties are right here on planet Donovan. He may not have said I love you too but at least now he knows where I stand. And that awed look on his face when I told him I love him was everything.

"I have work in the morning, I should go", I say when he returns.

"Stay the night. I'll take you in the morning", he says.

"I can't show up like this", I say.

I'm in skinny jeans with torn knees, ankle boots and a jersey, Dr Dirk would give me a written warning if I showed up to work like this. He's nice these days but I won't push him.

"I'll take you home in the morning so you can change then I'll get you to work", he says. I think I should say no but I desperately want to be with him so I nod.

"I wish I had my own car", I say. That was meant to be a thought, I don't know why I voiced it. I was thinking how life would be so much easier if I had my own wheels, you know.

"Write that list honeychild. Whatever you need. Write it down", he pulls me in and rests his forehead on mine.

"Tell you what, I'm going to drop off a parcel at Caleb's. So why don't you go and shower so long? I want to eat you up". I blush because I know first hand how vicious his muffing game is.

For once his now now is now now. He's back as soon as I step out of the shower. I drop the towel deliberately by mistake and watch his eyes feast. It turns me on how he gets so turned on by looking at me naked. I don't know why he loves picking me up but I'm not complaining.

He wasn't lying about muffing the hell out of me and making me scream like a bitch. Good gracious, how does he do that? Oh yes, right there. I cum and I'm good. He gets ready to get some and I tell him nope noppity no. Ain't happening, ain't in the mood anymore.

"What?", he looks at me wounded but he knows no means no so he sulks and lies next to me. He was misbehaving today and unruly boys don't deserve pussy!

"Please Lotus", he sounds so needy damn and I want him bad but we cannot reward bad behaviour so no can do.

"Please", he keeps begging and turning me on but I remain resolute. He ain't getting none.

I spoon with him, fighting back the urge to give in. Changing the subject might help redirect my thoughts.

"Your brothers must think I'm crazy", I say.

I kind of went off in front of them and cried my eyes out and professed my undying love. Then I dismissed them when we got here like my name is on the Title Deed.

"No they don't. They know I'm the crazy one and if anything happened, best believe they would have looked out for you", he says snuggling closer.

"I love you Donovan", I say as I snuggle closer. He responds by kissing me on the shoulder and holding me tighter. An I love you too would have been better but alright.

He's not so hard anymore. Good! Now he must feed me.

"Don", sweet voice mode on.

"Yes my skat", he cuddles closer.

"I'm hungry".

"There should be something in the fridge. Go and look", he says.

I detangle myself from his hold and turn to face him.

"I want real food not yogurt"

"Eeish. Ok what do you want to eat? I'll call someone to go and get it for you", he closes his eyes.

"I want those hot wings from Club Lotus. With sweet potato fries".

He opens his eyes and blinks blinks the way I sometimes do when I wasn't experring it.

"Me? The Club is in town Lotus! It's far!", he says.

"I'm spending the night isn't it, so go now so that you can make it back before I starve to death".

"Lotus", he says in surrender. Like I'm a bully or something.

"It's fine Donovan. If you don't want to go and get me food, it's fine", tantrum loading. I turn around and I bet he doesn't know that I'm smiling right now.

He sighs and sighs again.

"Fine. I'll go", he says.

There's a good boy!

As soon as he leaves, I put on the first T-shirt I find and head downstairs. Perfect! He has grapes, my favourite. I'll take those wings and chips to work for lunch. I don't eat heavy suppers during the week anyways.

I need to get rid of Dalu. But does that mean getting rid of that job offer as well? That job could change my life.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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I've been out of character all week and Chelsea says I'm dickmatised beyond salvation. She's complaining that she hardly sees me these days and she keeps saying I've changed. I don't think I've changed much, I just don't sleep in my bed every night and I don't think that's a big deal. I think she's exaggerating, it's only been a week of me doing that. I spent last weekend with her! All weekend I was with her so really she's exaggerating. Plus she thinks I'm domesticating myself too much. I really don't think I am. I cook for Don but I eat too so I cook for myself if we're being honest. I only dish up for him, isn't that so? I've broken routine a little I know but it's just for this week. I used to jog in the evenings in my quest to keep fit but lately sexercise is all the cardio I do. Women's Health says you burn more calories riding a man than running on a treadmill, so I will still stay fit I'm sure.

Ok so here's how my week has been since Monday. From work, I go home to refresh and pack a change of clothes. Then Donovan picks me up and we go to his house. I make supper while telling him about my day. Which reminds me, I need to slow down on complaining about Dr Dirk. Donovan said an unfunny joke about eradicating him if he keeps being a pest in my life. The way he jokes about killing people is not funny and the fact that he says it with a straight face makes it worse.

Caleb always shows up around eating time so I know to count a plate for him now. He's very reasonable and less angry than Donovan. Of all Donovan's brothers, he's the closest. He's a nice guy yena. I don't know who hurt Don. He shuts me down everytime I ask about his

parents or his childhood. He won't even tell me where he went to school! I do most of the talking when we hang out.

Anyway, I was still saying. I cook and have supper with Don and Caleb. Then they disappear after eating to go and cash up at the club and to collect taxies tax something like that. He tried to explain it but I didn't get it. He said it's like insurance so the taxies can be insured/protected. I wonder why they don't insure with reputable insurance companies. Maybe it's expensive. Ok, so they go and do that, then Don comes home when I'm in bed and we get in some steamy loving. And boy does daddy leave an impression every single time! I feel like a teenager first discovering sex. He's perfect for me and my only wish is for Chelsea to accept him.

He's very good with me and his 'brothers' are slowly warming up to me. They look at me funny but they are civil and that's enough for me. As for Don, he's disrespectful, crude and raw but that makes him him and I love him just the way he is. Yes, I love him. If only Chelsea could see reason and accept him already. She has negative things only to say about him. She says the gun, the club, the 'brothers' and the whole mystery of who he really is makes the hairs on the back of her neck stand. I tried telling her that he has a licenced gun because of the roughness of his neighbourhood but he doesn't use it. As for owning a club, I don't see anything wrong with that to be honest. Status is all it is and she's wrong to judge him for that. Everytime I mention her, she says she has a bad feeling about him and thinks I shouldn't be with him anymore. She's borderline insisting that I take up Dalu's offer and move to Joburg and restart my career the right way. Can you believe she thinks he's a gangster? I mean, I get where she's coming from because I also thought so once upon a time. But now I know he's not.

Then there's pretty boy Dalu. Dalubuhle Mthethwa. I've been avoiding that boy like the plague and I'm running out of excuses to give him. I was hoping he will get the message and let me go but he's so patient and understanding it's not even funny. Chelsea thinks he's who I should be and she points it out every single time, it's starting to get annoying.

I had a long week at work and TGIF! Work is not bad these days but since I've decided to work day shifts at Dr. Dirk's company and night shifts ontop of Donovan, I'm tired most of the time. Dr Dirk is less of a dick these days and he paid me the money I said I paid the doctor. I said I lost the receipt and he took my word for it. I'm yet to try and ask for a raise but then again I'm an intern so maybe not. I'm also yet to tell Don about Dalu's job offer but again maybe not yet. Then there's my mother, I'm yet to tell her I have a boyfriend but I know how awkward that conversation will get. She'll start preaching STIs and contraceptives and sex games. It's weird talking to her about sex, I don't know why. I'm yet to go on contraceptives, I think you can't take the morning after pill so many times without it deciding not to work and you getting knocked up.

Well, today is Friday and I can turn up! I haven't felt this excited about Friday since last Friday. Donovan wakes me up at 5 am. I don't know how he does it but he's fully dressed already! We are in Retreat at 5:30. He kinda drove like Michael Schumacher today. For the first time I invite him into our apartment. I think our relationship has reached that stage now. Next month we'll upgrade to matching outfits.

He waits as I go and shower and watches as I go from outfit to outfit trying to decide what to wear. We're talking and laughing and he needs to slow down on the compliments really. It's too early in the morning to have me blushing like this.

"It's Friday. Can we hang out later? Maybe you and me and Chels and her boyfriend, at our club?", I suggest as I dig through my clothes.

"I'm working tonight. If I finish early I'll call you, otherwise I'll call you tomorrow", he says. "Oh ok", is all disappointed me can muster right now. I kind of wanted booty rubs and cuddles tonight.

"Come, give me some love", he says. He can tell I'm disappointed, I have a very expressive face. My mouth I can tame I'm sure but my face always sells me out.

I stand in front of him and lean in for a kiss. It's weird but I love looking at the way he looks at me, it gives me hope.

"And angel, I'm seeing the kids tomorrow afternoon. Think you can come?".

How can I say no to a chance to hang out with Merishka and to see those precious young souls.

"Great! Tell that Mustang boy to tag along. I want him to talk to my boy about varsity things", he says.

That sounded like a command rather than asking. He gets like that a lot, it's almost like he doesn't know how to talk. My heart stops for a second and I think I can't breathe. Donovan wants me to bring Dalu along tomorrow. That won't end well for me. I need a new lie to save myself.

Chelsea budes in to check if I'm taking the car and she finds a butt naked me standing in front of a seated fully dressed Donovan. Awkward, considering where his hands are right now.

"Oh my goodness! Can you learn to lock your door!", she says yet still standing there.

"Put on some clothes girlie!", she says.

"It's my room!". I step away from Don's hands.

"So?", she says.

"So you should learn to knock!"

She walks across to us and I move away and continue my quest for clothes. Fine I'll put on underwear so long!

"Hi stranger. I know your rude self from Longstreet! Remember? You must be the Donovan who's driving my girl crazy", she says, giving him her hand to shake.

"Hi Chelsea", he says. She laughs and looks at me then back at him.

"So Donny tell me the truth. Did you really name the club after her? She's lying isn't she?".

"I did actually", he says, with a polite smile. "Wow! I wish someone could name a club after me or a perfume or better yet a shoe range. Don't you have a brother you can hook me up with?", she says dreamingly.

"They already named a bun after you", I interject.

"Shut up! Don and I are having a bonding session here", she says and I can't help but giggle. Maybe I'll open a bakery one day and name it after her shame, lol.

"So girl do you need the car today? There's no fuel so I can leave you with my bank card if you need it", she turns to me when she's done interrogating poor Donovan

"I'll take her to work", he responds although clearly she wasn't talking to him.

“Great then. Let me leave you lovebirds alone, I’m running late. My train leaves in 14 minutes”, she says.

“I’ll call you later. Love you”.

“Cool. Love you too babes....Nice meeting you Don”, she says and rushes out.

We look at each other and laugh. She is extra.

As we drive to work I feel really good. I’m hopeful that Donovan and I could actually be something. We connect like WiFi and I’m sad that my bestfriend can't see that.

“Open the glove compartment and take out a brown envelope in there” he says and I do as instructed.

“How much?”, he asks.

I finish counting the money and it comes down to “R7500”.

“More than your salary”, he smirks. I shoot him an you-are-not-funny eye.

“Take it and buy fuel”, he says.

I look at him in disbelief. All this money just for fuel? He gave me a whole lot after that trip to the Game Reserve last of last week!

“Please angel, don’t make this awkward. Just take the money and put it in your bag and let’s continue driving in peace”, he says.

I sigh but put it in my bag anyway. Chelsea will be over the moon or not! She calls it dirty money, mxm. All money is dirty, doesn't she know her history?

She confused me this morning. I thought she was against me being with him yet she went all nice on him. I don't know. But again, she's very good at putting on an act. She took drama lessons in her private high school and it shows.

Don drops me outside work and after a few kisses he lets me go. His eyes look like home. His eyes, those blue eyes! Can I just pack my bags and move into them?

New plans. Since Don is working tonight, I decided to be nice to Dalu. I need to talk to him about that career guidance thing and test the waters to see how him meeting Don might work out. I go on strong with the chat and my excessive use of emojis can show that I'm trying too hard. He's a little upset but I guilt trip him by telling him how tired I am and how the situation back home has been weighing down on me, he gives in and starts apologizing. He says maybe I should take the job then but it's complicated ok!

He’s going to a friend’s house party in Gardens and says he doesn’t want to go alone. Perfect! I’ll be there. If I’m being honest, I don’t know why I’m still entertaining him because I’m with someone now. I’m head over heels with Donovan and although he hasn’t said he loves me, I know he does. It’s obvious. The way he looks at me, the ways he’s all over me even when his brothers are around, the number of times he calls just to check up on me, the way he makes love to me. It’s obvious.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

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I’m in Gardens sitting on Dalu’s lap and wishing time could move faster so I can go home and sleep. It’s not my kind of scene and I feel out of place. What kind of people wear cocktail

dresses to a house party? I guess I didn't get the memo! I'm in a bandage dress and although I know I look sizzling, I feel out of place. But Dalu says I'm the hottest thing he's seen in a while which had me blushing red and blue. He's too touchy feely tonight.

And these black girls realise that they're still black right? Going to these fancy universities and befriending Betty with the good hair changes nothing. Didn't one of them just call "black people" too loud! In her words, "I don't like black people parties, they are too ghetto and they drink cheap liquor. Eeww". That rubbed me off the wrong way and I took it upon myself to be a Black people's ambassador.

"So black people drink cheap liquor?", I ask nicely.

"Not to say black people, black people you know. But you know what I mean. There's always cheap liquor in township scenes", Miss boujee says.

"I see. What is liquor ma'am?" I ask.

"Duh! Alcohol. Beer and those cheap ciders they drink!", she replies so confidently you'd swear she invented the word liquor.

"Are you sure?", I raise an eyebrow and look at her accusingly.

"Well ya", she looks to her little friends for help but white girls are clever these days, they avoid blatant racism.

"Let me educate you sisi. One - you're black, no amount of foundation can cover up your melanin and under that (hideous) weave lies an afro. Two - No amount of education or lack of thereof, since you don't know what liquor is, can unblack you. You can roll your tongue all you want but oksalayo with a name like Qondile you sure can click".

She stands and comes to my face and I can tell she wants a fight. Does she know I grew up in a township and I drink cheap 'liquor'? I'll re arrange her face real quick.

"Don't presume to know me. You know nothing about me!", she says.

"Of course. How can I know anything about you when you know nothing about yourself either!".

She looks at me, her eyes flickering and I can tell she wishes she could slap me. I'd actually love to see her try.

"I have no time for people like you", she decides to give up.

"Of course. Don't forget to look up the difference between liquor and beer darling". Bye Felicia.

I could use fresh air and Dalu comes with me. My phone rings and it's Chelsea. I ignore her but on the fourth time I start thinking maybe it's serious.

"What?", I say as my 'hello'.

"We need to talk, it's urgent!", she says but her tone doesn't sound hurried.

"Can't it wait Chels?".

"No it can't. It's a matter of life and death".

"Fine. Where are you?".

"At Hulk's place".

"Share your location, I'll be there just now".

Now I'm panicking. Did Hulk hurt her? What could be wrong?

"Dalu, please take me to Milnerton".

"Right now?".

"Ya it's my friend Chelsea. I think she's in trouble", I'm trying hard not to panic. If anything ever happened to Chelsea I would be too broken to continue with life. After what happened to us last year I can't. She recovered or so she says but she became promiscuous after that, picking up one night stands from Tinder like she was getting paid for it. It broke my heart

because I brought that guy into our life. And at some point I suspected she was doing drugs. I was so scared I'd lose her. Thankfully her parents stepped in and helped her through it. I didn't tell my family. I turned to church and prayer, that's what kept me going. I took a celibacy vow and wished to cleanse myself of that man forever. And although I'm not a big fan of the Hulk, I appreciate how he was there for my friend when she needed love.

I strike a conversation with Dalu about giving career guidance and he says he's up for it. I'll think about it clearly later, right now I'm too worried about Chelsea.

We're in Milnerton and GPS says "Your destination is on the right". I call Chelsea and when she doesn't answer. My hand is shaking and my heart is beating fast. I'm thinking the worst. I run into the house. I don't even knock. I'm praying in my heart that she's alright.

Then on the couch, there she is sitting comfortably with her legs over Hulk's lap! She has a savanna in her hand and he has a glass of whatever in his.

"Seriously Chelsea! You almost gave me a heart attack, for what?"

"Hey babes", she gets up and gives me a big hug.

"You freaked me out!", I yell at her and she rolls her eyes at me.

"Oh hello there chocolate...You must be the Dalu driving my girl crazy!", she shakes his hand. He blushes and I give her the eye. She said that to Donovan this morning.

"Dalu this is A and baby this is Dalu. You boys get to know each other I'll speak to Lotus", she says, taking my hand and leading me outside. A is Anatswanashe, we don't call him Hulk to his face.

"What's this?", I ask as soon as we step outside and she closes the door behind us.

"It's about Donovan. You have to leave him. I'm serious!", she says, with an urgency I don't get.

"What? Why?", confused is me right now.

"Ok, so I told Hulk about you and him and guess what, it turns out your bad boy runs with the Wolves. Matter of fact he's their alpha!", she says.

"The what?", I'm not sure I'm following.

"The Wolves Lotus! The numbers gang!", she says.

I can't help laughing. This time her imagination has outdone itself. Everyone knows that numbers gangs operate in prisons. Duh!

"Your theories girl! You are crazy. I can't believe you called me all the way for this. You want me to leave him that bad, you'll make all this up?", I don't believe her.

"Lotus, open your eyes! He is the alpha of the Wolf pack!", she claps her hands as she speak to emphasise her point.

"He's not an alpha of anything Chelsea. He's Alpha, that's his nickname!", I say, fixing her hair. I really don't want to fight with her about this. Let me push that loose strand of hair behind her ear instead.

"No Lotus, I'm not playing. Hulk knows Alpha in person! Apparently he's quite popular in Longstreet and not for good things. Hulk says the Wolves push their drugs through club Lotus. That club is all a cover up for money laundering, drugs and who knows what else? Makes sense why the drinks are so stupid cheap! They don't make the money from selling drinks! It's just a front", she says.

I wish I could believe her, I really do, but her theory is like something out of a movie.

"Look Chels. I know you've been drinking, you'll be fine. I love you but I'm going to get Dalu and we're going back to that boring house party! I'll talk to you in the morning, ok love?", I say with a smile. How drunk is she really!

She does something on her phone and shows me the screen! "You're not hearing me. Look", she says. I take the phone and read. It's a blog I think. I read the first few lines and my mouth gaps. Whaaaaaat?

The Wolves (Afrikaans: Wolwe) are the third most notorious gang in Cape Town, after the Americans and the Hard Livings. They don't identify as a gang but more of a well structured family. They pride themselves in being 'not just another gang' but an organised establishment that has been forced to make ends meet the only way they know how. Unlike other gangs, their ways are 'peaceful' and they only kill to defend and to protect.

There are four divisions of the Wolves, each operating in a different Turf in Cape Town under an alpha. Each Turf has an organised hierarchy with the:

ALPHA as the leader of the pack.

GUARDIANS who kill to defend.

RUNNERS who deal the drugs.

TAXMEN who collect 'Road Tax' illegally from taxies.

TOOLIES who deal the guns and manage the arsenal.

PEACEMAKERS who mediate between the gang and other gangs to maintain peace.

All four alphas report to the guy at the top, some sort of godfather only known as the GENERAL.

The Wolves are known for money laundering, drug dealings and racketeering (taxi drivers have to pay a "tax" to drive through the neighborhood). Although in the gangs world they are saints, they still flourish as an active criminal enterprise'.

I pause reading and catch my breath.

"But this doesn't say Donovan is part of this cult!", I say. I see the signs, they are all there, crystal clear, but my brain is rejecting them. She takes her phone, scrolls down, hands it back and returns to her crossed arms stance.

The article goes on and on and my hand is shaking as I read on. It can't be. No ways!

"Their symbol is the wolf and on completing initiation, they have the wolf tattooed on their bodies. They refer to each other as brothers and are one tight knit family. You cross one brother, you cross the entire pack".

I think I'm going to faint. I remember Donovan alluding to all of this and had I listened more carefully I would have picked it up. A part of me is still rejecting it. It's just a coincidence. Right? Right?

I fumble for my phone and dial Donovan, yes I finally got his number by the way. Chelsea snatches it from me before I can put it to my ear.

"What do you think you are doing?", she snaps.

"I need to ask him".

"No babes. You're not asking him over the phone and most certainly not in this state! You will talk to him tomorrow when you have calmed down!", she says.

“I need to know. I don't believe it Chels. You are making all this up because you don't want me with Donovan! You wrote this blog post, didn't you?”, I divert my pain towards her. “No Lotus, I'm not doing this with you right now. I know what you're trying to do but not tonight! Now take your little Dalu and go fxxk him or whatever but whatever you do remember this Dalu guy is the one for you not that criminal. So don't mess up and don't talk too much”, she says.

I feel tears filling my eyes. He can't be a gangster. I suspected it but I worked hard to convince myself that I was seeing things.

“I love him”, I say, more to myself than to her. She rolls her eyes.

"I love him. He's a good guy!", I plead his case.

"Good guy my ass! He sells drugs, kills people, bullies the community and you think he's a good guy? A good guy Lotus, really?"

"It's hard to believe this. I need a moment". The tears are here. She gives me a hug and holds me there.

“Don't cry. You'll get over him. We'll get through this together alright? Just stay away from him for tonight at least”.

I hug her back and sob on her shoulder. I know she means well but she has ruined my evening.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

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“I love him”.

“Then unlove him! I'm not doing this with you again. If you wanna walk that road again, you're on your own”, she snaps.

She paces as I lean against the wall, sobbing. I love him.

"So what's it gonna be?", she isn't playing I know and I'm crying because I understand where she's coming from.

"I'll leave him. I'll go with Dalu and I'll end it with Donovan tomorrow". Between her and a man, I'll pick her.

"Good!", she says.

I leave her with Hulk and swear not to call Donovan, tonight at least.

As we drive towards town Dalu can see that I'm not ok so I lie and say Chelsea's father is sick and she's worried so I'm worried. He says we don't have to go to that stupid party anymore so we end up in Rhodes Memorial. It's pretty dark. All the eye can see is the city lights looking like many stars on a low sky and the endless steps guarded by animals of stone on either side. There's an eerie aura like we are sitting on top of tombs or something. But the spookiness of this memorial and the fact that the statue of Rhodes is looking down at us right now makes all this the more thrilling.

Donavan keeps running through my mind but I'm doing my level best to kick him out. I need to focus on Dalu. We go from me complaining about my job to him reminding me that his offer still stands to him complaining about how his father tries to control his life to me pointing out that he should stop fighting his dad and embrace his love. I hate the whole "my

father thinks I'm weak and wants to control how I run my company". All I hear when he says that is "I'm so rich, look at me, I have no problems at all but I want to be normal so I'll invent problems. Let me start complaining about the excess love my father gives me then when I'm bored later I might also fight for animal rights and advocate for fish in the sea". Rich people bore me seriously! Some of us have proper problems so forgive me for not really worrying about plastics trying to kill the environment or stuff like that.

My goodness, Dalu whines about everything! He's so spoiled and he doesn't know it which makes it even more obnoxious. But he's into me yena so if me and him are going to work I need to stop being angry at him for being rich and love him as he is, with his money non problems and first world problems.

We talk all the way back to varsity and wow he really had it good at school. I want his problems! He says he had to share an apartment till third year because his father thought him too irresponsible. Like seriously? I shared a room at rez!

We end up talking about us and the red bus tour and that kiss and that near sex session. He wants to know why I'm giving him Katy Perry hot and cold vibes and I blame it on me being scared to fall in love. It's pretty dark but I can see the outline of his face and he smells like a million dollars. His smile reminds me of that boy who got shot in The Hate U Give.

Donavan crosses my mind again and I feel myself muttering a "why?". "Why what baby?", he pulls me closer. Oops! I didn't mean to say that out loud.

"I mean, why are you so patient with me? I disappear on you and when I come back you take me back. Why?". I had to spin something.

"Because I want something with you. I want to explore this and give us a chance. I can't give up in you Lotus. I want you".

That actually sounded sweet. My vulnerability leads us to kissing him. I'm emotional and I'm mad as hell at Donavan so I give back the passion. We making out strong and his hand rides up my thigh. He bites my lower lip a little when he finds out there's no underwear there. I don't know why but I part my thighs for him and let his finger roam and enter. I'm almost on my back on the cold stone steps and his fingers are terrorising me perfectly. His kisses are gentle and nice. But, but they lack that ferocity that comes with Donavan and the moment I think 'Donavan' it's like a switch just got went off in my body. I push Dalu back, harder than I meant and I quickly apologise while pulling down my dress. Fxck, I'm so wet!

"I'm sorry Dalu I can't do this".

"Why not? What's wrong? Did I do something?", he says still catching his breath.

"No it's not you. It's just, I'm celibate and I'm not ready to undo it yet".

He remains quiet. I doubt he buys it.

"Look, I can't go there yet Dalu. It's a dark past and I can't make the same mistakes again. I can't get attached to you, I'm sorry". I am still celibatish! It's the truth. Ok well I was before Donavan happened.

"Talk to me. What do you mean it's a dark past? Tell me", he pleads.

"I can't talk about it". I don't want to.

He probes and probes and obviously he's not going to let me go.

"It's my ex ok! He broke me to pieces and please don't make me talk about it. Not tonight. He hurt me so bad I can't go there". Damn you tears. I think I'm crying for Donavan more than about my past.

"Please don't make me talk about it". I'm sobbing uncontrollably
"Shhhh, don't cry baby. You don't have to talk about it right now. I'm sorry for pushing you".
He has no idea the hell hates he has opened. I never want to walk that memory lane ever!

We sit there a while, him holding me until the tears run dry. And we sit there some more, in silence. A shooting star shoots across the sky and I wish for peace.

"I love you Lotus and I swear I would never ever do anything to hurt you. I can tell he hurt you but you need to move on, don't let him keep you a prisoner still. Dust him off my pretty girl and walk on. And please take me with you on your journey forward", he says.

Lord, please restrain my tears.

"I know it's too soon to say but I love you, I really do. Like I told you, I know a gem when I see one and you are a gem! Please let me love you. Please give me a chance", he holds me closer as he says that.

I wipe my tears with the back of my hand. 'It's him you should be with, so don't fxxk up' Chelsea's voice rings in my ear.

"I won't hurt you, I promise. I'm not a saint I won't lie. I've been around and I've effed up before, many times I've effed up but no one has ever made me feel the way you do. I just want to be with you, travel the world with you, play with you, build an empire with you. I just want you Lotus", he says.

"I thought you just wanted sex", I chuckle, trying to make light of the situation. I need to teach myself to laugh through the pain.

"Frankly in the beginning that's what I wanted. Smash no strings attached but then I got to talking to you and I got to spending that day with you and I didn't mean to but I fell in love. Now I don't even care about the sex anymore, it's you that I want, all of you". He lets me go and takes my hands in his. I can't see him clearly but I keep looking.

"I love you", he adds on. I take a deep sigh.

I can't bring myself to return the I love you.

Donavan!

"Let's get out of here". The cold is becoming unbearable. We've been sitting here in front of Rhodes for hours now. It must be well past midnight.

"Ya let's", he agrees and gives me a hand up.

"Please take me home".

"Is Chelsea there?", he asks.

"No. She's sleeping over at Hulk's place". "Then I'm not taking you home. You can't be alone tonight, you're coming home with me", he says.

"No Dal...", I try to protest.

"No nothing Lotus. You can't be alone!.....please let me be there for you. I'm not trying to sleep with you if that's what you are scared of", he says.

I know a loss when I see one so I won't bother fighting this. Besides, I swore to Chelsea and if I go home alone I can bet R7500 that I'll end up calling Donavan.

"You also love Chris Brown?", I ask as Erased comes on. The volume is low but I know my boy Breezy when I hear him. Yaz Chris Brown can go on stage and just breathe but as long as he's holding a mic, I'll swear he gave the best performance ever! "Who doesn't?", he says and I smile back at him. I know he does I was just making conversation to break the silence.

So, Chris Brown, another thing in common! We drive on to his apartment and I'm as amazed by how exquisite it is as I was the first time I saw it. You need to see it for yourself to understand.

I see a missed call from Donovan and I flight mode my phone. He must go to jail!

“I’ll use the other room”, Dalu says when he sees me unsure how to change into the T-shirt he gave me with him standing there. “No please stay with me. Let me just go to the bathroom and put this on and we sleep”. “Are you sure?”.

“Yes. But I’m not ready for...”.

“I know pretty girl. I’ll just hold you I promise....If I get a boner forgive me, you have that effect on me”, he says. I find myself giggling. He really is sweet. My grandmother would love him.

He wasn’t lying about getting a boner and if thoughts of Donovan were not haunting me I would give it up right now. There’s a good reason why people should sleep at night, to avoid those little things called thoughts. They come alive in the night time like little vampires.

Donovan. If it's true that he's a gangster then him and I can't be. Then maybe perhaps probably Dalu and I have a chance. If I put my mind to it, I'm sure I can make it work with Dalu. I like Dalu but I'm in love with Donovan. Such fuckery! Two worlds apart and although common sense would pick Dalu without a second thought, something about Donovan has me hooked.

“There’s a joint around the corner that serves the meanest breakfast platters”, Dalu greets me when I wake up. He's talking my love language - Food. It’s almost 10 am! I should be at the Park Run! It’s a bit too late now though so I might as well go for breakfast with Dalu.

“I have nothing to wear though”. I can’t now show up in a restaurant for breakfast dressed in last night’s tight dress and high heels. It will just look wrong and I might be mistaken for a prostitute refuelling after a long night of whatever prostitutes do. And for the life of me I pray that Donovan stopped stalking me. If he or his brothers see me with Dalu all hell could break loose, literally.

“Let’s go to Cavendish then and get you something”, he says. It's rude to say no to shopping! Giovanni Versace would turn in his grave!

I must look ridiculous in my dress, his oversized sweater I have on and his flip flops that are way too big for me. But it was either that or high heels so ridiculous it is. Sissy Boy later I’m wearing jeans that cost almost as much as my portion of the rent, a bodysuit, a small sweater on top and a biker jacket on top. It’s not that cold but I will never afford these things on my own and I know the saying “Opportunity comes once in a lifetime”. I finish off with a R1000 sneaker wedge that I fell in love with at first sight. All together I’m sure I cost almost as much as my salary. I take a watch, a necklace and a keyring too because he asked “Do you want anything else?”.

I had to take off the jacket because I was beginning to burn. Since we are in Cavendish he says he knows another food joint there and that’s where we end up. The breakfast is good but thoughts of Donovan keep creeping into my head, disturbing my peace and messing up with my appetite.

We take a walk through Stadium on Main, laughing at the lousy bowling by some guy, wondering if we are too old for the trampoline and we even get a few tokens and play a few

games. We are bonding too well too quickly and I'm praying in my heart that Donovan stopped stalking me. I keep looking over my shoulder.

We make it back to his apartment and only then do I switch my phone to normal mode. It's past 3 pm and the first thing I see is a message from Chelsea:

'Come home. Your gangster was parked outside for hours. He just left now'.

I respond with a wide eye emoji.

'And whatever you do, please don't get dropped off! Walk if you have to', she texts.

My heart skips several beats and I ask Dalu to order me an Uber because Chelsea is in a bad space.

"Let me drive you", he offers.

"You hate driving boo". I can't risk Donovan seeing the same Mustang again.

"Alright. But I need to meet Chelsea again. She's your best friend baby and I would love to get to know her", he says.

"She's in a bad space and won't appreciate me bringing company. Maybe next time", I argue politely.

"I guess. Ok let's all hangout later then?", he says. So needy!

"We kind of tight on finances now so how about we go out after pay day? All 3 of us", can he let it go already.

"Never mind finances. How about you girls come through in the week then and I'll cook?

Talk to her and just tell me when", he says.

"That's fine yes. Let's do that".

I give him a hug and a thank you for everything.

"Your Uber is outside, let's go", he says and I follow him down with my jacket draped on my arm.

"Here. There's quite a bit in there, the pin is 8642", he hands me a bank card with his name on it.

"No Dalu I can't. Please don't throw me a bone just because you feel sorry for me". I love money yes but I'm not a charity case.

"I'm not throwing you a bone! You're my girl and I'm just taking care of you, allow me please". His girl? Since when?

I say no, he says yes, I say no, he says yes. Eventually I sigh and take it. Eve ate the apple so the sons of Adam can learn to feed us after all so ya...(Gospel according to Chelsea).

I missed the Park Run again! Men are such a distraction yeses. But I've bigger problems than mere running. I'm so conflicted.

Donavan. Dalu.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER NINETEEN

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When I'm done narrating my last night and my today with Dalu, Chelsea thinks I should marry him already. She says soulmates cross our love paths once in a lifetime! She went on to explain her soulmate theory and had me cracking my ribs with laughter. I can never with her. Lmfao.

"It's just that you don't understand how the process of creation works!", said the heathen to a believer!

"How does it work Chels?" I'm already ready to start laughing.

"Same way Eve was made! The formula never changed, only the location changed. The Garden of Eden became a woman's womb", she says.

"Teach me". I'm trying not to laugh.

"So in that same way, when a girl is made in the womb, the rib of her soulmate is taken out of him and she's made from it and other ingredients of course", she says, quite seriously actually.

"Let me understand. So boys are born with all their ribs intact and they lose the one the day their soulmate is created?"

"Precisely! Creation happens at night! So the boy will be sleeping and his rib will be taken and used on the girl. That's why it's said 'when you meet your soulmate you'll just know'. They mean, the rib in you will attract the ribs in him and the spark will be instant".

I think she believes these theories of her!

"Chelsea!". I can't help laughing. "If what you're saying is true then how do you explain women with Ben 10 soulmates?"

"No man! We all date people but they are not our soulmates! With your soulmate you'll know. With all these other men you'll keep trying but nothing will work. No matter what you do, if the rib that made you didn't come from him then it will not work!"

I won't even ask where she got that from because I'm 99% sure she'll say it's in those books that were omitted when the Bible was compiled.

We laugh and she has weirder theories about the exchange of male and female energies until we loop right back to Dalu. That bank card has her jumping up and down.

"He's perfect for you. Now get that Donovan out of your system", she says it like getting over someone is that easy.

"I want them both", I drop my voice.

"What? Are you crazy? You can't have both! You'll lose both of them. You can only have one and that one is Dalu! Your gangster must go, we can't hang around criminals Lotus!", she's says sternly.

"It just sucks that now we need a new chill spot. We can't do club Lotus anymore!", she adds looking genuinely sad.

I just roll my eyes. She doesn't understand my inner conflict.

"What are you waiting for! Dump his ass already!"

"Yes mum. But I need to see him and break up with him in person. I need to ask him why he kept all this from me!"

That's what I say but inside I'm hoping I'll ask him and he'll tell me it's a lie.

"I don't care how you do it, just do it. And while there keep your legs closed Missy!"

"Yes mum!". She can be too overbearing and controlling sometimes.

40 minutes later I'm pulling up in front of that double storey in the Cape Flats. With our numerous trips here I eventually learnt the way. I leave the car outside with half on the pavement and half on the road. I ring the intercom and wait but nothing. I keep trying but nothing!

It's just another street, kids playing loudly with pretend guns and making loud shooting noises at the far end, a dog looking for bones in front of one of the yards, two women with

rollers on their heads obviously gossiping, an old bakkie parked in front of that yellow house. It looks normal, no way a gang would thrive here.

Donavan's phone keeps ringing till it goes to voicemail. I'm getting frustrated. I probably should have told him I'm on my way but he's sometimes home at this time of the day so I thought maybe. He must be at his mother's house with the kids but that's too far to go to on a hunch.

I leave because I'm starting to look silly out here.

Chelsea is not in and I pace up and down trying to get it together. Donovan is a gangster? The very thought is killing me. I'm shaking and I do the only thing I know to. I find my rosary under my pillow and pray. My prayers are haphazard and my trembling hands skip some beads. I want to call Chelsea but I don't want to burden her wherever she is. I can't stop the anger flowing through my veins. How could he!

I texted him a 'where are you?' that time I was outside his house and only now does he respond with a "I'm home. What's up?". I ignore it and take a long cold shower to shock myself into reality. It's winter and I'm under a cold shower because of a man. Women deserve a monthly trauma grant from the government because the things men put us through!

I cook up a storm afterwards but the thoughts in my head just won't shut up. It's 6:53 pm when I grab the car keys and drive to the Cape Flats. 'I'm outside', I text. He comes to get the gate in less than a minute.

"What the hell? What you doing here? You shouldn't be here!", he yells at me. Not quite the welcome I expected. He turns around and makes his way back into the house and I follow up the steps to the bedroom.

"Don wait!", I call after him. He paces with a closed fist, vividly angry. Had I known my coming here would upset him this much I would have listened to Chelsea, stayed in bed and dumped him via an sms.

"Don't you ever again drive here at night. You hear me? Ever!", he says, looking me in the eye. I don't know what else to do than to nod.

"I'm not playing with you Lotus. You can't drive here at night!".

Yes, I got you the first time. I feel like I made a mistake coming here and maybe I should just leave. Now he's upset and I can't suddenly say "Hey are you a gangster?...It's over".

"It's fine, I'm leaving", I turn to walk out of the door. "No you are not. Take off your clothes and get into bed. I'll see you later", he grabs me by the arm to stop me. I stand there trying not to unleash my tongue on him. He ignores me,

opens the side drawer, takes out his gun and plants it on his waist.

"It's almost 8! Where are you going? I thought maybe we could, you know, talk", I say. By talk I mean dump his ass.

"I looked for you this afternoon and didn't find you. You decided not to take my calls and you switched your phone off since last night. So talk to the pillow so long, I have to go somewhere", he says. He sounds quite cold and I've gotten to know that unemotional him is dangerous him.

"We need to talk Donovan! And no it can't wait!".

"Too bad, it has to wait. I have a job to do. Now get into bed and don't wait up", he says, looking at me but not with the usual enticement and charm. A job? Like maybe kill someone? Or sell drugs? What kind of a job? I need to stop thinking this way or I'll drive myself crazy.

“I’m coming with you!”, I stand defiant in front of him. He says no but I’m not backing down so he finally says fine whatever.

We don’t drive very far when he pulls up in a rundown looking side of the neighbourhood. “Stay in the car at all times!” and he’s gone before I can ask where he's going to. He disappears into a house and I WAIT! Like 40 days and 40 nights later (probably 30 minutes) he re-emerges and dryly apologises for keeping me waiting.

“I need to talk to you”, I say before I can chicken out.

“Can’t it wait? I told you I have a job to do Lotus”, sounding annoyed.

“No, it can’t wait. Can you pullover and we talk?”.

He sighs but keeps driving. He parks at an outdoor gym and kills the engine.

“Talk. Make it quick”, he snaps.

My turn to sigh. It's now or never. Phew!

“You know I love you Don but I can’t be with a man who threatens to hurt me or any one close to me”, I’m off to a bad start.

“What are you on about? Did I threaten to hurt you?”, he shifts and looks at me. Those blue eyes and there goes my speech!

“It’s just that my ex hurt me and I can’t go back there again!”, I say. Shit! I didn’t mean to say that. I had a ‘dump him nicely’ speech but now I’m blabbering.

"What did your ex do?", he stays looking at me and I'm looking down playing with my fingers. Dalu tried getting it out of me but he failed. Don won't succeed either.

He pushes and pushes and before I know it I'm telling him. Damn you Alpha for making me weak!

“After my last boyfriend I was done with men! Done done. I should have stayed done”.

I hate thinking about my ex because he made me lose faith in men. He was a monster and maybe I should have seen the signs from the get go but I brushed them aside. That’s the problem with monsters, isn’t it? They never look like monsters in the beginning and some, like my ex, are so good at keeping their monstrosity within they never look like monsters at all. The whole world proclaims 'he's such a good man. You're so lucky to have him' yet you wish he could get hit by a car and die.

"Tell me my angel. I'm right here. Tell me everything", he says.

“He was a very mean human and although Chelsea kept telling me to leave him I stuck around hoping he'll change. I was patient with him and I let him take so much away from me. He made me believe I was the one with a problem and that if I left him no one would want me. Can you believe he would cheat and blame me for it and I would apologise? He would slap me and blame me for making him angry and I would apologise”.

"I would take two taxis to get to his house only to find him not home even though he would have known I'm coming. He enjoyed torturing me I think. He made me feel fat and ugly and he would be so upset if I looked sexy saying I wanted men to look at me. I wasn't that big but he would tear my body down and I felt like the ugliest woman on earth. My ass was too big, my boobs were too soft, my waist was too bony, my stomach was too flat, my calves were too big. Everything about me was wrong to him". Hence, my obsession with fitness. Months of being called fat have me terrified of gaining even 500 g!

"He once punched me in the face for smiling at a security guard, saying the way I smiled was obvious that I wanted to sleep with the guy. And you know what I did? I apologised and he forgave me so I stayed with him".

I let my tears roll down. That man made hell feel like home for me. I was so lost it's a miracle I made it out in one piece. I get angry everytime I remember what he reduced me to. I can't believe I gave a man that much authority over my life in the name of love.

"So I would do this thing where I would sit on the floor and play Chris Brown's Electric Guitar from my phone. I would sit there and hold my breath, trying to make myself faint". My voice is breaking and I need to stop to collect myself. It's hard to tell what Don is thinking because his eyes are glued to the steering wheel, his hands are clasped except the index fingers and he's tapping the steering wheel with them. I've opened the floodgates of my memory and it's too late to shut down now. I just hope he's not listening, it's embarrassing. I'm humiliated.

"But when he was good he was good you know, nice words, a young present here and there, good loving, a home cooked meal, you know what I mean! But the bad overshadowed the good. Ever dated someone you're scared of? It's hell! But I stayed, broken as I was, just because I was hopeful he'll change, you know what I mean". I throw him a glance and he's still focused on the steering wheel.

"And silly me! He would say 'Send me nudes' and I would strike a pose and send him naked pictures of me smiling into the camera. He never liked those even, he would Google some fine Pornstar and send me a nude picture of her and say 'that's what a bad bitch looks like'. So I would try harder next time but I just never got it right", I wonder why I'm telling him all this. Later a counsellor was to tell me that I had daddy issues and I was looking for a father in this older guy. That just made me hate my father even more for abandoning me.

"Then one day I walked into his house and found him having sex with another girl". I close my eyes and bite my lower lip so hard I taste blood. If I never remember that sight it will be too soon. I was shattered and the image never left my mind. "And as I cried, guess what the first thing he said to me was? 'If you satisfied me in bed I wouldn't have to want other girls'. He found a way to blame me for it but for the first time I stood my ground and broke up with him. At first he thought I was joking because he owned little Lotus but no I was done. Then when he realised I was no longer coming back he sent me a text with his friend's phone saying 'I'll destroy you little whore' and destroy me he did!". I stop to swallow.

"Did he hurt you after that text?", finally Don speaks. He has this dangerous look in his eye and his voice has a beastly undertone.

"Over and beyond! He posted my nudes on his Facebook and sent them to everyone who knew me. He made statements about how he had to break up with me because he walked in on me having a gangbang with four guys. He told people I was prostituting and I was on drugs and that I had older men paying me for my services and the whole nine yards. He even told people I had all sorts of STIs. He got very creative and guess what, his Facebook people believed him without a question and actually sympathised with him".

That's a Memory Lane I never wish to walk but since I'm here I might as well take a stroll.

“Sometimes I think that's why I struggled to get a job, you know? Like I'd go to an interview and it would go great and I could tell they liked me then I'd be turned down a few days later. I suppose they would do a background check and you know they start with social media these days and I guess no one wanted to work with a whore”.

Don buries his face in the palms of his hands and keeps saying ‘fxck!’.

“Where is he now?”, he asks eventually.

“Jail”.

“Jail? He went to jail for defamation of character? Or for the abuse?”, he asks.

“No. What he did to me was nothing, it was what he did to Chelsea”. I feel the lump in my throat growing.

“What did he do?”. I keep quiet.

“Tell me Lotus”, he sounds so angry and I'm hoping it's not at me.

“So he kept dragging me online and I couldn't take it anymore so I overdosed on pills, trying to kill myself. I was in my final year and everyone in my class and my lecturers had seen me naked and I couldn't deal with the humiliation. I wanted to die”.

He bangs the steering wheel hard.

“So Chelsea being Chelsea took it upon herself to confront him. That was after my suicide attempt and I was back in my room from the hospital. She got into her car and drove all the way to Goodwood, I guess to tell him to take all my pictures down from the internet or whatever. They raped her Don. All of them took turns raping her. She got there and found him with two of his friends watching soccer or what not and she shouted at him. She went to defend me and they raped her!”.

My tears are coming down in torrents now and I don't want to remember. I want it to stop.

“What happened Lotus? Tell me”, he says. I want to tell and scream and kick something. But he says I should keep talking. I can barely let the words out but I manage.

“He called me and told me they were done and I should come and take my whore of a friend. I had to call a cab and luckily I called the police when I was getting there. I got there Don and Chelsea was lying on the floor naked, her dress ripped into strings and these three grown men were laughing. They were laughing at her!”. The anger and the pain I'm feeling.

" 'You guys can have this one, she doesn't taste that good anyway' he said to his friends when I walked in. I couldn't understand how a man I had loved and who had said he loved me could be so cruel! Before they could decide if they wanted me or not, the sirens were wailing outside. The cops got there when I was still trying to pick Chels up. She just looked at me, tears dry on her face and she said nothing. She wouldn't say anything for close to a week, not a single word".

I'm shivering. I thought I'd forgotten, I thought I was over it. “They hurt her and it was my fault. She was trying to defend me and they hurt her. I brought that man into our lives and she paid the price”.

“Which jail is he in?”, he asks.

“Pollsmoor”, I manage to say.

I can't stop the crying now and I could use a shoulder. He starts the engine and drives. I'm thinking ‘he has nothing to say?’. Well, I spoke out at least. It hurts but it feels so liberating to speak out. I don't remember ever telling anyone about it except the shrink. We tried to forget and move on. Her parents got us a good lawyer and the court case went surprisingly fast. Chelsea was so far gone I thought she was lost forever. I would sit across her and almost not recognise her. Her flame had burnt out and she looked more on the other side of

the veil, you know, like the walking dead. Alive but not quite. Then the sleeping around started! I felt so helpless and I would call my mother and cry. She attempted suicide twice and was institutionalised for 4 weeks then when she got out the Hulk came along and I watched her come alive again. Today she's alive again and somehow all these unnatural events always bring her and I closer together.

"Do you have Electric Guitar?", I ask. That song saw me through the darkest of my days and I would cry to every lyric.

"You sure you want to hear it? I mean...", he says and I cut him short.

"I'm sure". I recline my seat a little and close my eyes. Let me visit memory lane and have a little dance with my demons. It's the only way to quench this fire that I've just awakened.

"Wait, let's do this. We're almost home. Let's get home and we listen to it together".

We proceed in silence and I'm trying my level best to keep my tears locked in.

I'm glad when home turns out to be his place. For a second there I thought he would take me home, as in to my home. He gets my door, takes my hand and leads me to a room that's now as good as ours.

"Play it from your phone", he says and I do that and put it on the bedside. Shoes and all, I lie close to him, his arms wrapped protectively around me. He doesn't say a word as I sob through the whole song thinking of days I felt like nothing, days I'm glad are gone and days I'd be damned if I let myself go through them again.

My tears soak up his white hoodie but he doesn't complain. We lie there as the song replays. By the fourth time I'm good and I ask that we sleep.

"Lotus look. I'm not an angel, if anything I'm the opposite of that. Many say I don't have a heart and maybe it's true. But I need you to trust me anyway, give me that benefit of the doubt they preach about".

He holds on to me.

"I'm probably not what you want in a guy. An 8 - 5 job, suit and tie, little wedding by the beach, fancy dinners with parents. I'm none of that and I won't apologize for it. All I ask from you is to realise that I'm not your ex and so please don't ever punish me for what he did. I have enough of my shortcomings, that you can punish me for if you see fit. But I'm not him and I will never do you like he did you. You have my word", he says.

I know he hates emotional talks so this means a lot. I wish he could go on but he always does this. He gets emotional then as soon as he realizes it, he snaps out of it.

"Come, let's get you out of those jeans".

He helps me out of my clothes, puts in bed and sits by my bedside holding my hand. "I'll be right back ok my angel?", he kisses my hands. I nod even though I would rather he didn't leave me alone.

"You know I wouldn't leave you tonight if I didn't have to. But there's things I have to do. I'll be right back", he says.

I nod.

"Let me go, I'll be back now now", he kisses me on the forehead, gets the lights and is gone. Surprisingly I'm dozing.

“Lotus”, I'm woken up by that voice I'm quickly getting used to. I heard him opening the door but as always I pretend to be sleeping, out of habit.

“Hey. What time is it?”, I whisper, turning around to face him.

“3:13 am”, he says after looking at his phone.

“Where were you?”. I pull his arm and dump it on my bare body. He readjusts it and pulls me closer to him.

“I had a rough night angel and you had a rough night. Think you can leave questions for the morning and love me just a little louder today?”, he says.

I bury my face in his chest and nod, hoping he can feel it. His hand moves from my back down towards my waist.

"You're perfect", he whispers, his hand holding my waist. He glides it down and rests on my bum. He squeezes a little and whispers another "you're perfect". His lips are freezing and his mouth tastes of alcohol but I take them and let that tongue slide into my mouth.

His hand moves down my stomach and down, forcing its way between my thighs. I let out a soft moan as his finger stops on my clit. “Don”, I let out when he moves his fingers further down and his one finds its way in. My one thigh is draped over him, opening up and probably crushing his arm. His finger moves in and out slowly, setting my body alight and gasping up my moans. My eyes are closed, my head is thrown back and I'm moaning into the night. My focus is on that finger and I'm arching and moving and shutting out any thoughts that threaten to spoil this for me. When his lips kiss my neck and his free hand digs into my bum, I let out a soft ‘Donavan’. I can feel the orgasm building up but I won't cum just yet.

“Your body is perfect. I love every single curve on it. You're beautiful, you're gorgeous and this body is perfect. You're everything he said you're not. You're perfect”, he says, pulling his finger out. I want to protest but I can't find the right words. He throws the covers off us leaving us exposed in the dark. So dark all I see is the outline of his body. He comes on top of me and guides himself into my wetness and slides home. He handles me so gentle like I'm piece of glass that will break if I'm dropped. When he hits a spot I let out a moan and ask for more. He stays there, hitting it, driving it, giving it good till I'm repeating his name over and over. His breath comes down on my neck as his hands wrap under me, grabbing my ass and lifting me up towards him. The impact is intense but his fingers digging into my flesh are holding me in place. Slowly, deeper, harder. He's not fxxking me tonight, he's loving me and I'm in love with him. He groans my name and grabs me harder and I know daddy's coming home.

“I'm sorry for waking you up sweetheart. I had to have you”, he says, getting off me and kissing me on the forehead. Silently I'm hoping that he forgets how many times I said I love him. I shouldn't love him. Damn you Alpha!

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER TWENTY

Tuesday.

It's after work and I'm lacing up my trainers, ready for my jog. I need to run so I can clear my mind a bit. I still haven't asked Donovan if he is a murderer and druglord and an overall criminal. Chelsea keeps pushing me to ask him and I keep lying that I'm ignoring him at the

moment and will ask him soon. Meanwhile I'm sending heart emojis and heart eyes to him every chance I get. I forced him to get a smart phone and I think I'm the only contact on his WhatsApp. I love him and I can't even lie to myself anymore. He's got me bad. But he's bad for me. Thixo!

As for Dalu, it's beyond complicated. I keep dodging his "I love you" messages and hiding behind work stress. But I promised him a dinner and we're having that dinner tonight. I have to cut my run short today so I can come back and freshen up. I know I shouldn't lead him on but he's really nice and I need to appease Chelsea. I lied that I'm done with Don and I'm getting serious with Dalu so this is me backing up my lies. So it's a double date. Me and him, Chelsea and Hulk. Chelsea is more excited than me, obviously. I think she thinks that the more time I spend with Dalu the faster I'll forget Donovan and what better way to forget a man than to get over him before you break up. Painless.

Mann, Dalu went all out! What with a 3 course, 5 star meal served in hotel quality plates! He looks so good man, I can't help stealing a few kisses. There's something about a man that cooks! Like after eating his lasagne, I was ready to call his father and ask to pay lobola. It's like the harder I look for reasons to leave him, the harder he gives me reasons to stay with him. I really don't know what I'll do with this boy.

"Babe, can I ask you something please", he says after dessert.

"Yes sure". I follow him to his bedroom and as soon as the door closes behind me, he pulls me into his arms and kisses me. I kiss back because well, he's an amazing kisser and we kinda vibing innit?

"I couldn't wait anymore. I've been looking at you the whole time and I needed to kiss you like this". He kisses me again.

"I love you Lotus", he says. I kiss him again so I don't have to talk. I like him but I'm not at the love stage yet. Baby steps Dalu!

He wants to make out some more but I say no. We can't just abandon Chelsea and Hulk. It's rude.

Chelsea smiles a naughty smile at me when we get back to the table and I look down blushing. The atmosphere is easy like we've all known each other for a long time. Chelsea adores Dalu and she's going out of her way to show that she approves of him. He's getting along with Hulk too and it's making me want to cry. Why is he being so perfect! He's making it harder for me to pick a D. Hulk looks oversized but the way he keeps looking at Chelsea is making me smile. They could be something after all.

"So Anatswanashe, where in Zimbabwe are you from?", Dalu asks, perfectly pronouncing that name and making Chelsea and I look bad for never trying. I'm sure we can say it if we tried harder.

"I'm from Manicaland", Hulk says.

"Where in Manicaland? Manicaland is a province, right?", Dalu.

"Ye, it's a province. I'm from Nyanga, born and bred, but my rural home is in Chipinge", A says.

I sip on my mocktail and keep shut upping. I've never heard of these places before. I only know Harare and Bulawayo in Zimbabwe. I don't even know their president. Do they have a president in Zimbabwe?

"The witchcraft in Chipinge! The nyangas (medicine men) there created witchcraft, I swear!".

"Ya hey. Why do you think I never go home. Their lightning is not one to mess with".

They laugh at the joke my friend and I obviously missed.

"But Nyanga is beautiful. The greenery, the mountains, the superstitions around the mountains, the history and culture. The Eastern Highlands fascinate me".

"It is beautiful", A agrees.

How does Dalu know all this? We didn't learn about Zimbabwe at school. All I knew was that Zimbabwe was the bread basket of Africa. I wonder if it still is seeing that they have bread shortages, excuse my literal translation, it sounded funny in my head.

"I wanted to take this chipmunk of mine to Kariba but because of this whole RTGS currency and fuel problems, I think I'll take her to Zanzibar instead", he says, smiling across at me.

"Zanzibar?", I jump in.

"Yes baby. You need a break from your shitty job...Actually, let's all go. I'll pay", Dalu offers excitedly.

Before I can even digest what he's saying Chelsea is already yelling yes yes and talking dates and leave and all that shebang. I just smile, wondering why the universe hates me so much. Why does this boy have to be so perfect! Can he please be a jerk already so I can leave him.

I Google RTGS and it says Real Time Gross Settlement. I don't understand the jargon but looks like that's the new currency of Zimbabwe. I'm feeling dom over here.

So by end of dinner it's finalised that we are all going to Zanzibar next month. Hulk looks indifferent and I'm just hoping he and Chelsea will be together then. Their on/off situationship can't be trusted. Chelsea helps Dalu clear the table while I lie about having to take a call from my mother. It's Donovan calling.

I'm by the balcony and just said my 'I love you baby' when the glass door opens. "I'll call you tomorrow Don. Be good! Bye".

If Hulk overheard my conversation he doesn't show it. I feel guilty so to mask it I jump into conversation.

"So A. You cool with this Zanzibar trip?".

"Ya I don't know, we'll see", sounding meh.

"Lotus you're a good girl and contrary to what you may think I care a lot about your girl and that means I care about you too, since the both of you come as a package", he says.

"That's good to hear. I don't like seeing Chelsea sad and she loves you, you know that?".

"I know. But it's you I wanna talk about not Chelsea", he says checking if the glass door is closed.

"Alright", I lean against the wall and face him. Maybe he wants gift ideas to surprise Chelsea. I know the pair of red thigh boots she wants.

"What game are you playing Lotus?".

"What do you mean?", I raise an eyebrow.

"Look, this pretty boy of yours is good to you I have no doubt. And maybe you love him too I don't know. But you are rolling with Alpha! Do you even know what that means? If, actually make that, when Alpha finds out you are playing him consider yourself dead. This boy, Chelsea, his family, her family and maybe your entire family will be dead too! Alpha will chop you up into pieces and feed you to the dogs".

I feel a coldness in my spine and my palms sweat.

"He would never hurt me!", I thought it and accidentally voiced it.

"Why wouldn't he? Tit for tat is law in the game. You're hurting him so he will repay you, a ten fold. What's your game plan?"

Would Don really chop me up?

"I'm working on it. I'll leave one of them soon". I promise I will. I just need a bit of time. He laughs and looks out into the skyline.

"Do you know who you are messing with? Grown men sweat when they hear that man's name and you are out here playing him for a fool. You need to stop this immediately if you value your life. For all we know, he's waiting outside. The Alpha has eyes and ears everywhere".

I hug myself, the cold hitting me even though I have a jacket on. I know he was stalking me but he swore to stop. I believe he stopped.

"Donavan would never hurt me!". I don't believe it myself but maybe if I say it out loud it will become.

"Stop playing naive! You know that man rules the streets with a gun. You're playing with people's lives here Lotus. I have no doubt he would enjoy killing this young boy of yours....What's the first rule in all gangs? Loyal to the death! And what happens when someone breaks loyalty? They meet their death. You've sworn allegiance to Alpha so why are you doing this?". Before I can answer he goes on.

"The man named his club after you! And word on the street is that the boss has a permanent bxtch now - you! What do you think he'll do when he finds out that some rich boy is knocking his girl? He will kill you and everyone else who knew about it! I don't know about you but I kinda really value my life", he says.

OK now I'm scared.

"You won't tell him, will you?"

"I don't have a death wish. Just make up your damn mind and do it soon before innocent people get hurt".

Chelsea opens the door startling me. "Oh there you are. We should go now, it's getting late. You staying behind Lotus?"

I look up at Hulk and his words come rushing back.

"No, I'm going home. It's a work night".

She looks at me puzzled because I had said I'm sleeping over even though she had insisted that it was a work night.

As I lie in my bed, sleep refusing to come, I feel terrible. I love them both. I must have gone mad because I've pic mixed Dalu and Don's pictures and the more I look at the picture the more I don't know who to pick. Maybe I should just let both of them go and return to my celibacy.

I get my laptop and watch a documentary about the Numbers Gangs in Cape Town. It's pretty scary how ruthless these gangsters are and I pray for that 1% chance that Don isn't like this. These are animals not humans! The ones in prison are worse. Wow.

Wednesday.

I leave work at 3 pm because Dr Dirk is not around and I know no one else will notice my absence. Even if someone ratted me out and I got fired, I wouldn't give a flying fish. I stopped respecting my job the day I saw my colleague's pay slip. And having Dalu's bank card and brown envelopes from Donavan has me feeling monied these days.

I sent some money home to help my grandmother and mother out. I guess that's why my mother is calling now. I shouldn't have sent R10000! It's very suspicious because she knows I don't make that kind of money.

"Sisi", I have her on hands free as I start the car.

"Did you rob a bank Lotus? Where did you get all that money from?"

Think Lotus think!

"Ha a sisi, the thing is at work they gave us performance bonuses so I took that and added some money from my savings and sent to you".

"Why?", she says.

"Why what? You should say thank you and be happy instead of asking me why, tshini!". This woman! Who gets given money and asks why?

"I'm your mother Lotus, I need to take care of you not the other way round. I know I don't make much but please my baby, use your money on yourself. I'll make ends meet. I have a job you know".

"You don't make much though!", I point out.

"I don't make much yes but with that little I've managed to take care of you nana. I'll continue taking care of you!", she says.

"But Sisi, you sent me to school so I can do better and I can take care of you and mama (my grandmother)". Why is she making this difficult?

"Who told you we sent you to school for that?", she says and I have no answer.

"We sent you to school so you can do better than us. So you can live a better life and do everything we couldn't. You don't have to worry about us, let us worry about you my baby".

"How would you feel if you saw pictures of me living it up and having expensive meals and drinking champagne when I know how you're struggling?"

"I would feel proud! That's exactly what I want for you. To be happy and do all these Facebook things. I would rather you took your money and spoiled yourself than sent it to me....And who told you I'm struggling? Where did you get that from?"

I want to cry but I also want to laugh.

"Thank you sisi, I won't send you money anymore".

"Lothasi you don't listen! Did I say I don't want money if you have a lot? I said you should come first then if you have spare change you can buy me iCarry Pack. I won't stop you if you don't know what to do with your money!"

I honestly can't with her.

"Ok I hear you", I can't win with her.

"I'll send you airtime just now. I bought it and forgot to send you the numbers. Use it to call the man who gave you all that money and forget to call your mother va! Just don't forget that imali yendoda iyabhatalwa ke tana (You pay for the money you get from a man)".

That shocks me. How did she know? Did Chelsea??? Nah, she wouldn't. I shouldn't have sent R10000!

I hoot for no reason at all. I just need her to hear that I'm on the road.

"I'm driving sisi, I need to focus. These people are driving deurmekaar (chaos). Let me call you later".

"Why did you answer your phone driving? I hope the police stop you and arrest you for using the phone when driving! Don't call me to bail you out please, I don't have money".

She deserves a reality TV show, I swear.

I drive straight to the Cape Flats before traffic accumulates. I sent Don an 'Are you home? I'm on my way' message but he didn't respond. Funny enough 'Gangsta Love- K.O and Nandi' comes on the radio. Why does it sound like the soundtrack of my relationship with Donavan?

I park outside and he's still not responding to my messages. His phone is ringing but no luck there either. I don't know why I don't learn. I never should have come here without him saying he's home. I'm standing outside the car wondering how dangerous it would be if I scaled this wall and jumped over the wall. If it didn't have that razor wire maybe. I call again but same story.

"Hey black girl", an older woman calls from across the street. I think I should be offended but hey I'm black and I'm a girl so technically she's not wrong. She signals for me to come to her and as skeptical as I am, I go. I've been waiting outside for 20 minutes now and still Donavan is not here so maybe a bit of chit chat could help pass the time.

"Hello auntie", with a big plastic smile.

"This is not the first time I'm seeing you here!", she says in an accusatory tone. I maintain the smile, clutching my bag in front of me and swinging slightly, thinking 'What is it to you? Are you the prefect of the hood madame'

"Ya umm I have friends around here", I say, smile still fixed.

"What are you doing running around with that monster? Is he your boyfriend?", she asks.

"Ummm which monster?", I'm convinced she's mistaken me for another black girl. There's quite a lot of us in this country.

"Donavan...Alpha...whatever they call him. That killer! He and his father killed my daughter!", she says.

"Ummm are you sure? Donavan?". It can't be true because wouldn't he be in jail then? I think murderers get life or am I misinformed?

"Yes him with the blue eyes! A murderer! Not so long ago he killed an innocent child on the other street! He and his goons are destroying our children with drugs and guns but no one wants to stop them!", she goes off.

"What? Donavan? No auntie I think you are mistaken. Don didn't kill anyone", I say with a little laugh. She's obviously mistaken, I know Donavan!

She's quite old too so maybe she's senile.

"You will die young if you keep with that man! Run while you still can, fast and far. My daughter couldn't run but maybe you can", she says, her pronunciation disturbed by her missing front teeth.

"He's just a friend", I say, trying to disassociate myself from him.

"Gangsters don't make friends, so I know he's not just a friend", she says.

I'm praying that everything she said is a lie. Yes I know he's dodgy and all and yes Chelsea said Hulk said he's the leader of a gang and yes he has a gun and has odd working hours but that doesn't make him a killer. I can accept dealing drugs maybe but murder? I can't. It can't be though. Those blue eyes can't look at someone and kill them. Who am I kidding? All the pieces are falling into place and my heart can't take it. He truly is a gangster and all that it comes with.

I see Don's car approaching and the lady says goodbye and scurries away like she just saw a disease approaching. He jumps out of the car and hurries to me.

"You good?". He gives me a hug. I fold my arms and look away. I don't hug killers mna.

"What's wrong? What did she say to you?".

"Nothing!".

I walk away towards the gate and thankfully he opens it. I stroll in as it slides open and wait by the door. Oh great, he's with his associate killer, Caleb.

"Keys Lotus", he says and I toss him my car keys. You know what I mean by 'my'. He looks at me with a worried gaze but unlocks the door. "Bring that car in Caleb", he tosses his brother the keys. I push the door in. "Lotus wait....", he calls after me as I run up the steps.

He gets the door just as I'm about to lock him out.

"What's wrong?", he asks grabbing me by the shoulders and forcing me to look at him.

"What's wrong angel. Talk to me asseblief". He begs with his eyes.

My voice is dry as it finds its way through the lump in my throat.

"Is it true Don?"

"Is what true?"

"What she said. Is it true?". If it's true he better get those filthy hands off my shoulders right now or I'm calling the police!

He makes me sit on the bed because I'm shaking and my lips are trembling bad. It can't be true.

"It's not true, right? You make clean money from your club and your cabs, right? She was lying, please tell me she was lying".

He looks at me then looks down.

"No...no... no it can't be. I know you Donovan. You are not a killer, you don't sell drugs, you're not in a gang. It's all lies!". All he needs to say is I'm right and we move on with our lives.

"It's true", he says.

"What?". My phone drops off my hands and onto the floor. I think I heard my heart shatter into pieces.

"It's true. Come on, deep down you knew it".

"I asked you if you are in a gang and you said no!", I raise my voice at him.

"No. I never said no. I asked you what a gang was. Come on now, you knew this. I run baby, you know that. Not like athlete run but with a gang. What did you think we do? Play cards all day and just draw tattoos on each other for fun? I'm a Wolf", he says.

"You do drugs Donovan? You sell guns? You kill people? You lead a gang?", I ask.

"I don't do drugs, I supply them, huge difference. Someone will supply them because there's a market so why not it be me? And yes Lotus I sell guns. One gun is R12k on our market, I can't let that kind of money go!", he says. Oh Lord it's true. I sink deeper into the bed and inhale deeply-exhale.

"And people? You kill people?", I'm asking but I'm scared of the answer.

"I've never killed anyone who didn't deserve it!".

"What? So that child deserved it? And that woman's daughter deserved it? Huh? How sick are you?", I stand up to square with him. I can't stand for this.

"That boy was a mistake. The Hard Livings did a drive by and my brothers and I went out to protect our turf. That boy came from nowhere. I drove him to hospital myself but bullets from the other side had also gotten him. He had been shot 6 times but the first bullet was mine so as it goes, it's me who killed him", he says.

"I tried Lotus, I tried to make it up to his mummy but she was so hurt she shut me out. I didn't know what else to do, they wouldn't even let me attend his funeral. So I tracked down his father and I pay him every month and he pays her as if it's a huge amount of child support for the remaining child", he says. I don't think I should be feeling this sorry for him. My anger has turned into pity. Whoever bewitched me I repeat - Show yourself.

Breathe Lotus Breathe.

“Are you not scared of going to jail or worse of dying? Drugs Don? Guns? You are on a suicide mission!”. I can't lose him... yet.

“I fear nothing”. The tone he said that with is flat, hollow and fearless. Scary. I saw a documentary about sodomy and gang initiation and all sorts of blood curdling evil in prisons. Even thinking about it now gives me chills. I don't understand how he can be so laid back about all of this. He could end up locked up or worse 6 feet under.

“They could throw you in Pollsmoor dammit! Do you know what they do to guys in there? Ever heard the saying ‘Don't drop the soap?’”, I yell at him.

“If I end up in Pollsmoor that would be perfect. I have many brothers in there. I'll be home”, he says.

“There's 26s and 27s in there and they kill without batting an eyelid!”, I try to recite what I heard in the documentary. I wish he could see how serious this is! I watched the gruesome documentary!

He laughs at me and comes closer and plants a kiss on my forehead.

“You're so precious”, he says. “The 26 don't kill angel. They are money, all they think about is money! The 27 are blood, they kill without batting an eyelid. The 28 do everything. They steal, kill, rape, loot, everything. They're the outlaws”, he says.

“Oh wow. And you're a 20 what again?”, I ask. “I'm 26 - 27. I think money but I think blood too. I have to make my money and if I have to kill to protect my money then so be it”, he says. He pulls up the sleeve of his T-shirt and there on his upper arm are the Roman numerals XXVI (26) and XXVII (27), so small they are barely visible. I don't know how I'd never noticed them before!

“The documentary said you only get a number in jail. How come you have it though?”.

“I told you Pollsmoor is home. I've been home a couple of times before. But again your dobbie lied! You can get a number out of jail. Remember the idiots making documentaries ask us the questions. Do you think we would be so stupid as to tell the whole world and rival gangs our secrets? Think Lotus”, he says.

Condescending much? I must be dreaming, having a nightmare. I'm sleeping with a drug lord/convict/killer/extortioner/gangster and who knows what else is on his CV!

“And that woman's daughter? What happened to her? What did you and your father do to her?”.

“Her name was Candice. I'll tell you everything. Take a drive with me”, he says walking out, leaving me no option but to follow him.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

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We drive in silence, I don't know where to. I can feel his pain from here and I take his free hand and interlock my fingers with his. I'm not sure but I think he's scared. I should be the one scared and maybe disgusted right now! I have a flood of emotions going through me. None of them is hate though! I don't hate him at all. He's in the Numbers Gang! He is running

with the Wolves. Fine they are said to be more human than other gangs and are more humane in how they operate. But when it comes down to the facts, does it matter? If a member of another gang kills someone, they are most likely to torture them first, rape them, mutilate them and laugh in their face as they take their last breath. In the same situation, a Wolf would shoot in the heart and get it over with. Humane or not, at the end of the day the person dies anyway.

“You should have told me”, I break the silence.

He flashes me a glance and gets back to looking on the road.

“Would you have stayed with me if I told you the truth?”.

I don't think I would have stayed so I stay mute. I would have been terrified out of my mind and ran for the hills. I didn't know the Don I know now. The one who's kind to his brothers, who dedicates his weekends to providing a better life for children, who calls me at midnight to say he loves me and wishes I was in his arms, the one who had no idea what I do exactly but cheers for me the loudest. Now I know this Don and my mind is failing to merge gangster him and this him.

Some half an hour later we are out of the city and he takes an off road and drives until he stops at a dead end. It's so silent and serene here, the only sound is of birds singing and an occasional rustling of leaves. It's winter so although it's early, it's becoming dark. It feels like I'm back in Eastern Cape, far from the hustle and bustle of the city.

“So? Would you have stayed with me if I told you the truth from the beginning?”, he asks. I shake my head no.

“Will you stay now that you know what you know?”. I nod, biting my lower lip. I sure as hell know I didn't sign up for guns and drugs and murder so why the f am I nodding?

“I love you Don, so I'll stay with you”, I confess unprovoked. He looks into my eyes and I hold the stare, biting my lower lip. I can't explain why I love him, I just know that I do.

“I want you to be mine. Will you be mine”, he says, looking me straight in the eye, his hand closing around my neck. That small tear tattoo looking evergreen on his yellow skin.

"Yes I'm yours. I'll be yours", still holding the stare.

"Will you be mine Lotus?", he asks again with a dangerous twitch.

I thought I already responded! Why is he asking me again?

“I'm already yours. I love you too”, I find myself saying because I'm sure that's what he meant.

“You love me?”, he laughs a little then lifts my chin up with his index finger so the gaze I just dropped comes back to eye-to-eye with him. I nod, keeping my face up but drop my eyes down again. His gaze, Lord his gaze is making my blood rush and it probably shouldn't.

"I love you Don, I do".

“You should!”, he asserts.

I wait for the I love you too, you are my queen, I can't live without you....but dololo! Men! With them you have to spell out everything!

“Don't you love me too?”, I ask, daring to lift my eyes. He's never said those words to me and I'm yearning to hear them right now.

“No I don't”, he says easily like he's been ready to say that since he was born.

He drops his finger and lets my chin go. That NO felt like a razor slicing across my heart. I feel tears welling in my eyes because fight it as long as I have, I love this bastard! The least he can do is tell me why after everything we've been through he would say that to me. I just

accepted him with blood on his hands and dirty money in his envelopes and I loved him as he is. How can he not love me back?

“Why don't you love me?”, the question comes off sounding more stupid than it did in my head.

"I don't have a heart", he says and looks away.

"Try again! Don't give me that 'I'm heartless' nonsense. Why don't you love me?", my voice stern and all I'm-not-playing-with-you-nigga.

“Because I don't love. Love makes you weak, distracted and vulnerable, things I can't afford to be. I can't be firing bullets and trying to save your ass at the same time. That's suicide! Love is for the weak and I'm not weak!”, he says.

“You are weak! You are a coward for denying how you feel about me. You know you love me so will you just stop fighting it! Tell me you love me”, I'm acting a bit unhinged I know. He's hurting me and I mean to hurt him back. I want to kick him and scratch his face but he's too quick for me and pulls me closer to the car, locking my feet with his and holding me in place. As he kisses the top of my head and says “Easy my skat” my tears fall. How can he not love me while his heartbeat against my ear is saying he does? I wrap my hands around his waist, feeling his gun safely tucked away on his belt. I'm trying hard not to beg a man to love me back but it's hard. He loves me so why is he saying he doesn't.

When I've calmed down he loosens the hold. I think that's pity I see in his eye. “I'm sorry sweetheart. I can't love you even if I wanted to”. I lip sign a “why?”. He rubs the tears off my cheeks and kisses me on the forehead.

“You have my attention. I want you, that should be enough”, he says.

That will never be enough! I want him to love me back as hard as I love him.

“Please love me”, I say the exact thing I told myself I would never say.

“I can't”, he pushes me back and faces away from me.

"But why?"...don't cry Lotus. He's just trash.

He lifts his T-shirt up and on his back lie the words “Candice” stylishly written in green. I saw those words the first night I gave my body to him. He fucked me stupid and I screamed like a bitch and when we were done he loved me a little while then got up and stood looking out of the window with his back to me. I just lay there on his bed not knowing what to do and the words “Candice” stared back at me and left an imprint on my brain. I don't know why I never asked him who she was.

“I loved once and I lost. I'm a soldier so I know better than to put my heart on the frontline twice in a row. Candice was her name”, he says. My heart sinks. I suspected but somehow wished it was his mother's middle name or his surname maybe? What's his surname?

“What happened to her?”, I might as well ask.

“I killed her”, he says, still looking away. My eyes pop open. He said that way too easily like it's nothing. My heart races and I clench my fist tight. Death scares me.

The thought that I've been sleeping with a murderer makes my bile rise so high I think I'll throw up. Will he kill me too? Why am I asking myself these questions when the killer is right here!

“How did you kill her?”, my inquisitive self asks.

“I loved her and that's how I killed her”, he says.

"How? Why? Talk!", he agitates me so much this boy!

He steps back and leans against the car, standing next to me. We both stand there in silence looking into the bushes. I'm impatiently waiting for him to talk and him - I don't know what he's waiting for.

"After I joined the wolves they encouraged me to fall in love. In fact, they made me fall in love with this very beautiful girl. I was 14 at the time. I listened and loved with all my heart. I fell in too deep and my brothers gave me all the money I needed to make the romance epic. She was my whole life. I would have died for her, that's how much I loved her. The night I made love to her I was ready to marry her. She was my first and although I wasn't hers, I didn't care. I lived and breathed for her". There's a deep longing in his voice and a sign of feelings that ended but never left. I swallow and wait for him to continue. He bangs the car with his fist and curses under his breath.

"So I had completed stage one. TO LOVE. And I had to level up. So they killed her. They called me in and told me to bring her with me. I was excited because my big brothers wanted to spend time with my girl. She didn't want to go because she said they made her uneasy and she couldn't stand being around them. She was older and wiser, you see".

I wait patiently for him to collect himself and go on.

"I begged her until she said she would do it for me. We got there and they pulled out a knife and told me to kill her, just like that..... I refused so the General hit me with his gun on the head and I fell on the floor. Candice knelt besides me asking if I was alright.....Then I heard the gun shot and all I saw was blood flowing out of the corner of her mouth. I got up and held her, just us two left in the room.....She begged me to let her die because she couldn't take the pain. "She won't make it" the General had said before he walked out". I hear a slight crack in his voice which he quickly disguises as a cough.

"So I took the gun left for me on the floor, held her close and put a bullet through her heart. I had killed before, to join the gang I had to shoot and kill a rivalry. Even then I didn't want to do it but it was what it was! My brothers helped me through that first shooting but this time I was on my own and this time it wasn't a stranger with a gun in his hand. This time it was my very heart in my hands. I shot her!.....As she died in my arms I pointed the gun to my head and pulled the trigger. I had no reason left to live. But there had been one bullet in there. They knew I would try to kill myself too and they wouldn't let me have that", he says.

"So ya, I had completed stage two. TO KILL the one you love so you can learn never to love again. My heart died with her and I vowed I would never ever love again. I refused to ever feel that much pain again. So as I mourned her, I died more and more each day until I was dead. So I completed stage three. TO DIE alive..... My initiation was complete and I received my tattoo", he reaches for the wolf on his neck. "To Love. Kill. Die. That's the way of a gangster! So there you have it. So no, I'm sorry but I don't love you sweetheart", he says, turning to face me. He finds me looking up at him.

His eyes are teary and I can tell he needs a hug. I probably should walk the opposite direction right now but I step up to him and give him a hug. Why did they do that to him. He was just a child.

"I love you". I say it anyway and hold on to him. I don't get it back but it's alright for now. They destroyed him! How dare they!

It's getting dark and my heart is bleeding. I don't know what's hurting me more, what they did to him or the fact that he will never love me because of it. He responds by searching my eyes for a while before his lips descend on mine, kissing so wet and hard it's knocking the breath out of my lungs. I feel him getting harder and harder against my thigh making me wetter than I already am. How he's channelling his pain into arousal beats me but I give back the passion.

He picks me up, walks to the front of the car and positions me there. As my dress goes up and he rams into me, I let out a whimper. I bring myself down and lay my stomach flat on the bonnet. I hear his breathing as he throbs and thrusts and consumes me. His hand finds its way under the dress and before it returns to holding me in place by the waist. It's a bit chilly but what's a little cold against the fire inside me right now? I take his back shots with mini screams and I take the coldness of his car like it's nothing. I feel my orgasm building up and as I let out that scream he holds me there, pushing deeper and deeper into me as I sink lower and lower onto the car. I know he has cum too. I feel the flow down my thigh. He pulls out and leaves me there catching my breath on my own.

I try not to think, afraid of what I'll think. How did we get here? We were still talking about Candice so how did that transition to sexing? When my legs are back to functioning normally, I straighten my Lasenza and pull down my long dress and zip up my jacket. How I wish I had wet wipes right now!

I get into the passenger's seat and fight with the seat belt till I win. So, no more talking ngo Candice??? I have many questions, like did he get that tattoo of her name before or after she died?

"Here", he hands me a brown envelope. I don't know whether to feel disrespected or. Is he seriously paying me for sex right now? He must have read my mind because he quickly clarifies. "Buy a morning after pill. I can't afford to have a child so please make sure that never happens". I don't know why that hurts but I take the money anyway. I need long term contraceptives or not? Since I'll be single and unloved then I won't need to pop a pill everyday.

As we drive off, I look out of the window and nothing is said till we get to his place. I get out, bang the door and walk away, never looking back. Well, I look back to ask where the car keys are so I can go home. He actually said he doesn't love me? Wow! Then he sexed me and I let him! Wow! Shuuh, I doubt even prayer can heal me.

Candice. I can stand fighting girls for him but where do I begin fighting a ghost of the love of his life? I could never win that spiritual warfare.

Chelsea holds me and lets me cry in her arms as I tell her what happened. She was right after all.

"I'm so confused. He says he doesn't love me but he's here every damn time, he makes love to me like he wants to marry me, he gets jealous when other guys talk to me, he fxcken buys me all these bloody gifts and calls me in the middle of the night just so we can drive out and watch the stars and fxck on the hood of his car. How can he not love me? How? Isn't all this

he's showing me love? So how can he say he doesn't love me?", tears are running down my face and my voice is croaky.

"He's a gangster babes, he can't love you and it's for the best that he doesn't. He's doing you a solid by letting you go. You not cut out for that life Lotus. Let him go", she says. So much easier for her to say! It's not her with her heart broken on the floor!

"I think I should go over to Dalu", I say after an hour of mopping.

"Good idea", she says. "That's the boy you should be giving all your energy to. And no matter what, don't hurt him Lotus. Don't tell him about Donovan! Let that boat sail away in peace".

She's right.

'Dalu, are you home?', I text.

'Yes', he responds.

'What you up to?', I text back.

'I'm flying out to Joburg tomorrow so I'm going through some work documents'.

'Can I come over?'.

'Ya sure'.

That was a shit load of money for a morning after pill so I will use a bit of it to Uber to Rondebosch. Besides, I have Dalu's bank card on my Uber account now so I don't have to pay cash. Money is not a problem.

I take a quick shower and put on a long dress and a jacket, more like what I was wearing earlier. I have no energy at all to be wiggling into jeans.

I'm all emotional and I can't exactly tell Dalu why. He seems to understand and I'm not sure what exactly it is he understands. He has no idea. He gives me a hug and lets me cry on his shoulder. My phone keeps ringing and I keep ignoring it. I'm sure it's Chelsea making sure I got here ok.

Only when I pull myself together do I look at my phone. Seven missed calls from Donovan. I don't know but my heart stops a little. I quickly go on WhatsApp and there's three messages:

'Answer your phone Lotus'.

'I asked if you would be mine and you said yes'.

It's the last one that has my breath running short.

'I know Lotus'.

With my trembling hands I call him and I get voicemail. I try again - voicemail. I try Caleb - voicemail. Holy Pharoah ancestor of Egypt!

"Dalu, I gotta run!". I leave him looking confused and speed-walk out. What exactly does he know???? As I wait for my Uber I text him a 'Went to see a friend. Going back home now. Thanks for telling me you don't love me, now I know exactly where I stand with you'. Please let it work.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

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The most beautiful thing in the world is falling in love with the least expected person at the most unexpected time. That's what they say but I say that's the worst thing to happen to anyone. See, falling in love with an expected person at an expected time, on your own terms is the most beautiful thing because you are in control and you are prepared and you know what you are doing or have a good idea at least. With an unexpected person, you fall in blindly and half the time you're feeling your way through the darkness, holding onto the rails and stumbling forward with no clue what the hell you are doing. That's the worst kind of love there is, the fairy tales lie.

Most fall in and out of love and make it out in one piece. Those are my SHeros. They swim harder, make it above the waves and learn to breathe again. The rest of us, love cuts us down to our knees and we unexpectedly find ourselves going through life just gasping for air and asking ourselves 'What is love?' ~ YVONNE MAPHOSA

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I'm out of my mind. That 'I know' is on repeat in my head. I'm taking random deep breaths as I wait for my Uber. I'm half expecting Dalu to run out of the building and come and beg me to stay. I'm disappointed when he doesn't.

I jump in and type-delete-type-delete messages to Don all the way to my place. He read my text about visiting a friend bla bla. The pain of being blue ticked! I know I hate his stalking tendencies but for the first time I was wishing I would find his car outside my place. I need to talk to him before I go out of my mind.

I curl in my bed like a dollar sign and it hurts so bad I can't even cry. He said he doesn't love me. How can he be so cruel! And why can't I forget him and do right by Dalu. Why can't I ever get it right in this game of hearts?

I must have fallen asleep because it's 2 am when I'm woken up by my ringing phone. It's Merishka from Donovan's programme. Unexpected and unsettling at the same time.

Merishka? At this time of the night? I answer and she says "Please come outside".

"Outside where?", I must be dreaming!

"Outside your complex. I'm here", she says.

I take a moment of silence to understand her. She insists she's outside, here in Retreat. I'm wondering how she got my address and why she would drop by at such an ungodly hour.

I put on a gown and slippers and head out. I'm thinking the worst. Who died for her to pitch up uninvited, unexpected and unwanted? Although me and her talk, we don't have a 'drop by after midnight for high tea' relationship. So this could mean one thing. Don is dead or he killed someone, I can't think of anything else. Although I doubt the first one.

It's drizzling a little bit and it's freezing so I put on the hood of my gown and hug myself tighter. It's quite dark but Eskom is loyal these days so our streets are lit. I'm assuming that's

her car, a white BMW X something. The neighbourhood is dead and the cold is blasting me harshly. I knock on the window and she rolls down and says it's open I must jump in.

"Hi Merishka", trying my best to be bubbly after being woken up from a sleep I'd struggled to fall into. "Lotus", she says, her voice lacking the affection I'm accustomed to. "What brings you here?...So late in the night?", I get to it because it's obvious that she's not in the mood for pleasantries. "I'm sorry for waking you up but I couldn't wait till morning. Don showed up at my place drunk and looking like crap! How could you do that to him?".

"What?", she needs to slow down. I'm not following.

"You know Lotus, I was rooting for you. I hadn't seen Donovan excited about anyone ever since I got to know him. You came into his life and gave him hope then you turned around and spit in his face", she says. I gasp silently. What? "Don may be whatever he is but one thing he has is a big heart. He takes care of many people and those kids he takes care of are close to my heart. I would be damned if I let anyone mess with their future and that's exactly what you're doing and that's why I'm here".

I'm still too shocked to speak. What did I do?

"If he goes to jail, who's going to take care of those kids? Who is going to keep the peace within the wolves? Do you even know anything about his life? Do you know how he's the reason the four sectors of the wolves stay intact? Do you know what would happen if he went away Lotus? Do you have an idea what you're doing?"

My answer is No x5 but I have no words and right now I feel attacked. Why would he go to jail? And why would that be my fault? And what's this about the wolves?

"Donavan has never hidden who he is. He gave you the best of himself and you took advantage of that and you used it against him!".

She's a very expressive person and I'm getting her anger today.

"He said he doesn't love me. Did he not tell you that part?", I eventually find my voice.

"As if you love him!", she snaps.

"I do! Oh my goodness! Why are you doing this? Of course I love him!"

"What is love to you? Having multiple partners? That's love to you? Sies mann!". I'm sure she would spit on the ground if we were outside.

My heart beat picks up. So she knows about Dalu, which means Don also knows. So that 'I know'. Holly Molly, I'm so dead!

"He's in love with Candice and can never love anyone ever again!", I get my fighting goddess up.

She laughs at me and I feel a pang in my heart. I hate it when people laugh at me!

"He loved Candice yes and what happened to her made him block out all feelings towards a woman. The fact that he told you that was a cry for help! He was crying to you to understand how he can't be your chocolates and flowers kind of man. How he loves you but is afraid if he gives in, your life might be in danger! He's not loving you for your own good but he needs you. How could you not see that? That man will do anything for you but you'll throw your toys around because he didn't say the words I love you? How does he treat you? Doesn't he open up to you? Something he never does with many. How is that not love?"

I swallow hard and clasp my gown.

"I'm trying not to be mad at you Lotus. Don said you and your friend went through some terrible things that's why he's let you make up your mind on your own. Although he didn't go into detail, I could tell whatever it was got to him. He hates not having been there to protect you then, even though he didn't know you at the time. Then you turn around and play him for a monkey. For men like Donovan, it's not their hearts that get broken, it's their egos that get

bruised and trust me, that's far worse than a heartbreak. Don is from the streets and he settles things the street way, an eye for an eye".

Dang, she talks! She's scaring me.

"He cried, that's how I know you meant everything to him. Donovan never cries. For the many years I've known him I've only seen him cry once...when that little boy he shot died. This was the second time and that's why I'm here. He will spiral downwards and it's all your fault. You wounded him badly and what does a wounded animal do?", she looks at me like I should answer that. I shrug my shoulders. I honestly don't know what wounded animals do. Go to the vet maybe?

"But what did I do?", I hate being blamed for things.

"You took him for granted. Made him believe you wanted to be with him when you had a boyfriend all along".

My mouth dries and the words I thought refuse to come out.

"He's (Dalu) not my boyfriend! He's just my friend, I promise". Is he my boyfriend? Come to think of it, I don't know.

"I couldn't care less, really. I like you Lotus but between you and Don, I choose Don. So do yourself and everyone you love a favour and stay away from Donovan! You made your choice so leave him alone girlie. Take your dolls and go play your little games elsewhere. I can't have Donovan go to jail for you. So much is at stake", she says.

She's hurting me, seriously. How am I the bad guy in all of this? What is she on about? He said he doesn't love me, which part of that doesn't she understand?

"Merishka, I don't know where you get off attacking me like this! I did nothing wrong. I loved him and he didn't love me back!", I try to make her see reason.

"How do you say you love someone else when you have a boyfriend Lotus! What is love to you? Nee man, stop it! It's not funny, just stop it".

Why is she attacking me! What has this got to do with her?

"For what it's worth, I'm sorry. I love Don with all my heart and it's him I want to be with. I just want him to love me back, I can't relationship alone".

"You're starting to sound like a broken record right now. Stop it! Own up to your mistakes! You made your choice so now stay far away from Donovan. I'm warning you Lotus".

"Wow", that's all I say.

"I don't hate you, I'm doing this for you. Don might not kill you but there's no telling the extent he will go to to quench his rage. Leave...Him...Alone...Girlie!".

Fine! Whatever!

"Will he kill him (Dalu)?", I force out a whisper, too scared to hear the answer.

"I hope not. But if he does, that blood is on your hands", she says.

My poor heart!

As I walk back into our apartment block I feel a little dead inside. I call Don and it rings till voicemail. I know it's late at night but he doesn't quite sleep the normal hours most of us do. I wish I could send a message but I don't know what to say. He hurt me by not returning my love. How am I the bad guy? Fine, I messed up with Dalu, I'll own that but it was never to hurt anyone. It's him D I love.

As if my night can't get any worse! A message comes through from Dalu as I adjust my alarm from 6 am to 6.20 am. Never underestimate an extra 20 minutes of sleep in the morning, especially in winter. I open the message and whoever said guys don't text paragraphs had no idea what they were talking about.

"Lotus. I've been very patient with you. I get that you have issues from your past relationships but how am I supposed to help you if you won't let me in? You're hot one moment, cold the next, I can't keep up with your mood swings. Baby, it's either you love me or you don't, this running in circles is giving me a headache.

I love you Lotus. You're the girl of my dreams and there's nothing I wouldn't do for you. You're beautiful, sweet, hard working, caring, friendly, sexy AF and that laugh of yours, I smile just thinking about it. I want to make you happy but I can only do that if you let me. I love you and I want to commit to us and build something together. This is where I stand....Where do you stand baby?"

Why am I crying? Which D exactly am I crying for. I know Merishka said I must stay away from Don but I don't know how to. Then Dalu, my sweet, innocent charmer. Unlike Donovan, he's made it clear where he stands with me. I like him too, quite a lot in fact, so maybe if I work at it we'll be couple goals. But I can't erase Donovan out of my mind. How did I end up in this mess?

I want to say my bedtime prayers because only heaven can send me the kind of help I need right now. But I've strayed so far from the Lord, I don't even know how to begin praying.

I text Donovan: 'I loved you Don, with all my heart. I'm sorry for what I did. You made me so happy and I'll sure miss your corny jokes and sarcastic ass. You're an amazing guy Donovan and whoever ends up with you will be one lucky girl. I know I've lied to you before but the truth is, nothing ever happened between me and him, that I promise you so please don't punish him for my crimes. I hope you find what you're looking for. I will never bother you again. Goodbye my alpha'.

I text Dalu: 'I know I've been unfair to you. I can explain, I just need a bit more time. Please be patient with me. Let me respond kakhle tomorrow, I'm half asleep right now. Goodnight baby'.

I play my anthem and hug my pillow, curled up in a ball. I swear Chris Brown is a fortune teller because when he wrote this 'Cry No More' he had foreseen this time of my life.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

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You know I came from the dirt like a Sandstorm...

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I keep reading the response from Donovan and I don't know whether to laugh, cry or be afraid.

This is what I texted him last night.

'I loved you Don, with all my heart. I'm sorry for what I did. You made me so happy and I'll sure miss your corny jokes and sarcastic ass. You're an amazing guy Donovan and whoever ends up with you will be one lucky girl. I know I've lied to you before but the truth is, nothing ever happened between me and him, that I promise you so please don't punish him for my crimes. I hope you find what you're looking for. I will never bother you again. Goodbye my alpha'.

This is the message I woke up to:

'Then you are one lucky girl. Me and you made a pinky promise'.

Is he refusing to be dumped or what? I really don't care, I said what I said and me and him are done. We are not done because I don't love him, we're done because I love him a little too much and it's consuming me.

I call in sick, work can miss me for today. I'm busy here nursing a broken heart.

Dalu is off to Joburg and he's convinced we are in a relationship. I guess in a way we are, I'm giving him all bae vibes so who can blame him. I wish with all my heart that I could love him without forcing it. He keeps talking about how he can't wait to get back next week. I don't know how to tell him it wasn't supposed to happen that way. That I sent him that text because I was all up in my feels after what Merishka said. I'm mad at her. She basically accused me of ruining Don's already ruined life. That was a lot unfair. Fine I'm not perfect and I admit this playing him and Dalu is wrong but he's not an angel either!

Let me text Don and make myself clear. I've read that leaving relationships hanging is very dangerous. It should be clear when it's over. By text three I'm worked up. He really puts in extra hours to agitate me with his obnoxiousness, Yerrrr!

L: Don, can we talk?

D: Since when do you ask for permission?

L: I'm serious. For once please be serious

D: Make it fast, I have people to kill

I read that twice to look for sarcasm. He can't be serious.

L: That's not funny! *angry face*

D: To you...

At this point I wish I'd never bought him a smartphone! I doubt he would text all this via sms.

D: Regret meeting me yet?

L: Meaning???

Silence.

L: Fine, I'll get straight to the point. Merishka paid me a visit and told me to leave you alone so that's exactly what I'll do.

D: Who's Merishka to you?

L: What? She's something to you obviously! She had the audacity to show up and paint me out to be the devil himself! You went and told her I'm a bad person and what not!

D: Who is she to you not to me...

Is he being for real right now? Didn't he see my long paragraph of rant? He will disregard me like that? Why am I still talking to him again?

L: She's nothing to me!!!

D: Good

L: What?????

D: She means nothing to you so her opinion should mean nothing to you. She doesn't sleep with you and she doesn't know how you snore when you've had a long day. So leave her out of this.

Didn't I tell you how infuriating this guy is! He works on my nerves and only Noah knows why I love him so much when he's like this! Why Noah? Because well umm Noah is the English version of knower, the only one in the world who knowered (knew) how to build a boat big enough for every animal in the world.

L: Fine Don! We're going in circles here and you're making this harder than it already is. We are bad for each other and we need to go our separate ways. I love you but you don't so I can't be in love alone. I'm sorry baby

Oh no, I didn't mean to put that 'baby' there.

D: Sure baby! Do whatever you want. You know my address when you're ready to honour your word.

L: Whatever!

D: Answer me honestly before I leave you alone

L: Shoot

In my head, 'Please don't ask about Dalu', fingers, toes and intestines crossed.

D: Were you telling the truth that nothing happened between you two?

L: Yes. Nothing happened.

I reply immediately so it doesn't look like I'm making it up. I keep it short too to avoid blabbering.

D: Dankie saan.

Did he just 'dankie saan' me? That's a 'sho mfethu', a whole 'sharp chief', an entire 'sure mate'! That's my cue to terminate the chat.

NEXT DAY

Still 'sick' so no work again today. Chelsea has been the perfect shoulder to cry on and she forces me to take a shower when she comes home after work and she force feeds me. My precious Chelsea bun. It's a miracle she hasn't said "I told you so". She even suggested that

maybe I'm not ready for a relationship and should take time out to love myself. I didn't voice it but what the hell! I love myself! I love myself so much I need someone to love me with me. Clearly, I need more than one person to partake in this huge amount of self love I have! I promise it sounds better in my head.

I kinda thought Don and I were getting back together yesterday until reality struck me like Nigerian lightning and I remembered why I decided to break up with him in the first place. He begged, not like on his knees begging, I guess his ego doesn't allow that. But he let me know that "You said you were mine. You gave me your word. You made a pinky promise". I hung up on him. My phone is on flight mode since then till further notice. It took Chelsea reminding me what dating an improper man left her raped and scarred for life. I felt guilty for loving Don at that moment. He would never rape anyone. But that's exactly what I thought about my ex when I first met him.

END OF WEEK

I haven't shown up for work and I'm ignoring Dr Dirk's calls. I'm in mourning over here and the last thing I need right now is Daily Checklists and smelling retention samples! So from the day I flight moded my phone, Don has been parking outside our apartment in the mornings! From Chelsea's window I can see the street. I think he's hoping to see me when I come out in the morning so we can talk. I miss him I won't lie and it's taking all the strength in my soul not to run out and go to him. It's funny because I know if he wanted to, he could come up and kick down the door and make me talk to him. But he's choosing the more human way.

So obviously I couldn't keep my phone on flight mode forever, my mother went crazy and was calling Chelsea and that annoyed her and she said I had to be more creative than flight mode. So I blocked Donovan and Caleb! This morning he was outside for over 2 hours and I got into Chelsea's blankets and cried myself to sleep.

I told Dalu I am social media fasting and he bought it. Bless his beautiful soul. I speak to him a bit in the evenings though, just to make sure he's still with us, you know. I'm a bit scared for him although I think if Don wanted to hurt him, he would have by now.

I suck at dealing with heartbreaks.

A WEEK LATER

"Babes. It's been a week now. Let's go out dancing, you'll get another guy. There's Dalu", Chelsea says.

"I don't want another guy. I want him, only him. I want him back. He said he doesn't love me Chels", I resume sobbing. Saying those words out loud pierces my heart yet I constantly repeat them. He may not want me but I want him, I need him badly. I thought focusing on Dalu will make me forget him but no, he's not that easily replaceable.

That's it. I'm tired of crying and pleasing Chelsea at the expense of my heart. I love her, I do with all my heart and I'll forever be indebted to her for many things. And I'm sorry my ex did what he did. Hardly a week goes by without me regretting it. I blame myself for it and if there was a way to make the memory go away, I would. But I'm not healing from Donovan and with every passing day the pain intensifies.

I get out of bed and put on my ugg. My weave is tied up in a clumsy bun and my pyjama shorts are shorter than short and my oversized T-shirt is big.

“Have you spoken to him? Have you officially ended things or you left it hanging?”, she asks as I get ready to leave. I shrug my shoulders. No offence but can she butt out of my business for once! I'm tired of her acting like my mother. I know she hates Don, it's not a secret. He represents the kind of man that hurt her. But I love him because I've spent time with him. He represents the kind of thrill I would love to have and to hold.

“He was outside this morning again Lotus! Break up with him already! What are you waiting for?”, she raises her voice.

“I love him Chels. Deal with it”, I regret saying it out loud.

“Wow! Are you kidding me? Lotus you have to leave him! He's a 27. Do you know what that means? I know all about gangs and baby girl you are digging your own grave. Rival gangs will feast on you!”, she says.

“I love him, I can't help who I love”.

"Have you considered that maybe he said he doesn't love you to save you? Gangs use girlfriends and families against their rivals. Everyone knows that. He loved you enough to let you go, now stay gone!".

She's almost pleading with me and I understand her, I do but I can't explain the nature of the demon that has possessed me.

“You don't love him babes. You love his dick and a dick is not worth your life! You are collateral now and the other gangs will kill you just to get to him! Don't you get it? You are in danger!..... Here, take the phone and call him right now. Tell him it's over.... Do it!”, she yells at me. I stay quiet with my arms folded. I always do what she says but no mann, she must first understand where I'm coming from before deciding how I should feel.

Don might have said he doesn't love me but I know he does.

“I need a minute, I'll break up with him my own way”. My heart is so heavy I can't breathe and with Chelsea in my face I can not breathe!!!! I know I probably, maybe, somehow need to let him go and move on but I can't.

I wipe the tears off my face and put on a brave smile.

“Don't tell me you are going to him!”, Chelsea says.

“I'm not! I said I'll break up with him, didn't I? I just need to drive. Can I use the car?”.

There's no point in pretending around her so I let the tears fall. She's pushing me too much but when all is said and done, she's all I have. I need to get away from her though before I say things I'll regret.

“Sure. Don't drive too far. You're in no condition to drive!”.

“Yes mum. I'll be right back”.

“I'm serious Lotus, it's getting dark. Don't go too far”. She gives me a big hug then watches me as I walk out, half naked in the middle of winter.

For whatever reason, his gate is open and so I drive in and park behind his favourite car. I hear the loud talking from his 'brothers', I mean, crime mates. I stop outside the door, suddenly realising that maybe I should have put on something longer than these shorts because now it's as if I'm just wearing a T-shirt only.

I'm already here so I might as well get in. I don't even know why I'm here to be honest. I walk in without knocking and no one seems to see me. Caleb is sitting on the arm of the couch smoking something funny. Two of his jail-bounds are sitting on the couch with beers in their hands, another one is sitting on the ottoman, also with a beer in his hand and he's the one talking loudly. Then there he is, drawing on the granite top with a knife and his eyes cast down. He looks secluded from the group and as they laugh at whatever, he remains focused on harassing the countertop. I stand there a little longer just thinking "shame, they are so unalert. If I was a rival gang member they would all dead right now".

"Hello", I say with a wave even. They all stop and turn towards the door. I expect them to jump and draw their guns but they just look at me. I feel naked. There's silence and Donovan is looking at me like he's seeing a ghost. I'm not sure what to do now but looking at him is making me want to cry. He looks like what some would describe as broken. I catch Caleb's eye and he nods slightly.

Oh fxck it man, let me do this and get it over with! I walk around the couch and around the counter and stop right next to him. He drops the knife and turns around to face me. For a moment we stand there staring at each other. The silence is so loud you could hear a pin drop.

I can feel the stares of the other guys boring into me and I'm glad that my exposed lower body is now hidden by the counter. As I look into those ocean eyes, tears well in my eyes until they are flowing down. He cups my cheeks making me look up at him, tears still running down my face.

"Are you back? Are you still mine?", he asks. "Yes and yes. Any more questions?", I say with a breaking voice. He smiles because he knows he once hit me with that answer. "I have one more question yes", his smile fades and his face returns to serious mode.

"Ask".

"Do you still love me?", he asks.

I blink down a stream of tears and nod my head.

"I do. I love you you handsome jerk".

He pulls me towards him and rests my face on his chest. His hand digs through my weave and he holds me there, hushing me down. I probably made that too easy but frankly I've zero fs left to give.

"Can you get a room?", Caleb says.

"Can you get a girl?", Donovan says.

"I'm not staying Don. I came to check if you are ok. I can see that you are so I'm gonna go now".

"Stay the night...please", he says.

"I can't". I promised Chelsea I'll be right back. "Then I'm going with you. Let me get a jacket upstairs". Before I can say no, he's walking towards the staircase. Chelsea will not like this one bit.

I walk towards the door, very self conscious because of my exposed thighs.

"Bye. Good night", I wave at them with a smile.

"When are you bringing our boy back?", one of them says.

"Tomorrow?", I say.

I guess it was a trick question cause they all laugh at me and whistle. I fell for it, didn't I?

“Don't mind these idiots, come”, Caleb walks me out.

“Thank you for coming. Alpha was going out of his mind. He won't say it to you but he loves you and the thought that he had lost you was driving him wild. And wild is not a side of him anyone likes”.

I think I needed to hear that even if not from the horse's mouth.

“He says he told you about our life and I understand it's a hard place for you to be at but I hope you know that he will make sure nothing ever happens to you”, he continues.

“He hurt me. He said he doesn't love me”, I say.

“He does and I'm sure you can see it. He just doesn't know how to love and you are teaching him. Please don't give up on him now. He followed you around, named his club Lotus and spoke about you to us like you were already his girl when you didn't even know he existed. I told him it was creepy but he hasn't loved a girl in a very long time.... He told you about Candice, right? He was very young and that broke him. I don't think he ever got back together. You're the first girl he's letting in and it must be scary for him. So he needs time, be patient with him please”, he says. I nod.

“He said he doesn't love me”, broken record me repeats.

“He lied! You are his life right now and he loves you, deep down I'm sure you know it too. Be patient with him”, he says.

I nod.

"I know he knows about my friend. Will he hurt him?"

"No. He said you said nothing happened between the two of you and he chose to take your word for it instead of following his mind".

Really? He took my word for it? I don't believe it.

"It will take time but give him a chance please. His life has never been easy. He lost so much at a young age and he had to toughen up. He's had it very rough and he fought tooth and nail to climb up the ranks and make alpha. He's the youngest alpha the Wolves have ever had but see how he keeps all of us in check? It's not even fear of him that keeps us in line, it's respect".

“What are you two talking about?”, Don shows up looking all kinds of bad boy stylish.

Hoodie, faded jeans, sneakers, clean hair cut, gold tooth, blue eyes. He looks like the kind of guy mama warned me about.

“We were talking Math”, Caleb says.

“Math as in numbers or meth the ice?”, Don asks.

“The numbers dom kop”, Caleb says.

“Let me let you guys go. Alpha, I'll give you a call if need be”, Caleb says before walking away.

I won't ask.

I'm glad when we don't bump into Chelsea as we get home. I don't want to explain why I'm bringing home the gangster I was supposed to break up with. But in such a small space I can't avoid her and obviously she heard me coming in.

“Lotus”, she budes in excitedly and freezes. Her face speaks all volumes of disgust and hatred.

“Sorry, I...I didn't realize you had company. Come to my room, now, please!”, she says and walks out banging the door behind her. “Your girl doesn't like me much, does she?”, Don says. “She's just overprotective of me, that's all. She'll come around”, I assure him.

Thankfully we were just cuddling, clothed, she could have seen worse.

"I'll be right back, let me go hear what she has to say", I get out of bed.

"I miss you already", he says.

I wish people could see the softer side of him so they can understand where I'm coming from. I wish Chelsea would understand. He's not a bad guy at all, just a regular guy who more frequently than the average guy does bad things. But in his world he's goals, he's an alpha of his pack after all, an inspiration to little gangsters, a "when I grow up I want to be like Alpha" to new recruits. So who is to say our world is better than his?

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

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"A gang is the same as a wolf pack. Gang members don't use their energies in friendship with one another, for they don't know what friendship is. But what they have is a bond stronger than friendship - a brotherhood united by a desire to protect their territory and attack those who threaten it".

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I find Chelsea pacing around the living area and she pounces on me the moment she sees me. Girl has zero chill. I don't mean pounce at me with words, she actually pushes me like she wants to fight me or something! I know she can get like this, she's very confrontational by nature, but it's never directed at me so it's kinda coming as a shock to me right now.

"What the hell is wrong with you Lotus? Are you trying to get killed? Why did you bring him here! What is wrong with you!", she yells at me. "Chelsea idrama engaka sana! (So much drama!)". Yhuu, she can be annoying.

"Why is he here? Why did you bring him here?", she's talking in my face and she knows I have standoffs of any kind. It's just not me.

"Stay out of it. I decide who I want to be with", I say in a low voice. Why is she yelling for the whole neighborhood to hear?

"So you maintaining that 'I love him' crap?", she laughs mockingly.

"Matter of fact yes. I love him!". People please hold me back before I teach her how we settle scores eNgcobo!

"You love him? This is the same nigga who told you to your face that he doesn't love you then banged you against a car like a whore. Then paid you for the sex and told you he doesn't want a baby with you! He doesn't love you Sweetie, he loves, emm what's the name of the girlfriend he murdered in cold blood again? Yes, Candice!", she yells, deliberately wanting him to hear (I know).

Oh wow, we're throwing under the belt punches now? That stung. Never thought she would ever throw my words back at me. That really hurts coming from her. "Leave him alone! Get a proper boyfriend and leave this one alone. You'll never make it anyway! He's married to the streets and either he ends up in prison or dead and I'll be damned if he drags me to hell with him!", she screams at me.

"Will you keep your voice down?". I'm not only worried that Donovan is hearing all this since I left my door open but I'm worried that Chelsea will bring up Dalu and I can't have that right now.

"No, maybe if I scream loud enough you'll hear me! He doesn't love you, he told you that so stop being so desperate! You're always desperate for men who don't love you! Geez Lotus",

she yells on. Ya ne! She's hurting me today. "Butt out Chels! Maybe if you didn't fuck every dick around and actually had a man that loved you, you wouldn't be so jealous of me and Don! This is my apartment too! And he's not going anywhere. If you have a problem with that go choke on a dick, bitch!", I do speak when I'm provoked.

"So I'm a slut? You're this goody goody church girl and I'm a slut?". She looks pissed!

"Your words not mine", I cross my arms.

"Oh no you didn't!".

"Oh yes I did", I snigger back.

I don't know when but she reaches for my hair and pulls and as a reflex reaction, I grab hers and pull. She kicks me, I punch her, we fall on the floor and struggle with each other. She's punching every chance she gets and I'm kneeling her still trying to get her to stop pulling my weave. It hurts so bad. Shuuu this girl is strong. I'll lose this fight I know it, she hits like a man goddamn!

Donavan is trying to separate us.

"Stop both of you, just stop", he pulls me off Chelsea and keeps us apart.

"I'll leave. I'm sorry Chelsea. I'll leave. Just stop this", he says.

"No baby you're not going anywhere! If she has a problem let her leave!", I say.

"It's like that now Lotus? You'll choose this motherfucker over me? We are there now? Cool, have it your way!", she strolls off to her room and bangs the door so hard the walls vibrate.

"Maybe I should leave angel. I don't want you fighting with your girl because of me".

"Not you as well! You are not going anywhere. You are staying!", I march off to my room and I hear him sigh behind me.

He finds me already in bed sobbing into my pillow. He doesn't say anything, just slides in beside me and pulls me into his arms so I cry into his chest. I want to scream at him, scream at Chelsea, scream at the universe for betraying me, scream at myself. How did I fall in this deep with this guy? Why can't I let him go? I'm letting a guy come between me and my best friend. Why do I have to choose? Why can't Chelsea understand that I love him?

He rubs my back as I convulse into him, bawling my eyes out. I know Chelsea has a point but I can't let her get to me now. She used the Candice situation against me! That cut like a knife. I can't let go of Donavan, at least not yet. I know he's wrong but he's so right. I'm safe right here in his tattooed muscled arms and as wrong as my mind says it is, my heart wants all of him. He's imperfectly perfect for me. And what's worse is I want him as he is, I don't want him to change to the 'acceptable guy'.

He keeps me in his hold for a while until I'm calm and he keeps me there some more. His phone rings and I tense up. The thought that he's leaving me is making me want to resume crying. He can't leave me today. I hold on to his T-shirt and bite my lower lip. "Show no pain Lotus", I silently chastise myself but who am I fooling? My heart is dreaming of roses but it's sitting on a cactus.

I must have been clinging on harder than intended because he ruffles my hair and loosens my hand on his T-shirt. He reaches for his phone in his pocket and answers. I resume sobbing because now he's leaving me, isn't he?

"Caleb", he answers.

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“Shit that's fxcked up! Shit shit!”

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“Handle it. Do whatever needs to be done”

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"No fingerprints Caleb! And gunning should be the last resort. Keep it clean"

.....
"I can't come right now. Go and take care of it. Take Hilton and two of the youngins. Clean Caleb, you understand?"

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“Go ahead without me my bruh. I have something very important to take care of tonight”.

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“No, no backup. It's a solo mission. I'll be good. You know me”.

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“Let's talk tomorrow. Nobody should disturb me tonight. Y'all's do what you supposed to do. No contact with me”.

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“And Caleb, I mean it. I don't want blood in my club!”.

He hangs up and slides his phone under the pillow and returns to holding me tight. Like what was that about?

“Are you going somewhere?”, I manage to ask. “No. You are my solo mission”, he says.

I smile through the tears. “Look at me”, he says and I do through my glassy eyes.

“I knew you were mine the first time I saw you in my club. You looked like a flower and the way your eyes came alive when you smiled, I just had to have you. I probably went about it the wrong way but I wanted you. I didn't think you would want me back, I mean, that's why it took me that long”, he says. “I watched you weekend after weekend, telling guys off and paying for your own drinks. I had to know more about you first before I had you, you know”, he says. “So you stalked me!”, I say, with a little smile. “No I didn't stalk you! I researched you. Last thing I needed was to make a move on you only to find out you already had a punk, you feel me? I couldn't share you. I can't share you Lotus. It's either you are all mine or you are not at all”, he says. I nod. I don't know why. “You were creepy though”. He looks down and I think he blushes a little. He's so beautiful and those scars and those tattoos, I want to trace my finger over each one of them. How could Chelsea ask me not to love him though? How could she be so selfish!

I'm starving and I have an appetite today. I order pizza and we watch a movie on my laptop, ironically it's about Gangs and the Cartel in Mexico. I keep asking if drug exchanges go like that and if gun fights get that dramatic. “No man, this is just a movie. It's nothing like this in the real game”.

"Really? But tell me. Gangs do crime isn't. The whole reason you join a gang is to have people you do crime with, right?"

"What? No! Gangs are for protection. Some of us live in communities where death is always around the corner. We run in packs because the lone wolf easily dies. We prolong death that's why we are in a gang - to have each other's backs. You feel me?", he says.

I deserve the Nodding Award.

"But still. Why don't the police arrest you guys? No not that I want you to be arrested but crime equals arrest you know".

"We have the police on our payroll baby girl. We're not stupid. Go to the police and file a case against me right now and before you leave the station I'll know about it and we all know what happens to snitches!"

"But you've been arrested before so your system is obviously flawed", I point out.

"Ja. It's two ways. One I can go to jail for a little while because I have business to do inside. So I get myself arrested for something small and get a month in jail then get out. Or say I get arrested for reals by a cop not on my list. I go to jail fine. But do you think they'll find the docket when it's time to get me on trial? I'm the alpha baby, the only way to take me down is with a bullet through my head. Jail? Pollsmoor? Come on now. We run that place".

Ummm emmm, he's so confident in his trade, it's admirable in a twisted way.

"Where do you buy guns from? I know policeman get killed everyday for their firearms and no offence but that's just sick!". I do not condone that at all.

"Other gangs do that but we live by a creed baby. And we will never kill a cop for his gun. Self defense yes, we can shoot to kill but never for his gun".

"So where do you get them?". Hayi kabi but they don't look like they know anything about manufacturing weapons.

"From several places. But mostly from the police station store rooms. We have members who are police. To survive we have to infiltrate baby, it's the only way. So the members in the police force and the police on our payroll make sure we get the guns confiscated from whoever".

"So you license those guns in your name?". He looks at me like I'm stupid then rustles my hair.

"Why would we do that baby girl?".

I keep asking him about gangs and his lifestyle and he's so forthcoming with information. I'm sure if I went to the Red Ants tomorrow morning, him and all his brothers will be locked up before sunset.

"So what is Caleb in the family?", I ask. He insists that theirs is not a gang but a family so I'm getting with the program.

"Caleb is a Cleaner. He makes sure nothing ever leads back to us and that our books look squeaky clean to the Taxman. He works with our lawyer and the accountant to make sure our businesses are as legit as they come", he says. "Gangs have lawyers and accountants?", I'm genuinely shocked. "We are not a gang, we are a family!", he kisses me.

"You and your girl will be good?", he changes the subject. I nod biting into my second slice of pizza. This may be our first physical fight but I hope we will be ok. A part of me wants to go to her room and ask that we talk things through but pride stands in my way. Maybe tomorrow.

The movie was good and we watch the pilot of my new favourite series "Step Up - High Water". Neyo did the most with this dance series damn! 10 minutes in and he already thinks it's lame but he watches it with me anyway.

It's almost 1 am when the second episode ends and we agree it might be time to call it a night. The sex is slow and sensual and I fall in love with him with every stroke. I'm kinda emotional but he holds me like I'm the only thing that makes sense in the world. He lets me bite down on his fingers in my mouth to shut down the moans so Chelsea doesn't hear me. He may never admit that he loves me but it's crystal clear that he does. The way he holds me, touches me, feels me, looks at me, kisses me. He loves me!

I need to get on contraceptives soon before I breed a little gangster and Don made it clear that he's not about that life. The pharmacist said I can't take morning after pills more than once a month.

"There's a reason it's called an emergency pill girlie! It's not a contraceptive!", she said to me! She's seen me in this pharmacy like 5 times this month alone. The rest of the month I depend on my 'safe days'!

Falling asleep in his arms is back to becoming my favourite thing to do.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

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He's already awake, playing Temple Run on his phone. I know he's a morning person and I'm sure he doesn't know what to do with himself so Temple Run he played. I say my good morning and he looks relieved that I'm up now cause he abandons his phone and takes me in his arms. I really wish I could stay here, like this, all morning, but self imposed duty calls. I drag myself out of bed. It's Sunday and I need to shower, dress up and show up. I have a load of sins I would like to leave at the priest' ear today.

As I stand under the stream of water, careful not to get my weave wet, I think back to last night. Things were not supposed to happen that way at all. I love Chelsea like a sister and I hate what happened yesterday. But she kept pushing and pushing and I snapped. I too have a breaking point. I'm not going to go crawling to her though, I know that she won't have anything nice to say when she's still this angry. She shocked me yesterday. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think she would use anything I tell her against me! I probably shouldn't have retaliated in anger though. But what's done is done, she should just come and ask for forgiveness already!

"Let's go to church", I say to Don, fixing my skirt.

"Why?", he says, lying on his side, his face resting on his hand, watching me.

"What do you mean why? What's done at church?". This guy!

"I don't believe in church", he says.

"Really? What are you? Moslem? Buddhist? Atheist? Please don't say you are an atheist!".

"I'm none of the above. I'm spiritual, I'm a believer", he says. I roll my eyes.

"To be a believer you need to believe in a higher power. So what do you believe in?". I sit next to him and strap my heels.

"I believe in the Source. The source of all creation. It's within me, it's within you, it's everywhere and is not confined within a church building!".

"The Source?", I look at him as I stand up. I transfer my purse and make up bag from my backpack to a handbag.

"Yes the Source. He gives us life and protects us and you know, takes care of us as his children, you know gives us our daily bread", he says. "That's God boo. You believe in God so get up and let's go", I throw him his T-shirt.

He sits up and puts on his T-Shirt.

"I haven't been to church in 18 years", he says, sounding nostalgic.

"I was an altar boy serving with the priest and drinking from the chalice, you know. I carried the cross into church, leading the procession Sunday after Sunday", he laughs, at himself I think. Really? I can imagine him in a white over shirt and the red skirt altar servers commonly wear, with a rosary around his neck and a cross in his hands.

"So why did you stop going?"

"When Candice died, it was my fault. I killed her but pops took the fall. He didn't want the gang life for me but I joined anyway thinking I was slick. He had retired and was trying to make it through life the right way you know. So when the news of what had been done to Candice got to him he rushed to the scene. It was just down the road. He got there and told me to run. He took the fall and went to jail so I wouldn't", he says, the pain raw in his voice. "Wait...But Don I thought your father was dead, that's what you said! And I thought you don't retire from the gang!", his story just left me confused.

"You watch too many movies angel! I never said pops was dead, I said he was gone. He got life anyway so he's as good as dead. He was at the top of the Wolves. He was a General and soon discovered that as you move up the ranks there's a way out. So he found that loophole and retired", he furrows his brow as if in deep thought. "You can retire from a gang? I thought you enter through blood and leave in a coffin", I'm visibly shocked. Man those documentaries lie! They said it's a till death do us apart commitment.

"Yes you can leave the Wolves, but it's a huge risk to even request it. I was there when my father left. He was at the mercy of all four alphas. I was young then and barely understood what was going on or why I was there or why pops stood there butt naked surrounded by all those fierce looking men with guns. Two alphas stood behind him and two alphas in front of him. It was simple really, he had to plead his case and if they accepted his reasons for wanting out he would hear it from the two in front of him", he says.

"And had they rejected his offer?", I ask, my blood chilling.

"Then he would have felt the knives from those behind him", he says. I have no comment.

"So ja, he pled his case swearing on his life that he will never betray the secrets of the brotherhood...I was later to learn that the reason I was there was to help him win his case. Two of the alphas had lost their sons, killed by rival gangs, so he asked for a chance to raise his own son away from guns and blood. The other alpha had been a protégé of pops so his yes was guaranteed and the other just saw a chance of being the next General. All odds were in his favour so he walked away that day. He had calculated it well", he says, resting his elbows on his knees. He looks sad and almost like he will cry.

"So pops made it out of the gang and it was just us two. He did the best he could, being both mother and father to me. Then my joining the gang sent him straight back to the hellhole he had avoided by quitting the game. I sent him back in".

A tear wells in his eyes and he looks up and blinks fast. I feel his pain all the way from here so I move closer and force his head up, resting his face on my stomach. I'm relieved and happy when his arms go around my bum.

"I'm sorry baby, I didn't know".

"You couldn't have. I didn't tell you".

He stays there a moment then lifts his head up and I look down, our eyes locking.

"Ja so on the day of my father's sentencing, I ran to church, the only sanctuary I knew. I got down on my knees and asked for one thing, one thing only. That pops doesn't get sent to jail. He was all I had and he hadn't killed Candice, I had! I prayed, I promised to be a good boy and to never break any laws. I promised to leave the gang but he got life anyway. I was

left all alone. No one wanted me. I had no option but to drop out of school and grow up. Since church didn't come through for me I also stopped going through".

I give his hand a squeeze, unsure what else to do. All I wanted was for him to get up and come worship with me but he went too dark too quick. I want to talk to him, to hold him and maybe cuddle a bit so he blows off some steam on me and forget, but I really have to get going, I'm running late again. I appreciate how he's opening up though. It's heart warming.

"I'm so sorry baby. You don't have to come with me. How about you just relax here and I'll make you Sunday lunch with all seven colours when I get back. Would you like that?", I smile sweetly at him. He has me and I promise I'll pray for him.

"Yeah. I would love that. So hurry on and get back before Chelsea finds out I'm alone here and murders me. I don't look too good dead", he says and I giggle with him.

"Ok. After mass I'll run back here. I love you", I plant a wet one on his lips.

"I know", he says.

I need to stop putting my heart out there, seriously.

I get home after church still trying to decide what to make for lunch. I promised my criminal seven colours but this whole thing with Chelsea is draining me. I don't want to do anything honestly. I'm glad when I get home and find Don ready to leave.

"Do you mind if we go to my place and we cook there rather or get something on the way? Caleb has kinda been waiting for me for a while now but I didn't wanna leave before you got back".

It's like he read my mind. I quickly change into leggings and a crew neck and I'm good to go have my Sunday chills.

I'm kinda hoping to bump into Chelsea but it doesn't happen. Oh well.

Caleb is home and he's with Hilton and three younger guys, maybe 18 - 22 years old somewhere there. Don isn't that old naye but ke hierarchy counts more than age in their establishment.

"Give me a second baby. I need to talk to my tribe", he says, looking at me like if I say no he will dismiss this meeting.

"Sure, let me get to cooking so long".

They start in full blown, fast paced Afrikaans and I don't even bother trying to make sense of anything.

It goes on for a little while and the young ones leave so it's now Hilton, Caleb and Don. Hilton doesn't talk much and he always looks very troubled. Did I mention that he's tattooed so much there's no skin in sight? I'm talking about tattoos all over his face! He scares me because Don says he gets a tattoo for every person he kills and clearly he's a mass murderer. Hilton never really pays me attention. He can pretend like I don't exist while I'm sitting right next to him. I don't think he likes me much. Don says he's a very troubled soul but they're brothers and till death do them apart. When he says his byes and leaves I feel much freer.

The food will be ready in a bit and I've given them their beers so now we can talk. By that I mean I can interrogate them. Caleb is easy really. He's smart, laughs easily, looks good and he's just a nice person yena. I have my mimosa in my hand and I'm looking at them looking at me. Sometimes I think Don is scared of me, which doesn't make sense really.

“So Caleb, those tattoos over your eyelids, what do they mean?”. He has tattoos on both eyelids that read: I’M (right eye) SORRY (left eye). It looks weird whenever he blinks but I’ve always wondered about their meaning. He looks at Don as if asking if it’s ok to answer. Don nods. Wow! I could never be led like this. Could never be me!

“It’s one of those man. It means nothing much”, Caleb says, with that charming smile of his. “Please tell me”, puppy eyes.

“Well ja, one day when I’m dead and my eyes are closed forever, whoever will do the body viewing will know that I’m sorry”, he says.

“That’s deep. Sorry for what?”

“For everything”, he says and I can tell it’s case closed so I move on to the next tattoo.

“How about this one?”, I point to the one on his left arm. Don has the exact same tattoo and I love the green on his yellow skin. It reads: I’M JUST A SOUL WHOSE INTENTIONS ARE GOOD.

“It means exactly that. We may do bad time and again, but our intentions are always good. We don’t wake up in the morning wishing to hurt anyone but things happen”, he says. That’s true for all of us I suppose. We all sin and I dare not judge. Today is Sunday and I’m walking with the Lord, Thank you.

“And this one?”. On his right arm he has a tattoo that Don also has. It reads: GIFTED.

“We’re the GIFTED baby. We call each other Wolves but the true name of our family is GIFTED - Gifted I Fight Till Eternal Death. It’s more than a name, it’s a vow, a promise, a covenant till eternal death”, Don responds this time.

Oh ok. That sounds intense. There’s so much I have to learn about him I see and I truly appreciate how he’s opening up to me ever since we got back, many hours ago.

Caleb excuses himself saying he has a call to make outside.

“Did I make him uncomfortable?” I whisper to Don.

“Not really. He probably really has a call to make”, he says.

“So last night? What job had Caleb to do?”, I ask excitedly. I feel like a part of the Wolves now and I’m getting the inside scoop *peace sign*.

“I can’t tell you that. I can tell you about myself but that’s where it ends. I’m sworn to secrecy baby, what we do, how we do it, who we do it with, is a guarded secret”, he says, with a stupid smile.

“Oh, so you don’t trust me?”, I play the oldest emotional blackmailing card in the book.

“Yes, I don’t trust you”, he says.

Ouch! I wasn’t experring it!

“What? Why?”, acting all shocked.

“Let’s make it relatable to you and your church. Remember Samson and Delilah? Women have been the downfall of men since the beginning of time”.

Oh no he didn’t! But it’s the way he’s laughing about it that has me laughing too. Me? Delilah? kuRough mos.

Let me go and finish cooking in peace. He stands, leaning against the counter watching me chop vegetables. I focus on my cutting board but I can feel him watching me.

“What are you doing to me skat?”, he says and I blush very hard.

“You know what, before I forget. When we’re done here, write me that list of the things you want or else I’ll get you the things I think you need. So don’t yell at me when I deliver a gun to you and wet sneakers”.

Is he for real right now? A gun?

“What the hell? Why would the sneakers be wet?”, that missed me.

“I’m a thief so if I’m passing by and I see nice sneakers drying on someone’s wall, I can get them for you!”, he continues laughing.

“Are you serious?”. Why do I get the feeling that he’s serious?

“Of course not. Rule number one: If you steal something, make sure it’s worth it. Imagine doing time for a pair of cheap sneakers!”, he laughs so beautifully, my lord.

“Don...Do you steal?”, I turn serious mode on.

“Me? Of course not. If I want something I get it but I’m definitely not a thief”.

I’m confused!

Caleb returns and takes Don away from me. After a while he comes back and says, “About Chelsea, think you can go home and talk to her. I have a peace offering for her”.

I doubt Chelsea will want anything from him but ok, no harm in listening.

"Tell her I need you guys to wear black, we have a funeral to attend", he says.

"Whose funeral?", I’m really confused right now.

"Do you always have to ask me these questions? Just wear all black both of you, we have a mother fucker to bury", he says.

"Who? And why is Chelsea coming? Whose funeral Don? Who did you kill?".

“No one. I’m going to change into something black and I’ll be right down. Find a way to make Chelsea come with us, that’s your only job”.

"Chels won't agree to this! Give me more details Don! We not even talking me and her!".

“Then work on it. 45 minutes from here to your place, make her agree”.

I look over at Caleb for help and he shrugs his shoulders.

Sigh.

I switch off the stove and abandon my cooking mission. I text Chelsea:

‘My Chelsea Bun. You’ve been my bestfriend for many years now and you mean everything to me. I’m sorry for what I said and how I reacted yesterday. I’m sorry that I let a guy come between us. I miss you terribly and I don’t know what to do without you. I love you Chelsea and from the bottom of my heart, I’m sorry. All I’m asking is that you hear me out. But if leaving Don is what it will take to get you back, then say the word’.

BLUE TICKED....

WAITING....

GIVING UP....

‘I’ve been a bad friend. I’m sorry too. You know I love you and I want you to be happy. If Don is what happiness is to you then I’ll support you. I love you too’.

Yay! I have my friend back! Yay!

‘I love you more’, I quickly type.

‘I love you most’, she types back.

I guess we’re going to a funeral then! I know we still need to talk but we off to a good start.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

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I'm uneasy about this whole funeral and involving Chelsea thing. The state of our friendship is still volatile and one bad move and she may blow up again and we'll be back to square one. She said she will accept Donovan! She actually said that and I know she means it. One thing I know about my best friend is that she says what she means and she means what she says. She doesn't hold grudges too, against me at least. And boy, I love her for it.

I'm glued on my phone as Don drives and Caleb does whatever in the back seat.

'Please wear black. We're going somewhere', I text.

'Where?'

'A funeral'.

It feels stupid even typing it. What am I even saying? It's a major relief when she replies with laughing emojis.

'A what? Whose? Did your gangster die already?'

'That's not funny!' I add that dramatically sad emoji.

'Seriously though, please put on a black dress and black shoes. I'll be there just now'.

I hope whatever this funeral is, it won't affect Chelsea. I don't know if we can make it through another fight soon after the yesterday one.

'A funeral? On a Sunday afternoon? Who died?'. 'I don't know ok. Probably some gangster but Donovan needs me there and I need you there with me, please babes'.

SILENCE....

We're approaching Retreat and she's still silent.

'No babes, pass', she texts. When did she become this person? She's so difficult these days.

'Please Chels. Do this with me'.

I know it's ridiculous but we better go to that funeral or Don might just drag us there.

'Fine, whatever', with an eye roll emoji.

I send her kisses and finally let my breath out.

I run up to our place because Don said I have 10 minutes to get back down. I'm such an obedient lamb nani I'm shocked. I run straight to Chelsea's room and surprise surprise, she's dressing up. I fling my arms around her, almost knocking her off her feet.

"I love you Chels", I hold her tight and she hugs me back. She doesn't return my I love you! What's with coloured people and not telling me they love me back???

I go and get my blacks and come and dress up with her.

"You realise that if you stick with this guy you'll be going to a funeral everyday, right? In his life people die every hour bruh! They drop down like flies", she says.

"Don't be like that! Let's go, this once. Let's talk about this later, please tog".

"Ok babes. But make no mistake. I'm doing this for you not him!", she says

"I know. And enkos' (thank you) for that".

When I grow up I wanna be like Chelsea. If roles were reversed I think I would still be angry! The fight would've never happened because I'll never judge who she chooses to date, but that's not the point.

We look like black widows in our tight black dresses, black high knee boots, black coats and black hats. Of course it was Chelsea's idea to dress up identical and to look hot for a funeral. We twinning hard me and my BFF. Now we're ready to pick up shovels and ashes to ashes, dust to side chicks.

"Hi Chelsea. How are you doing? Good to see you", Don greets so politely, I'm sure he would genuflect if he could. He gives an unsuspecting Chelsea a big hug and she gives back a half hug.

"I'm good Don. Why are you not in a suit? You can't show up at a funeral dressed like that!", she says.

"What? I think I look ok. Don't I look ok?", he sounds so timid shame, I can't help giggling. Chelsea has that effect on people. He's in faded black jeans, white sneakers and has a black short sleeved Tee over a white long sleeved one. I think he looks good but maybe not for a funeral. And he was busy preaching all black and then he shows up dressed like a zebra!

"We must be there at 4 my bruh let's go", Caleb says, getting out of the car.

Don and I look at each other and laugh silently at the way Chelsea is batting her eyelashes staring at Caleb. Of all the brothers, Caleb is the handsomest or is it most handsome? There's not a single scar on his face and he hides his tattoos with long sleeves. He can't do much about the eyelids tattoos but he's taller than us so they are easy to miss. He has this charming smile and he looks very good. Hay shame, there goes Chelsea's heart!

Chelsea and Caleb get in the back seat and I take a second with Don outside the car.

"Look Lotus. I don't mean to freak you out but my family comes first and I would die for my family with a smile on my face. I'm an alpha and mine is to protect mines and to avenge where vengeance is necessary. In our world an eye for an eye is the way. So I'm doing what I'm doing today not to hurt you but because you're my family now", he says.

"You're scaring me Don? What are you on about?"

He kisses me on the cheek and tells me to get in the car.

"Who's funeral is it?", I ask, maybe the answer to what he said lies there.

"Get in angel. He doesn't like to be kept waiting. You look good by the way", he says, eyeing me like a child seeing candy.

"I didn't know you guys take funerals so serious! You are dressed like you are going on TV or something!...But seriously let's go", he says flashing me that gold tooth.

I jump into the front seat and he goes around and drives off. Caleb and Chelsea seem to be hitting it off in the backseat as she won't stop giggling and saying "Thank you" to his exaggerated compliments. Seriously? Did he just ask her if she is Beyonce's little sister?

We driving towards Tokai and Donovan looks nervous which is making me nervous. I wonder who died. "Pollsmoor Prison" the sign in front of us reads.

"A funeral in prison guys?", I look at Don first then at Caleb over my shoulder. Both remain silent. Alright, ok.

Don says something to the guard and we are let in. I've never been to prison before and I'm getting the chills just being here. Someone who hurt me beyond words is in here. I told Don, how can he forget!

As we get out of the car, Chelsea grabs me by hand and pulls me aside, her nails digging into my flesh.

"What the fuck is this Lotus?", vividly unamused.

"I don't know", I whisper. I also don't want to be here.

Caleb comes to us and puts his arm over her shoulders.

"Let's go girls. We'll be in and we'll be out", he says.

"Get me out of here right now!", Chelsea is getting worked up very fast.

I'm mad at Donovan! I told him what happened and he would bring us here to this place where the man who broke us to pieces is! What level of fuckery is that? Awakening those memories, seriously?

"Trust me at least", Caleb pleads with his eyes. I leave him to deal with Chelsea while I go and yell at Don. How could he!

"Please angel, trust me, please", he says before I can even begin yelling.

Man, can we rephrase the saying 'curiosity killed the cat' to 'trust killed the girl'?

We walk towards the buildings, my hand in Don's and Chelsea's in Caleb's. Some prisoners in orange uniforms scream at us, some saying they will do obscenities to us if they catch us. I guess that's what happens to men when they haven't been with a woman in years. All the sperms go to their head and the testosterone overload drives them mad. I try not to look their direction in case I see Roland, the man who made me change my mentality to 'Men are trash'.

A warder meets up with us and that brown envelope exchange between him and Don was so quick I could have missed it if I blinked. We follow the guys following the warder down a passage and into an empty room with a long table and metal benches on either side. I'm wondering what kind of funeral this is exactly. Do they hold funerals in prisons? I must read more yaz so I can learn about these things out of my scope.

Chelsea looks pissed and I'm just sitting here, uncertain. Caleb has his arm around Chelsea and Don has his around me.

A man scarier than any person I have ever seen in my entire life walks in. He looks maybe 50 years old or so and his brown face and bald head are covered in tattoos of all kinds. Skulls, guns, words, swords - all sorts of tattoos. There's no clean skin left he looks green and animalistic. Hilton is like this too but this one is older so the sagging skin and tattoos is just not ok. I feel goosebumps and I clutch Chelsea's hand harder. He has the number 28 inked on his forehead. "The 28 kill, steal and destroy. They rape, loot, sodomize, everything. They are outright outlaws!".

Chelsea is awfully silent and that's worrying me. I wish I hadn't brought her here. Caleb and Don stand as the man gets to the table and they do the hand sign, with the thumb and first two fingers raised. Holy angels in heaven, this man cut the front of his tongue in two! Eeeew! It looks forked like that of a snake! I find myself shivering. He's very scary.

“Brothers, I’m sure it’s an absolute pleasure for you to meet me”, the ugly stranger says and smiles, showing a mouth full of browned teeth.

“It is”, Don replies, putting his hands together and displaying the utmost respect. He takes off his T-shirts and shows the older guy his shoulder where four stars are neatly inked. “I’m Donovan. First alpha of the Wolves. Cape Flats Turf. I’m an alpha so what I offer you, I can see through”, Don says it like a soldier to a commander and I don’t know why but I’m charmed.

“I know who you are Alpha. You’ve created quite a reputation for yourself. Your toppie (old man) and I go way back. If you have his integrity then me and you will be good”, the Hunchback of Notre Dame says.

“I have his integrity and you have my word”, Don says.

“Very well then, your word is all I need. Let’s get to it. I need to be taking my nap right now”.

“A convict in here wronged me”, Don says.

“Wronged you or your pack?”

“Wronged me, on a personal level”.

“Carry on”.

“I want justice served”, Don says.

“Nothing is impossible but what’s in it for me?”.

“I’ll do this:

One - give your sons on the outside one of my routes for taxi tax.

Two - I’ll grant your sons immunity - safe passage through my turf provided they don’t open up first or we’ll be forced to clap back.

Three - I have with me for you a little gift, a brick of ice (Tik)

Four - 10 grand cash”, Don says.

Caleb looks at him with a raised eyebrow and I can tell he’s shocked even though he’s trying to hide it. Obviously he wasn’t told all this like the rest of us.

“That’s very generous of you Alpha. Raise that 10 to 15 and I accept”, tattoo face says and salutes to which Caleb and Dondre respond with their own salutation. I can’t help noticing how his is different. His is a ‘live long and prosper’ sign of pinkie and index finger raised and the rest down.

“15 it is”, Don stretches his hand and the man seals the deal by extending his too and doing a complicated hand shake.

How could he just agree to doing something yet he doesn’t know what it is? Could it be greed or just a lack of humanity, meaning he can do anything under the sun?

“So what will you have me do for you?”, he asks.

“I need you to take up a new wife. Whether the bastard has a number or not, I need you to wife him completely and when you are done with him make him a buffet for every man who needs some pleasuring. Dehumanise him but keep him alive, I might need to pay him a visit in the near future”, Don says with a straight face. I shoot a glance at Chelsea and find her looking at me too with a wide eyed stare. Poor guy! I wonder what he did to Donovan to deserve this!

“Tell everyone that he raped innocent sisters on the outside. You know what they do to rapists inside”, Don adds.

“Consider it done. I could use a new wife, the one I have is becoming lazy and frankly, he’s become stale”.

“I need justice served. Here’s your brick and your stash. I’ll hold my end of the bargain. I want to hear that bastard scream all the way to the Cape Flats”, he says sliding over a plastic bag with what actually looks like a brick wrapped in white paper and a brown envelope. One day I’ll ask where they get these brown envelopes from. I look at Chelsea and I think our suspicions are the same. Could it be?

I’ve never seen Donovan like this. He’s cold and stern. Through all of this I’m wondering where the prison staff is. Shouldn’t they be in here like in the TVs? But again I remember Don saying “The prisoners rule the prison because it’s their home”. I watch as Caleb intertwines his fingers with Chelsea and I’m happy that she lets him. My hand finds itself looking for Don’s but it misses it so it rests on his thigh instead.

“One last thing, I want to meet him. Me and him need to have a little chat”, Don says. His face looks stoic, his voice sounds deadly and his eyes are focused. Don slides the man a photo and the man smiles with those teeth.

“I know him. A good little virgin, smart enough to join the 27s when he got in here so no man touched him. Can’t wait to have him in my bed tonight”, still with that sinister smile.

“Alpha, this justice is for her, isn’t it?”, he asks looking at me with eyes that I can’t stand. His face I’m sure will haunt my dreams for many nights to come.

“Something like that”, Don says.

“She your bxtch?”, he asks, still looking at me with his reptile eyes.

“Something like that”, Don says.

The guy laughs and I feel so belittled. I can never get used to being referred to as a bxtch.

“I will hold my end of the bargain because your offer was too good to refuse. But let me tell you something young blood. We fxck bitches, we don’t fight for them! I don’t know what they teach you in the Wolves but in my gang, my sons know that to love a woman is the quickest way to your grave”, he says and stands.

Don swallows, I see his Adam’s apple moving.

“I’ll be back”, he says like the Terminator and phew I’m happy now that he’s no longer looking at me.

“What the hell Don?”, I’m the first to speak when the scary man exits the room.

“What?”, he says innocently.

“You said we’re going to a funeral! Is this a funeral?”, I want to yell at him but the stuff he discussed with that man has me cold inside.

“It is a funeral! What better way to kill a man than to kill him and leave him alive. He will die a slow painful death and even if he wants to really die, they’ll keep him alive. When they’re finished with him, not even death will want him”.

Wow! Who am I sleeping with exactly! He can’t do that to him. It’s cruel.

“Lotus, putting a man in prison is not justice. It’s just a transfer of location and he can chill here, eat for free, watch TV and have a good life. He wronged you and you’re my family and no one touches my family and gets away with it”, he says.

“What if he’s changed? You can’t....”, I say with a painfully thin voice.

“Don’t you dare feel sorry for him. Did he feel sorry for you all those times he hurt you? Did he feel sorry for Chelsea when he stripped her naked and forced himself on her in front of his friends? Did he? Did he stop and think of what it did to you? What I’m doing here is feeling sorry for him. I’m giving him the opportunity to experience first hand what he did to you girls. An eye for an eye”, he says, the anger in his voice unmistakable. I can tell he’s not

negotiating. And when he put it like that, I want hell to rain on my stupid ex. An eye for an eye!

My heart is beating fast as I find Chelsea's free hand and hold on to it with both of mine. "I'm sorry Chels".

Tears are running down her face and Caleb has his arm around her. I'm scared that she's mad at me for telling Don our story. She will never forgive me for this.

"It's ok, thank you actually", she says with that reassuring smile-through-the-tears.

"Don, thank you for this", she says, letting my hands go and reaching over for his. He clutches it with both hands and kisses it before giving it back to her.

Minutes later a clearly surprised Roland walks in. My handsome yet beastly ex-boyfriend. Prison has done a number on him and that orange is not good on him at all. He looks older than his age and his face looks tired. My heart is beating so loud I'm sure everyone can hear it.

"Relax my skat, he can't hurt you", Don rubs my arm to calm me down. I didn't realise I was shaking. Roland breaks a step when he sees us and turns around, probably to run away. He bumps into that guy from earlier. Now I don't know who this man is or what he's famous for exactly but the way Roland cowers and goes down on his knees when he realises who he just bumped into is hilarious. It's like a little demon on trial before Satan.

I don't know when Don got there but he's strangling Roland and dragging him across the floor to a wall.

"I'll leave you here Alpha, do what you must but please don't kill my wife. Keep the blood on his body minimal, my sheets are white", tattoo face says with an evil laugh.

"And you convict, report to my cell tonight so we can consummate our marriage. You are my wife now, congratulations. Don't keep me waiting or I may just lose my temper....Oh and find a skirt somewhere and put a doek on that bean head and shave clean, everywhere. Be a real woman, you know I don't do men!", he laughs and walks away, with his fingers saluting in the air. The look on Roland's face is that of fear and despair.

I think I'm going to throw up.

I've never seen Donovan in this animal mode before. I know he gets into fights or whatever and has what he calls 'rough nights' but he's done his best to keep it away from me. But as I watch him and Caleb ask Roland, with a fish knife on his throat, why he did what he did to us, I fall in love with him all over again.

"Why did you do it", Don asks through clenched teeth.

"I...I I didn't mean to hurt her. I loved her", Roland stutters, gasping for air as he holds his neck away from the tip of the knife.

"You loved her so much you raped her friend?", Caleb chips in.

"I I I didn't. My friends...did".

"A liar too!", Don punches him on the mouth and I can't watch. Hate him as I do, I once loved him and that's the reason I'm feeling a bit sorry for him right now.

"Lotus please, you know I'm sorry, tell them to stop, please Lotus", he begs through a mouth full of blood. He looks so pitiful and a tiny part of me is thinking maybe he truly is sorry.

"You don't ever say her name again! She's my angel and you broke her wings. Now you have me to deal with me", Don says before punching him flat in the eye. I've never heard a man cry out so loud before! And who knew sweet Caleb had violence in him too!

“Girls, he’s all yours. It’s his funeral, bury him! Do whatever will take all your anger away but don’t kill him, he still needs to be wifed”, Don says. My eyes widen as Chelsea stands up as if she’s been waiting for this moment all her life. She takes off her coat and walks across to Roland. I remain sitting, shaking where I am with Don standing behind me, with his hands on my shoulders.

I don’t know who this girl is and I had no idea she was this angry. Watching her go berserk is soothing and heartbreaking at the same time.

“Angel, stand for me”, Don says and I take a deep breath and stand.

“I can’t do this Don”, a tear runs out of my eye. “Would you rather have him dead? I’ll kill him myself right now if that’s what you want. Just say the word”, he says so sincerely it might just be the sweetest thing I ever heard.

“No”, I’m many things but an accomplice to murder is not one of them. Chelsea is still going crazy on him, kicking and yelling and punching and scratching. He’s on the floor with his hands covering his face. Not so manly and cocky right now.

I can’t watch this so I bury myself in Don’s chest and he embraces me. After forever, Caleb drags out a crying Chelsea towards the door we came through. I don’t recognise this man on the floor crying like a sissy! Roles are reversed now. That used to be me after being beaten up.

"Go on. Do whatever", Don urges me.

I go to him anyway and squat. Might be the last chance I ever get.

“Sit!”, I command him, feeling brave with Don standing behind me. I can tell he’s in pain as he sits up. It feels good to have this power over him. All those times he made me feel weak and worthless are giving me the motivation not to feel sorry for him.

“Lotu...I’m sorry”, he says.

I guess he remembered he’s not allowed to say my name.

“Please if you ever loved me...”, he tries, looking so pitiful I feel like throwing up on him.

“Look Ro, I’m not here for your sorry. If anything I’m the one who’s sorry. I’m sorry that you were so insecure and so incomplete you found pleasure in hurting me. I’m even more sorry that I let you. I’m sorry that you’re such a coward that you did what you did to Chelsea. I’m sorry that I threatened you so much and you couldn’t stand having a powerful woman in your life so you sought to break me thinking it will elevate you. But look where it landed you! Tonight you’ll be someone’s wife! Karma is a bxtch ne? So really Ro, no need to say sorry to me because I forgave you every single time. I accepted all those apologies you never gave me”. He won’t see my tears! He’s not worth that honour!

He looks at me like he will resume crying.

“And thank you Roro. You taught me what a man isn’t”, keeping a fixed smile on my face. Let him see how happy I am without him!

“Oh...and since you are someone’s bxtch now, let me give you some advice. Try not to be too fat or too stiff or too thin, remember men hate that!”, I chuckle. Then he would call me fat and I’d lose weight then he would call me thin! He used to say sex with me was bad because I was too stiff. But now that I’ve experienced sex with Don, I know sex was bad back then because he was the problem not me!

I give Don my hand so he can hoist me up from my squat.

“Let’s go baby”, I say.

I don’t know why Don kicks him one last time, sending him back to the floor.

"Hell is coming for you. Be ready", Don says before we walk away. I always thought my closure would come from one of my many prayers in church, I didn't know I had to walk into hell and look my devil in the face to actually be free of him.

"Thank you", I squeeze his hand as we walk past two warders who nod at him like he's a colleague.

Chelsea is not ok at all and when we get to the Cape Flats and Don takes my hand, Caleb says "She'll stay by me, I'll bring her tomorrow". "No Caleb, you can't", I jump in. I'm worried he'll take advantage of her.

"It's fine babes, you know I'm a big girl", she gives me a hug and whispers a thank you and I whisper an I love you.

There's no heaven for demons. Let Roland enjoy hell.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

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You will never understand the damage you did to someone until the same thing is done to you. That's why I'm here.

With Love - Karma

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Of all days, Don decides to leave me alone tonight. I get that he has no option but I really wish he could stay with me. Remember, he went and did his own thing without consulting his pack so now he had to call an urgent meeting to let them know that the sons of Reptile (I gave him that name) have free passage in their turf. And he said it couldn't wait because anything can happen overnight and he has no energy to start a war with Reptile's gang. He's trying to explain to me the best he can and I get it, I do. I'm slow I know but I get it eventually.

"Gang wars get brutal and so we avoid them as much as possible. They're inevitable yes but we delay them as best we can. Because believe it or not, we know the grave awaits but we enjoy being alive in the meantime".

"But can't you like talk it through and settle out of court kind of like normal people do?". I know my questions sound I thought through sometimes but I think it makes more sense to talk and iron out differences without gunning down each other. But that's just me. I hate all sorts of confrontations and conflict. I mean, there's enough space for all of us to thrive on earth. We are stars and the sky is big enough to let us shine without blinding each other!

"You truly are an angel! But I'll tell you this, I try by all means to keep the peace. But I can only do so much. I only lead a quarter of the pack. We have a General, so at the end of the day his word is final. If he says "kill", kill we do", he says.

"He can just wake up and make a decision like that?". How could one person have that much power?

"No. We sit and deliberate, then we vote. If he says something and the four of us (alphas) disagree, then we win. If two or more alphas side with him, he wins. That's how democracy goes. But for serious matters like a full blown war, we kinda have no option. No one ever

won a war by sitting at home and praying for peace! So we protect what's ours or die trying at least".

"So I could lose you any day? You could wake up dead!", I can't bear the thought.

"Wake up dead? What's that? A resurrection?", he laughs it off.

It's really not funny.

While he's gone I think it's best I put on my earphones and write my list. It's public knowledge that the quieter you are, the louder the thoughts get. Of course I'm out of my mind right now, it's very dark in there. I refuse to imagine what Roland is going through right now. He hurt me, brutally so, yes. He hurt Chelsea deeply and it will take a very long time to forgive him, yes. He deserves punishment, yes. But he was my boyfriend so no matter how much hate I harbour in heart, I could never wish that much pain and emasculation on him. Heck, I would never wish it on my worst enemy. Do you know what they said they'll do to him? Must be the Christian in me making my conscience feel a little guilty. I know he deserves it but still. The image of the Reptile's tongue forced down his throat is making me gag. Oh Roro.

On the bright side, I'm alone now so I finally get to write my list. We all know what I want above all else, so that goes first. I can't seem to think straight because this that I just wrote is a grocery list not a wish list. Seriously Lotus, Muesli and Plain Double Cream Yoghurt!
DELETE.

I know one person who deserves to hear about today's 'funeral'. She was my pillar during that trial and her anger made me feel better. She's in a loud place, tarven obviously because it's Sunday.

"Hold Lotus. I can't hear you. Why are you calling me when I'm in such a noisy place? Why didn't you call before I left home?", she screams into the phone so I can hear her.

"How was I supposed to know where you are? I don't have a tracker on you", I respond.

"You're so rude yhuuu! I wonder who you take after because it's clearly not me!", she yells.

"Ha a sisi, go outside tu. I need to talk to you".

"We're sharing ingudu, if I go outside they'll finish it!".

Trust my mother to put beer before me! I've been crying, can't she hear it in my voice?

"I went to see Roland in prison today". Since she won't step out and I won't hang up, I might as well.

"What. Hold it like that, I'm going outside".

"Why baby? Why would you go and see that monster?", she says, not disappointed but more concerned.

"I haven't told you sisi but I have a boyfriend now. I've been meaning to tell you. It's just a disaster. So he knows people in that prison".

I go on and tell her what happened. I'm trying hard not to cry. I don't know but I don't like appearing weak in front of her.

"Serves him right! *obscenities x10*. I hope he feels everything he did to you and Chelsea!

obscenities x5. Rhaaa! Serves him right!", she goes on and on. She's a little tipsy so insults are flowing easily from her mouth.

"Isn't it too much though? I mean...".

"No you're not about to feel sorry for that dog! Isn't it too much? It's not enough! I wish I could lay my hands on him. Rhaaa! *obscenities*".

"But nana, this boyfriend of yours, what is he exactly? How does he have that much power and connections? I hope he's not a gintsa (gangster)", she says.

"He just knows people! What has that got to do with anything?", I snap.

"I'm just saying Lothasi! Don't be silly. Don't go opening your legs for a gangster. Do you have a death wish? Is he a gangster?". Oh there she goes again!

"I said he's not! Now stay out of it! I don't even know why I told you!", I snap again. We can never get it right me and her.

"Do whatever you want nana. You're a grown woman, do whatever you want. Now if you don't mind, I have beer to drink". Then she hangs up on me! We fight so bad I don't even know why we bother talking to each other to be honest.

I call Chelsea's mother and I tell her everything and she celebrates like we finally found the men who killed Jesus and we necklaced them (burnt with tyre around neck). She, like Don, says I shouldn't dare feel sorry for him because every demon has it's day in hell.

I text Chelsea but she doesn't respond. She probably drank herself stupid and passed out. My Chelsea bun. Caleb better treat her well or else!

I feel better after talking to Chelsea's mum. Unlike my mother, she's classy and she doesn't swear. Her biggest swear word is 'stupid'. She comforted me and now I can go back to drafting my list in peace.

Don walks in as I write number 6. He looks drained but he's forcing a smile. "What are we writing?", he asks.

"That list you said I must write", I smile at him. He shouldn't see I've been crying. He did the most for me today and it would be cruel to make him feel bad for it.

"Let's see", he grabs my phone before I can stop him".

"You want a car? What kind of car?", he says reading my number 1: Car.

"Any car to be honest. I like the Captur, like that one my former lecturer drives".

"Cool. I'll get it for you".

Just like that? Oh wow, I must be doing something right.

"Baecation? What's a baecation?" He frowns at my Number 2.

"It's a vacation with Bae!", like duh!

"Who's Bae?", he looks at me like 'talk bxtch!'.

"You silly. Bae is like baby. So I want us to go away, maybe to Dubai or something". Don't tell me he honestly doesn't know what Bae means! Is he living under a rock? As for Dubai, well I just said. I've never left South Africa. I've never even been on a plane! But everyone goes to Dubai so I also want.

"Dubai? Nah, take your girl with you. It would mean getting fake documents, cleaning up my money and shit. I don't have time to do that. It's better I give you the money you need and you put it in your bank and you go and do whatever they do in Dubai", he says.

Umm ok. Friendcation sounds good too.

"Ok baby. We could use time out I suppose". He's a godsend. Where I'll get time to travel I don't know! I've been off 'sick' and I don't have enough leave days to be friendcating.

"You want thigh high boots - burgundy for you and red for Chelsea?", he looks at me like he'll laugh. What's funny? I want them and so does Chelsea but Steve Madden isn't cheap! I honestly want them and he better get them before winter is over.

He's on number 4 now, "Girlfriend allowance - R5000 per month". He actually laughs.

"What the hell is girlfriend allowance?", he asks.

Man! He wasn't supposed to read that. I was yet to edit to something less gold diggish! I look down in embarrassment.

"R5000? Only? Are you sure?". I was sure but I'm not anymore.

Ok I wrote number 5 as a joke. I would have deleted it.

"Boob job? Why would you do that?", he frowns at me.

"Your boobs are perfect as they are. Why would you wanna pump them up with silicone?"

"I want them bigger and rounder", I say with my dropped voice.

"Come here baby", he reaches for me and I get up and sit on his lap.

"I will get you everything on that list except the Boob job. I love you as you are. You will not be changing yourself to feel more beautiful. You're gorgeous. Don't tell me you haven't realised how crazy I am about your boobs. Should I show you?", he bites his lip. Dzamn papi! I can't help giggling and blushing. He's amazing.

"Show me", my turn to bite my lip.

Monday.

Who doesn't hate Mondays? He woke me up at 5 bloody am. I tried saying I want to skip work but he wasn't having it. So I had to drag myself out of bed and he took me home. How come Caleb let Chelsea skip work? So not fair!

Work is a drag and Dr Dirk is working on my nerves. Ok to be fair he's being his usual self but I'm snappy so he's annoying me. That payslip changed the way I respected my job. I sometimes wish I had never seen it. I need to have a serious meeting with me, myself and I so we can decide if we're staying at this sorry excuse of a job or not.

I told you I blocked Dalu, right? Of course I did! I can't risk 'Hey baby' messages creeping up on my screen when I'm with Don. Please don't bother asking me why I'm unblocking him right now because I also would like to know.

Hay kabi but have you ever 'dated' someone out of pity? Dated them because although they don't raise your temperature, they are nice, gentle, kind and patient with you, all things most guys aren't? Only dated them because they're so good to you, you don't want to break their hearts? I'm there with Dalu. If Don had never happened, Dalu would be my dream come true. But now I'll leave my relationship status at: Complicated.

I think he's stalking me because how else did he know to text me as soon as I unlocked him? I keep digging myself a deeper hole by entertaining him. I must break up with him already.

'Baby, I need your help', he writes like we just spoke minutes ago. No 'where've you been' or stuff like that most guys would do.

'Shoot', I reply, deciding to go with the flow.

'I'm having dinner with my parents this Saturday. Please come with me. I can't stand them on my own', he says.

'I don't think that's a good idea Dalu'.

'Please baby, I'm on my knees. Plus it's a long weekend. Please Lolo'. he texts.

You know when you want to break up with someone but they want you to meet their parents?
Disaster I tell you.
'I can't Dalu'.
'Please baby. Do this for me, please'.
Deep sigh.
'Let me think about it and get back to you'. My answer is a no but let me think of a gentler way to let him down.

When the work day finally ends, I'm the first out of the building. Finally! Traffic is kinder today so I make it home in less time that expected.

Chelsea is in her PJs looking all cute with her high ponytail and funny elephant bedroom boots. I drop my bag and run to her. I just need a hug, her hug. We stand there in each other's hold. Yesterday. We don't have to say it but we both know.

"I love Don for you", she says when we break the hug and wipe our tears.
"Really?".
"Ja. You have my full support. He loves you Lotus".
I'm tempted to say 'but he said he doesn't!'.
"It's probably going to be a rough ride but stick with him babes. It will work out and he'll make you happy". That means a lot coming from her. So the peace offering worked after all.

"I want Caleb", she blurts out.
"What? You have Hulk. Why do you want Caleb? Did he do you good last night?".
"He didn't sleep with me", she says.
"Really? So why do you want him?".
"Because he didn't sleep with me! I practically took my clothes off and threw myself at him but he didn't sleep with me! He said I was drunk and that he thought I deserved so much better. He said if me and him where to ever sleep together, it had to be with me sober and not emotional".
I look at her like okay!
"No guy has ever shown me that much respect Lotus. I want him. Plus he's so cute and man he kisses so good". She makes that 'in remembrance' face.
So they kissed even! Wow ok.

She wants him, but does he want her though? But she has Hulk though! But she hates the gangster life and he's a gangster! I don't know but I plead the fifth right now. My lips are sealed. I have my own situationships weighing me down. Who am I to judge?

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

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It's hard to resist a bad boy who's a good man...

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I'm so boo'ed up, I can't be saved. So after work, my first stop is home then on to the Cape Flats. Forget working out! Why am I having summer problems in winter? Leave me alone. Don knows I'm coming. He said I should come to him straight from work but I'm still in the

honeymoon phase so I need to shower, touch up my makeup, spray on my expensive perfume, brush my teeth and show up to him looking like a million dollars. You know guys value you up based on how you present yourself in the first three months, right? You dress like a hobo in stage one of a relationship and you get hobo treatment throughout but you come off as "I kinda deserve nice things in life" and he'll get the memo. Anyway.

Anyway, I drive down a route I'm now accustomed to. One day too soon I'll be driving my own car! Imagine that! Mamela, I don't care that it's winter. I'll roll down my window and blast Chris Brown. People shall know that this Xhosa girl has a car. It's very important. The people at work bona, if I could drive into the factory I think I would. You might not believe me but at my work place the amount of respect you get is proportional to your bank balance. So if I show up in a brand new car people will respect me so much they will even address me in English. You wait and see.

So I sent my list to Chelsea and she laughed at me and called me stupid. Not in those exact words but that's what she meant. She says I should have asked for the latest Mercedes Benz because it's not like Don will spend any money on it, he'll just steal it. So not funny! As for the R5000 allowance, she said I must love myself more. In my defense, I don't want to come off as a gold digger, asking for a Merc and R30000 allowance when I don't even earn that much. No! Can never be me.

My list have grown by the way.

6. 30 inch Brazilian weave + 360 degree lace frontal closure
7. Rent for next month
8. Woolworths voucher
9. YDE voucher
10. Trip to Disney Land, America LOL

I'm playing innocent but deep down I want to ask him to buy me an apartment. But can he afford it considering he lives in the Cape Flats and not in a very fancy side? Baby steps Lotus. Maybe one day he will leave his bank statement lying around and then I can have a rough idea of what I can and cannot ask for. Chelsea says it will never happen because the likes of Dons don't have bank accounts. It can't be true though. He has a club and there are speed points there. Come on now! Does she think the money swiped goes straight into brown envelopes? *roll my eyes*.

Speaking of Chelsea. Caleb went very hard on her without meaning to. He showed her affection, whatever that was, then went silent. It's only been 2 days but Chelsea is going crazy. She's not playing, she really wants him! I asked Don yesterday if Caleb maybe perhaps somehow by any chance was attracted to Chelsea that way and guess what baby boy said? "I'm not Caleb, how would I know?". And he wasn't joking so I left it like that. They're grown, they shall see what to do.

Then Chelsea's mum sent us emails this morning. One email actually to the therapist who helped Chels and I after that ordeal with Roland. She Cc'd us both and in short, she wants us to have two or three more sessions with the therapist after what happened on Sunday. We assured her we're fine but she wasn't having it, so therapy on Thursday it is. I love Chelsea's mum, she took me in like her own daughter and during the trial of my ex, she was by my side as much as she was by Chelsea's. And obviously my family couldn't afford lawyers, therapy

and all that, so her family did everything for me. They treated me like their own daughter and for that I'm eternally grateful.

At first I was scared that her family would blame me for what happened to her but they didn't. I know if roles were reversed, Chelsea would have been cast out of my family at lightning speed. Some of our parents always find a way to blame the friend for everything wrong that happens.

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I find Don waiting for me impatiently, he did say he has business to take care of shame. I didn't ask what business though, I don't want that kind of stress. It's my birthday next week Friday so I think he's planning something for me. I think that's the business. I may be wrong but I think I'm right. I'm so excited, I catch myself smiling every time I think about it. Issa countdown to 23 y'all. I give him hurried kisses as he leaves. He's a bit upset because I was late so now he's running late. I said sorry though but he just walked out. He'll be strong. Nothing a hearty meal can't fix.

Cooking done. Waiting getting boring. Time moving. It's almost 10 and dololo Donovan! I might as well have stayed home mos. He said he would be back now now! Hay suka I'm going to bed mna.

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"Lotus!"

I'm woken by Donovan's shouting from downstairs. I think I'm dreaming so I pull the covers over my head and try and get back to sleep. I should have closed the door.

"Lotus!", loud enough for the whole Western Cape to hear. I want to ignore him and keep sleeping but the urgency in his voice is worrying me.

"I'm coming", my heart picking up pace on my way down.

"Bring towels....Dude I'm dying. Hurry up!", he yells. Dude? Not baby? Ok it's serious! I pause a little trying to access the bizarre request but I go back up. Did he say he's dying? And now towels? Oh no, I'm not emotionally prepared for such.

I grab three folded towels and run back down. I'm fully awake now. His voice screams, 'it's a matter of life and death' so I'm responding like it is. I'm in a state of panic.

"Grab a knife and pass me that bottle", he says. I can tell whatever it is it's urgent. I throw the towels at him and he cusses loud and that's when I see his arm. He's topless now and all six of his packs are in place but now is not the time to ogle him. His left arm is turning greenish and there's blood trickling from something like a tiny hole. It looks painfully sore and I'm just staring not sure what to do.

"Grab a knife my skat and pass the whiskey!", he yells at me like I'm the one who hurt him. I do as told, rush to the kitchen and grab a small steak knife and rush back to him.

"What happened?", my voice trembling. I want to touch but it looks very sore, his arm is beginning to swell around that hole.

"I need you to get the bullet out", he says bluntly.

"Bullet? What? What happened?", tears already welling in my eyes.

"Listen to me. This is not the time to cry. I'm dying over here. Take that knife and get this bullet out!", he says, clenching his jaw in apparent pain.

My hands are trembling and I have tears in my eyes. I shouldn't be here at all. I'm doing home surgery now? Taking out bullets? This is not the kind of life I want to lead. I didn't sign up for this. I don't even watch action movies because blood is not my favourite thing. There's a good reason I didn't become a doctor ok! Fine, my marks were too low to be admitted into medical school but still!

"Now Lotus!", he yells and I jump.

"Why don't we go to the hospital or call the police? Who did this to you?"

"We only go to the hospital when we are ready to die and we only call the police when we are ready to go to jail. Today I'm not in the mood for both", he says sternly, looking up at me, with those eyes a deeper blue than normal.

"Get the fxcken bullet outta my arm", he screams at me.

"How?", I don't see how I can do it with my hands shaking like this!

"I'll guide you. Please my angel, do this for me", he pleads. The pain in his eyes as he bites his lower lip is too vivid to ignore. He takes another long sip of the Jack Daniels before pouring the rest of it on the 'hole'. I'm sobbing and biting my lower lip as I follow his instructions. I make a shaky cut on his arm and wince through it all. There's blood everywhere and I should know better than to be handling blood with bare hands but what option do I have?

"Let me call Caleb. I can't do this". Sob sob.

"I called him on my way here. Take it out Lotus. Do it!", he goes from sorrowful to snappy. I can't see the bullet through the blood and my teary eyes are not helping either. I have no idea what I'm doing with this knife and he groans every time it touches his raw flesh. The towels are soaked scarlet and the couch is a mess.

My angels must have heard my prayers because the door flies open and Caleb walks in with Hilton right behind him.

"Alpha, you alright?", Caleb runs to where I'm standing.

"Just get the fxcken bullet out of my arm! Get it out", he groans.

"Shit!....Give here", Caleb turns to me and takes the knife from my shaking hands.

"Do you have something like tongs or something?", he asks me.

"I have eyebrow tweezers in my handbag".

"Let's see it....Get a clean towel and make it wet....Hilton get me some ice. Now!", Caleb barks the orders. I run up the stairs for my tasks and come back down with a wet towel and tweezers.

"Are you crazy? What the hell were you thinking going on a solo mission? How can you make her remove the bullet? Are you trying to lose your arm?", Caleb yells at Don.

"Just take the bloody bullet out man and stop talking!", Don says.

"No Alpha, this is not it. Where your head at these days? Are you trying to get killed?", Caleb is angry and it shows.

I stand by and watch to learn. Caleb has tied the top of the arm tightly with a shoelace, I suppose to slow down the bleeding. Don is gulping down a fresh bottle of whiskey and Hilton is holding an ice pack to the wound.

“Switch on the stove Lotus, put it on high and bring a cooking stick, something wooden”, Caleb says to me and I know better than to ask questions now. I do as told and fast.

Don takes another gulp of the whiskey and bites down on the cooking stick. The bleeding is not so much now and I can see the hole where the bullet went through. “Hold his other hand Lotus and don’t let go...Hilton hold him down”, Caleb orders. I feel like yelling at Hilton as he pushes down on Don’s chest with his knee and grabs his head like he's doing a wrestling lock. That looks painful.

“Ready?”, Caleb asks and Don groans what sounds like a yes. His hand crushes mine so hard I cry out in pain. He groans deeply, biting down on that stick but unable to move with Hilton on him. After what seems like forever Caleb says “Done.....Lotus burn this knife quick and bring a bowl of water”.

I wipe the blood on my shorts and run to the stove. I leave the knife on there and take a small dish with water to Caleb. I return and wait until the blade of the knife is glistening then I turn it around and wait.

Caleb places that hot blade on Don’s wound which is starting to bleed again. I cringe as my baby cusses and I can't stop the flow of tears down my face. I can feel his pain deep in the pits of my stomach. Caleb carefully places the ice pack around the wound and rips Don's T-shirt into bandages then ties them down.

Mental Note: Buy a First Aid Kit tomorrow and read up on how to deal with all sorts of wounds. This is my life now!

"Was it necessary to take it out? Wouldn't leaving it in there been best?". I can be random at times but all this is new to me and I'm fast learning that what I read is not what happens in the real life.

“No! It heals quicker when taken out. Besides, the bleeding wasn’t stopping so it’s not like the stupid metal was helping in anyway”, Caleb schools me. I’m trying hard not to resume crying as I cling on to my baby’s good arm. Caleb rolls a joint and passes it to Don to smoke. So he walks around carrying weed? Isn't that illegal?

It never stops in this life. What’s next? Will I get shot too?

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

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Ride or die...

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I'm thoroughly shook by what happened. It was like a fast paced movie and I'm a chick flick kinda girl, I don't do action. This must be one long dream, it can't be happening right now. Come on, bullets, guns, home surgeries, knives - the only thing missing is Anorld Schwarzenegger and we have Terminator: Cape Flats Day.

I'm sitting on the couch, my feet under my bum and clinging on to my baby and trying to keep it together. How did we get here? I mean, I knew the gangster life had its fair share of

quarrels and little misunderstandings. I knew guns were part of the deal too but somehow I'd convinced myself that it would never happen to anyone I know, at least definitely not to my alpha. It's now all too real. Guns and blood are now a part of my life? And I'm ok with that because? I'm not trying to die young, I kinda really love life and I have so much unticked off my bucket list I can't kick the bucket yet.

Don is getting high and drunk as we wait for the doctor. He's taking this pain like a pro! Could he be used to it? I know I would have died from just the shock of being shot yet look at him, all cool about it like he got bitten by a mosquito or something minor like that. I don't know why I keep thinking a traditional healer will walk in any minute now. Not our type but the coloured men who wear sacks and sell herbs type. I don't think they can call a qualified, registered medical practitioner after an illegal shooting. Please don't ask me if there are legal shootings because I don't know. All I know is doctors take their jobs very seriously because one small mistake and they're kicked out and stripped off the right to practice. Imagine going from Dr back to Mr just because you treated an enemy of the state! Seven years of med school down the drain at the snap of Thanos' fingers! I doubt any doctor in his right mind would associate themselves with gangs.

The doctor is at the gate and Caleb goes to fetch him. A proper Pakistani (Somalian?) man walks in. My bad, people from up Africa confuse me. Pakistan is in Africa, right? Or is it the capital city of Tunisia? Never mind, let me not expose my ignorance any further.

The guy looks like a doctor doctor! I don't know what I was expecting but I know for a fact it wasn't an actual doctor. But since they have lawyers, policemen and accountants on their payroll, I guess a doctor was a necessity seeing that they work under dangerous conditions. He greets all of them by first name, ignores me and gets to asking questions while taking the temperature and blood pressure of Bae.

"When did he get shot? Where? What did you do? A knife? Was it sterile? How long ago? You covered it up with a dirty T-shirt? You didn't listen to me last time!". He sounds calm as he voices his disapproval in the form of questions. Caleb answers until Donovan snaps, "Enough with the questions my bru. Get to working!". Someone is in a grumpy mood.

Dr doctor opens his case and puts on gloves and a lab coat. Seriously? Lab coat for what? And is it just me or everyone here is pretending like I don't exist? I could get up and walk out and they wouldn't notice.

"Better than last time", the doctor says tracing a finger on the wound. There was a last time? Lord help us all. Don looks unbothered like he didn't just get a bullet pulled out of his arm. Can alcohol and weed really numb someone to that point? He has a little furrow on his temple though and his jaw is quite clenched. I suspect he's hiding the pain.

"I can't stitch him up. You decided to burn him again", Dr says without looking up. These 'agains' are not sitting well with me at all. "He'll live. I'll come and check up on him tomorrow evening. Call me just before he dies", the doctor chuckles and I'm here thinking I didn't get the joke.

"I'm not dying yet. Only death can kill me", Don says with his drunken voice.

I get up and stand behind the couch. I need to take notes. He tries to see if the skin is flaking off, smears some ointment on it and presses around the area. Not once does Don wince. Dr

man carefully dresses Don's arm up in proper bandages. I have so many questions but I don't think I can ask right now.

"Right. We good here. Who'll be taking care of him this time?", the good doctor stands up straight. What does he mean 'this time?'.

"She will", Caleb looks at me. Me? Kahle kahle, how did I get nominated for this role without my consent? I'm screaming in my head 'I have a job you criminal motherfudgers! I can't babysit! What if whoever shot him comes to finish him off and I get caught in the crossfire? Bloody fools!'. But outside I give the doctor a blank face.

"Right Miss. Keep the wound dry. Bath him in a tub and make sure no water comes into contact with the wound until tomorrow night. When you bath him tomorrow night, clean his arm with water only, no soap, just clean water and pat it dry then dress it up again, I'll leave you bandages".

"Bath me? Fxck off, it's just an arm, I'm not dead yet", Don says in a drowsyish voice. We all look at him and disregard him.

"No more pouring of alcohol on the wound please. It slows down healing. How many times should I tell you?", he looks at all of us as if expects us to tell him how many times he must tell us. Three times maybe? Three for trinity or seven times maybe? Seven for perfection. I'll go with seven times. I got lost in my head there for a second.

"Give him two of these pain pills every 4 hours and he must finish these antibiotics or else, I don't have to tell you...rub this around his wound, it will help with the swelling". I nod and receive the pills, the ointment and my invisible nursing degree.

"Call me if he passes out or if his fever gets worse or he feels numbness on the arm, starts to bleed, arm changes colour, any sign of infection. Anything off, call me", he says.

"I don't have your number", I look up at him innocently.

"Good. Alpha call me", he says.

Mxm. "What if he passes out as you said or his fever gets really bad and he can't call?". I really hate being dismissed.

"Then make a plan", he dismisses me again.

If only he could see the number of middle fingers I've flipped at him in my head.

"One last thing. Don't leave his side for at least 2 days. Make sure he eats and takes his meds. Monitor his fever", he says.

"I have to go to work! I can't sit here for 2 days!".

He sighs and fumbles around in his briefcase and gets a booklet and a stamp.

"Full name please", he looks up at me with his hand sitting on the paper ready to write.

Sigh.

"Lotus Janse van Rensburg".

He gives me that look everyone gives me when I say my surname out loud.

"Here, you're off sick all week. Now take care of your, of your...?", he stops there obviously unsure how to continue.

"Of your...None of your business!", Don says rudely.

Maybe it's the pain talking or maybe he's just rude. He always was rude from the get go so I don't know why I'm shocked.

We might as well cut out Hilton's tongue mos. He doesn't talk this guy. He just sits there looking mean AF and ready to murder. Exaggeration but something like that.

"Walk with me Lotus", Caleb says walking the doctor out. Sigh. They don't see me these people! (Translate to Xhosa to make sense).

The doctor has driven off in his posh Porsche and it's just me and Caleb standing on the pavement. It's chilly out here and I've had a rough night so I really would love to go back inside, take my one armed boyfriend and go to bed.

"Alpha says you said you love him", he says it like I never should have said that.

"I did. I do". Even a blind man can see it. It's lunch bar this thing - too obvious.

"Now you'll need to love him harder than you ever have", he says.

"Umm ya sure", like duh, like I would dump him for getting shot!

"I'm serious. He's a thorn in the arse when he's in pain. He'll push you away and do everything to make you go away. Just remember that you love him and stay with him", he says.

"Why would he do that?"

"Because right now he's weak and Alpha is never weak. He never wants anyone to see him weak".

My poor baby.

He looks down and those "I'M SORRY" tattoos are in my view. They kinda look beautiful and sincere. I hope all who ever see them will forgive him.

"Who shot him? Why?"

"One of our own. Some feel like granting the other gang safe passage through our turf and giving up one of our taxi routes never should have happened. Not everyone is happy", he says.

So it was because of me. I swallow hard and I feel guilty. Am I going to be the next Helen of Troy?

"So what will happen now? Will they forgive Don? They will right?", please say yes.

"Forgive Alpha or Alpha forgive them? When it comes to Alpha, it's an eye for an eye. He has to do what he has to do to send out a clear message or else they'll start thinking he's weak. So if anything they should be begging for his forgiveness because he's a wounded lion right now".

I might need those 'I'M SORRY' tattoos soon.

"Does he know who they are or who it is who shot him?", please say no.

"No. But he will find out, he always does. He's an alpha Lotus, don't tell me you still don't know what that means! We all owe him our allegiance. We need to rat out who shot our alpha and the justice must be punitive and serve as a message to anyone with similar thoughts".

I feel goosebumps all over. I am Helen of Troy reincarnated.

I want to know exactly what will be done to the shooter but Hilton disturbs us. He stops close to me and looks so hard at my face I want to step back. But I'm frozen and his unsmiling inked face is making me shiver.

"Stay away from our alpha!", he says before stepping away.

"Never mind him, he means well", Caleb says but it doesn't make me feel better.

"Take care of him Lotus".

"I'll do my best".

"Dankie...maybe you should go back in now. Call me if you need anything or if he becomes too impossible".

I nod, I'll try but no promises. Hilton's words - stay away from our alpha. He said it so intensely I know he meant it. I knew he didn't like me much but I didn't know he wanted me gone. Ja ne!

Getting Don upstairs and to bed wasn't much of a hassle. The weed, whiskey and meds knocked him flat out and he's sleeping on his back with his arm resting on a pillow. I'm scared he'll forget and roll over it. Please no.

I need to talk to someone before I lose my mind.

'Chelsea Bun', I text and add heart eyes.

'Babe', she texts back almost immediately.

'Can I call?'

'I'm with Hulk, let me go to your room and call you'.

I probably should go to the other room as well.

She calls 2 minutes later and I tell her everything. I mean every thing!.

"Come home Lotus. You're not safe", she says. Really? That's the first thing she has to say?

"I can't just leave him. He got shot!". I don't voice out the 'what's wrong with you!'.

"Ja! More reason why you should get out of there. Actually, stay the night, it might be dangerous to get out now. Leave tomorrow and stay gone".

She sounds desperate for me to hear her and I can't deal with her. I need my best friend not my mother.

"I thought you approve of him now. Caleb is no better!", I didn't mean that last part.

"I approved yes, I still do. But I approve of you staying alive more. Let the thugs deal with their thug life and you stay away from it. Being selfish is not always a bad thing babes".

"Wow Chelsea! Caleb is a thug too remember and you want him anyway!".

"I do. I actually do but I'm not blind so I know exactly what he is. No way in hell would I be caught dead cleaning bullet wounds and nursing gangsters. I want him but when I get him, it will be on my own terms", she says.

"Clearly nothing I'll ever say about this guy will get through to your head. So continue with your Clyde Bonnie, I'll write your eulogy so long".

Then she hangs up. WTF! I want to call her back and yell at her but let her be. I'm going to actively match her up with Caleb so she can walk a mile in my shoes. Let's see if she will still be Judge Judy then, tshini!

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER THIRTY

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Helen of Troy - The face that launched a thousand ships.

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I think true love is tested when your person falls sick. You become their mother, nurse, lover and therapist all at the same time. You make sure they eat the soup you made even though

they tell you it stinks. You wash their wound and apply more Betadine even though you think it stinks. You keep reassuring them that they will be just fine even when you're not certain of it. But worse, you have to deal with their little moods, attitude and aggression. Only love can see you through that. If you just like the person, you'll be out faster than they can say - paracetamol.

I didn't sleep last night! When we went to bed, everything was ok. I was still in shock but watching Don lying on his back knocked out by pain pills and all his other vices, gave me a sense of peace. I know he used to sit and watch me sleeping, which I found creepy but I did the exact same thing. I guess it's only creepy when you're the watched not the watcher.

After my talk with Chelsea, I wasn't ok at all. So I went downstairs, made myself a nice creamy cup of coffee and went back upstairs. I pulled an ottoman on Don's side of the bed and just watched him sleeping. You would never think he's that rude, aggro, big headed, gun slinging outlaw when he's snoring that softly! He had a few beads of sweat on his forehead which I dared not wipe off because they looked like they belonged. The green 'tear' under his eye looked like a small raindrop - beautiful and belonging. The scars on his face made me remember that I've actually never asked what happened. Like who carved his face like this? In summary, he looked like a fallen angel. Not fallen in the Lucifer kind of way but more like an angel who went to battle, got wounded, broke his wings and got lost in the forest. That kind of fallen.

When my coffee was done, I put the cup on the floor and slept on the far end of the bed. Yes, after the long night and the horror movie I starred in against my will, I deserved booty rubs and cuddles but contrary to popular belief, I'm not selfish.

As soon as I dozed off, I was woken up by groaning. I'm sure it wasn't that bad but because I had just fallen asleep, it sounded like an animal in the jungle ready to charge. Needless to say, I didn't sleep a wink. Don was in pain and wanted to tear the bandages off. That disturbed the wound so I had to clean it, dry it, Betadine it and bandage it again. I'm passing this nursing internship with flying colours.

I gave him pain pills but first he wouldn't take them, then he wanted more than the dosage, then we finally got on the same page and he took what I was giving him. Then the stupid pills took forever to kick in. And even when they eventually did, he still felt a lot of pain. It was taking everything in me not to cry. His pain was written in green veins on his face. Poor baby.

When Caleb said Don would act impossible, I thought he was just saying. Least did I know it was an understatement! He wanted alcohol at 3 am to shut down the pain. Fair enough, I gave him that. Then he wanted to pour it over his arm when the doctor explicitly said not to do so! We fought over the bottle and I'm ashamed that a wounded person would be that much stronger than able bodied me. I still won! If we can call soaking the bed with a bottle of Johnnie Walker winning. Then he made me roll a joint of weed. It looks easy but fixing it first then rolling it needs skill. I did a terrible job at it.

Then he wanted to get up and go find whoever shot him! At that time, with one hand and in that much pain! The things people do when they get high! As he smoked and drank some more, he became drowsy and wasn't making much sense anymore. It was fine when he was talking about how bad gang violence is and that it could only get worse because a few known

gangbangers were set to be released from prison in the next week. He went on and on about how prison is bad because all it does is give these guys a chance to plot their revenge once on the outside.

"Lotus never shoot a person and leave them alive. Aim for the head and kill or else you'll have a hungry enemy on your heels everyday".

Such advice though. I'll never use it.

"But what fuels gang violence? Can't you all live in peace?". Like political parties so. They don't like each other and they fight for power but we don't see them doing drive bys and killing each other in cold blood.

"The shebeens here are causing me headaches. Our rivals want control over the ones at the edge because they claim it's on their turf. I keep telling my brothers that we should just give them to them. It's not like we make much money from them, our money is made fair and clean in Longstreet! But no, the pack is greedy. They think giving away our stuff is weakness. How can they not see that avoiding a war is strength? I don't want a war. Innocent people die when we fight. A few shebeens are not worth the lives of hundreds".

I think he was talking alone. At first I thought he was telling me but his body language was clear that he was barely aware that I was there.

"Then you'll see these stupid cars when they come out of prisons! They'll be here on our streets tracing their ex girlfriends. Why these dom girls on our turf, under our protection, will go and date a rivalry makes no sense. We can't force them to date within the turf because they don't run with us but when their boys come here looking for them after break ups, opening fire unnecessarily and hurting people, who gets blamed by the community? Me. Us. I take the fall every single time and I have to take care of those families".

Listening to him, I wished I could do something about it. Stop all the violence, confiscate all the guns and speak peace over the land. I wished he could keep talking but I guess those extra sips of neat whiskey did stuff to his brain.

He now wanted his mother! No kidding. He had a tear running down the side of his eye. His mother is dead and it was quite chilling listening to him beg her not to leave him. I don't know the story there, I just know that she died. As I sat there holding his good hand, he turned to me and said "Mummy? Is that you? It's me, it's Lemon. It's your little Lemon. Don't leave me". Mummy? Lemon? None black people and their pet names! Who calls their child Lemon? I wish I knew what happened to his mother but that wasn't the time to ask.

At that point I gave up any hope of sleeping. I kept checking his arm for colour changes or bleeding but apart from some swelling, nothing was out of the ordinary. Ordinary being the state the doctor left him in. Occasionally, I would feel his forehead with the back of my hand and he was heating up and sweating but he looked fine. And boy was he talking! Mostly to people I don't know. He was saying he's sorry to his dad and that he was doing his best but people are too hungry for blood to listen to him.

"I want an energy drink", he said in between hallucinations.

I wasn't sure if he was talking to me or his mother or what.

"There isn't any in the house", I wiped his brow with a cold towel.

"Then go and get me one!", he meant to snap but his croaky voice wouldn't let him.

"At this time? I can't go out alone!", I tried to reason with him. He told me how it was unsafe to walk outside especially at night because the 'guardians' sometimes shoot first and ask questions later.

"Why not? Go and get it now".

"Because it's not safe Don!".

"Take my gun with you. You'll be safe", he insisted.

"No I'm not doing that! Are you crazy?".

"Fine, then get out of my way. I'll go and get it myself!".

Then another squabble between me and him began. I was tempted to pick the empty whiskey bottle off the floor and hit him on the head so he could pass out! I lost this one. He really wanted that energy drink hey! I had to call Caleb, at 5 am, asking him to go and buy energy drinks.

And we are here now, I'm still waiting for him to come. I can't take this anymore. I'm glad he has his own keys to Don's house because I don't think I can leave his bedside when he's like this. He'll roll off and permanently damage that arm and how will I get my strong holds and booty grabs? Not a chance I'm willing to take.

"I'm sorry Candice. I didn't know", he says, looking at me.

I blink blink and think I'm the one hallucinating now. Did he just call me ...?

"Candice. I'm so sorry", he says.

So I'm not imagining things? He called me Candice!

How is he so stuck up on her though? He was how old again? 12? 14? That's like what? 14 - 16 years ago? What did he know about love at that age? Or is it the guilt of killing her that's haunting him? Although he didn't kill her if we are being honest, they did and they turned him into a stone cold guy in the process. First his mother, now Candice! Is he seeing dead people? I should stop losing weight, maybe I'm disappearing.

"Candice", he says for the third time and I don't know if I'm too Christian or what, but I think this is the right count to deny being Candice. Get it? Peter, three times, denying? You know how it goes.

"Baby, it's me. It's Lotus", that's what I voice out but I'm frustrated in my head and I want to yell at him. "Yes, Lotus, that's her name. She's my girl now. I'm sorry".

Blink blink blink!

Far fetched but what if he's seeing a ghost for real and now he's asking for permission from her to love me? Yhooo! I look behind me nje just in case there's someone there, you know. We don't play with such things. Ghosts are real and they like trouble.

"I didn't mean to kill him. It was an accident", he says. Oh dear Lazarus! Please tell the rich man to send me a jet to get me out of here and I'll give him 2 L of water in return. I can't sit here and listen to endless sorries! Please tell me he won't go asking for forgiveness from the people he's killed! I think it's quite a long list and I have no energy left in me to sit here and listen to that. It's deeply unsettling.

"Sleep Donovan! Get to sleep already!", I snap at him.

"Lower your voice! You're making me sick", he says.

"Oh wow! Just sleep. I'm tired".

"Then get the fxck out of my house!", he says.

Ja ne! We're getting into another altercation when there's a knock on the bedroom door. I jump at first because - ghosts - but then quickly remember - Caleb. I've never been so pleased to see Caleb all my dating life!

"How is he?", he asks when I let the hug go.

"Being an asshole!".

"I can hear you angel", Don says and I feel a bit bad.

"Have you slept?", Caleb looks at me.

"Not one bit. We've been back and forth all night. He's a handful this one!".

"Khethile khethile", Caleb says in correct pronunciation.

OMG! How did he even know that phrase and how did he pronounce it so perfectly? Don't tell me he knows Xhosa/Zulu/Swati anything Nguni! I sometimes swear at them in Xhosa in their faces! Yhoh!

"Go and get some rest. I'll stay with him", he says.

"Be gentle with him. He's in pain", I may be upset with him but I care.

Caleb looks at me with a look I can't read. A good look though. I take that as my cue to leave. I need sleep.

The nightmares! You know that dream within a dream? Where something terrible is happening and you force yourself to 'wake up' only to find out that you weren't 'dreaming' but it was really happening except it's just another dream but it feels so real?

"Lotus. Wake up".

I wake up kicking and ready to fight. That was scary as hell.

"Caleb?".

"You were screaming. Are you ok?".

Of course I'm not ok you dummy! You said it yourself, I was screaming! I dreamt of people running after me and trying to shoot me!

"I'm good. Just a little nightmare...what time is it?".

"Past 8...Get some rest. I'll come back and check on you guys later", he covers me up, just the way I always imagined my father would cover me up after reading me a bedtime story.

"Wait...How's he doing?".

"He's asleep now. I'll have the doctor come later today and check up on him. He'll be fine, be patient", he says.

"Alright then".

"Caleb wait...can I ask you something?".

He turns around.

"Is Don still in love with Candice?".

He raises an eyebrow and I find myself explaining how Don went on and on and on about his first love. Sigh. He comes back and sits on the bed.

"Don was young and Candice was never supposed to die. You never forget the first person you killed you know! Yes he had killed at initiation but that's different. His first true kill was Candice and it never leaves your mind. He loved her yes, like we all loved our childhood sweethearts. So to know she died because of you, that kind of guilt never goes away", he says.

"You're not a replacement for Candice. He truly loves you. He's in that bed right now because he did something big for you at the expense of his own life".

I hate feeling indebted to someone but yes I get it.

"Did you also have a Candice?", I cross the line but whatever.

"I did. It's a path we all go through so we can learn how not to love. It's a good lesson because love complicates everything. But I promise you, no one is ever prepared for that amount of pain and guilt", he says.

"So I have nothing to worry about? I'm not competing with a ghost?"

This is getting deep and dark, I don't want it to continue.

"You have to understand Alpha. He is tough, no doubt about it but he's letting you in, one thing I never thought I'd live to see. You're melting the icebox around his heart".

I don't know why that sounded sweet. Like I have superpowers or something cool like that.

"Now get some rest his skat. I need to find the idiot who pulled the trigger. So stupid! We can't afford a war amongst ourselves. We stand undefeated because there's strength in numbers, now someone goes and does this! There'll be no stopping Alpha after this. He'll do everything to remind the pack who's the leader", he says.

"Is it because of me?", even stupid questions must be asked sometimes.

"Yes. There's a good reason we kill our hearts never to love again. Because with love comes irrational decisions like the stunts he pulled in Pollsmoor! How do you think the pack feels knowing that their alpha gave away a taxi route and allowed another gang to walk as they please through our turf? All for a woman? He named the club after this same woman and has us stealing cars for this woman! Everything he does lately is for this woman! Most see it as weakness and that's not a trait of a leader. So ya, Alpha has a lot of proving himself to the pack to do or we might have a funeral very soon".

Hold up, back up a bit, "Stealing cars for this woman? What cars? And whose funeral?"

"That's not the point. The point is, I love what you have with Alpha. I've known him since we were kids and my loyalty to him runs bone deep. But it's not everyone who feels the same way. All others see is weakness".

"Why does Hilton hate me?", I want to ask something but let him answer this first.

"He doesn't hate you. He loves Alpha".

That doesn't make sense! But let me ask my question quickly.

"What if Hilton shot him?"

He looks at me like this time I've really crossed the line.

"Don't be planting such ideas in Alpha's mind ok? Hilton is not a coward. If he wants to kill you, he tells you first so you can have a fair death!"

How noble! Roll my eyes. I nod though. My lips are sealed. It's just, Chelsea suggested it might be Hilton.

"But in the 0.01% chance that it's Hilton. It would be a shame to watch Alpha pick between his cousin and his girlfriend. We both know who he will pick but it would be fun to watch".
We do? Who would he pick?

"But...", I want answers.

"I wish I could stay but I really have to run. So much is at stake Lotus. I need to calm the situation before it gets out of control if it's not too late anyway", he says.

He leaves the door open so I can hear Alpha from the other room if he calls for me.

The chat with Caleb has left me guilty and scared. He's usually nice but I kinda felt like he was a little annoyed by me today. It could be just my imagination or Don could have irritated him too.

And what was that about stealing cars for me?

Sleep take me please.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

I am the wolf, the beast you always fear. You hear my howls but you don't see my tears...

It's Friday and my birthday is next Friday. Seven days away. I'm not happy at all because no substantial plans have been made. That just sucks because I had big plans for my birthday before I met Don. I was going to rise and be the best version of myself. I was going to leave the past behind and be reborn into my new year as a clean soul. This new chapter was going to be the best yet. Obviously my plans included a night of dancing at Club Lotus with Chelsea. And I knew my mother would send me money so I would use it to buy champagne and pop it. I still want to see those dreams of mine come true but I've been so busy dealing with Don that I haven't had time to myself. I'm not complaining at all. Taking care of him has brought us closer and he has shared even more darker secrets about his world that should have sent me packing.

But since I'm here, I might as well live here. Don said I must write down what I want for my birthday. He likes making me write things down, I don't know why. I'm done now and I'm scared to show him the 'plan'. I want an over the top, totally glam party. Kim Kay style so. I've always admired those rich parties on yachts and I get to live my dream now. Dating a Clyde comes with its perks. Watch me next Friday, I'm going to put the extra before vagant! I still need to get my dress made plus go shoe shopping with Chelsea and that hair I put on my first list, Don said I'll get it tomorrow. Chelsea okayed my party plan and added a few things here and there so we all green lights. We found a party planner with a good profile on Instagram and great reviews so he'll do I guess. I left him a message but he's yet to respond. Fingers crossed. All we need now is Madonadona and his envelopes to say yes.

So the plan is, I'll have my private party from 7 till 11 pm. Have a classy party with well dressed people. Have food and champagne, you know how it goes in the movies. Then we pretend like the party is over so Chelsea's parents and other adults can leave. Then after that we open the club to the public and unleash the freaks. Get drunk and wasted and dance till we drop. KuzobaLIT!

I haven't even spoken to Don but I've invited everyone and confirmed the deets. Pray for me.

So here's my wishlist. Very short and simple:

Venue: Club Lotus

Theme: Black tie attire

Time: 6:30 for 7 pm

Cake: Red velvet, coated in white chocolate, shaped like a lotus

Decor: White flowers, beautiful chandeliers and garlands.

Entrance rules: Dressed accordingly. Must have a gift (gifts in the form of cash only). Must have RSVPed

Must haves:

Professional photographer

Serve champagne from the ceiling

Bouncers at the door

Topless waiters at the afterparty

Live band to sing happy birthday to me

Far fetched wishes:

My mother and grandmother to be there

My father to miraculously make a grand entrance

Dalu to forget that it's my birthday and not surprise me in any way

Hulk to fall sick so he doesn't bump into Caleb. (Although it will be fun to watch Chelsea sitting with Hulk but dying for Caleb).

"Don, baby, can we talk?", all smiles and puppy eyes.

"Sure, I'm heading out in a second. What's up?"

"My birthday, can I discuss it with you?"

"I don't have time right now skat, later?"

"No Don! I have a week left. I still need to get the cake made, get a planner, get my dress made so no I don't have later!"

"What's needed from me my angel?", he sounds a little annoyed.

"Money".

"How much?"

"I don't know, a lot".

"Ok, why don't you figure that out then have this discussion with me when you now know?"

Mxm. Stupid boy! Just give me a million and shut up.

"Ok ke sharp. Let me do that".

He goes back to his phone and types something then makes a call. I know I need R75000 or more but it's crazy even thinking that amount. I don't even make that in a year so to ask for it from someone's son just like that? Chelsea says it's nothing to a gang leader but I just can't. I need to fast for 40 days and 40 nights for the strength to pronounce all those zeros.

"You have to drive me. Caleb needs to go somewhere", he says as he hangs up.

"Where are we going to?". Now I need to dress up to go out. I hate unprofessional people.

Have a plan for your day man.

"To meet a friend".

"Where?". I'll just put on a sweater. These leggings will have to do.

"Somewhere".

He has this attitude that I can never understand. Will he die if he tells me where we're going?

But ke my energy levels are low today so I'm not doing this back and forth him.

"Hurry up. Time".

I laugh to myself and choose to let it go. The devil is a liar. I shall not kill anyone on this day the Lord has made.

Hurry up to me? As if I knew we had to go somewhere in the first place! He had plans with Caleb that didn't involve me and now I'm not wearing my trainers fast enough? Isso kay.

I need +R75 000 so I have to play nice here otherwise I'll end up popping JC le Roux on my birthday. I smile at him, isn't they say kill them with your smile.

"Masambe (Let's go)", I leave the room before him and run down the steps. Some of us have both arms so we can run without fear of falling and being paralyzed. I watch him from the bottom as he makes his way down. He's recovering pretty well shame. I think I'll add self-made Doctor on my CV. He still can't use his arm and he has it in a sling but he's no longer being a cry baby at least. I'm still playing nurse Jackie and I haven't gone to my place since that day. Chelsea has given up. I don't get that girl sometimes. How can I say I love someone then abandon them when they need me the most? Oh and Chelsea asked that we move our therapy session to next week because she's not ready so yesterday didn't happen.

I think I'm going to get fired on Monday. Dr Dirk called earlier and yelled at me. He said I'm not serious. I kinda hung up on him and flight moded. He can go and jump off a cliff for all I care. Who does he think he is!

"Start the car Lotus. Time", he says.

I reach over and put on his seat belt, give him a kiss on the cheek and start the car.

"Drive!", he snaps.

I got distracted there thinking of how to bring up my birthday. I might as well just ask because I need this birthday bad. But eeish cold feet. I drive out but all the way I'm thinking I really have to ask. Time is something I don't have.

"Don, you know I never ask you for much. I wouldn't ask if...".

"Just ask Lotus".

Double eye roll!

"Fine! I need R70 something thousand". I focus on the road and hold on tight to the steering wheel with both hands.

"Sure. The friend we're going to see will transfer it to your account. He owes me for a job".

I almost swerve off the road. Just like that? You mean to tell me I could have asked for these kinds of moneys and have been given and there I was asking for R50 to buy airtime?

"Thank you, oh my word thank you. Fxck, thank you! Wow baby!".

I could hug him right now, twerk on him, do whatever he wants. Too bad I'm driving.

"Remind me about your car later today. I might need to get it myself. The guy I sent failed.

Bloody doos! How hard can getting a car be?".

Very I think?

"Ummm, what? Where exactly are you getting this car from?". I know what Caleb said but I haven't had a chance to address it.

"From the lady. You said you wanted that specific car!"

I slam the brakes so hard, thankfully it's a taxi behind us so it swerves and I'm served insults I'm sure.

"Are you crazy? You going to gift me a stolen car? Uphambene? (are you insane?)". What an insult! Chelsea will have the laugh of her life.

"Of course not stolen! I'll give her some money for it and gently remind her not to go around lying. If she plays nice, I'll play nice", he says.

I look at him and he looks back at me innocently. So he will go up to my lecturer and say

"Hey Ma'am. My girlfriend wants a car so hand over the keys. Here's R30000, go and deposit another one".

"You said you want that car! I'm getting you that car? What's the problem?", all innocent.

"What's the problem? Are you seriously asking me that right now? I want a brand new car dammit, not a stolen one!".

"Then why did you complicate all this? You should have just said so! You would have your car by now!".

Is he yelling at me right now? Wow! Lord come back quickly before I'm a murderer and end up missing heaven! Whoo shame, I can not. I feel like driving this car off the road and into those trees.

"Drive...My guy is leaving for Joburg in a few hours and this meeting is critical!".
Breathe Lotus, don't kill him, just breathe.

The road signs say NEWLANDS. Who would have guessed that Don also has friends in this side of town? He never ceases to shock me.

As I drive in, through that high gate, down that long driveway with its trees that went to a private school and park behind a black Jeep, I realise I need to reevaluate my goals. This is the life I want. I want such a big house with a big ass garage and fancy cars and those trees. I don't know if it's envy or jealousy that I'm feeling right now but it's one of the two. I want to live here.

I'd consoled myself by thinking 'Obviously it's white people living here' so you can imagine my surprise when a black guy walks out of the door and towards us. And no he can't be the garden boy, looking like that. He obviously owns this place and I wouldn't be surprised if he bought it cash. You can just tell when someone is seriously monied. Ok I think I'm staring. I know I'm with my boyfriend here but yhoo this brothers has that thing man. He's a panty dropper, relationship breaker, slay queen maker, all in one. He's very dark though, like dark dark. But Kwesta said 'the darker the berry the sweeter the juice' so can he give me some juice? Don't you dare judge me but if I wasn't with Don, this would be my target. I would be flirting with him strong right here right now.

"Lemon, 'sup", he bro hugs Don.

Lemon? Where do I know that name from?

"Lotus right?", he smiles my way and I feel my febaring (whoring) demon waking up. He gives me a hug and he squeezes me a bit. I want to die. He smells like a mistake that I'd love to repeat over and over again. I hug him back as he lets go, for that extra 3 seconds. I know there are good kissers but I've discovered a new category- Good Huggers. I need to get it together I know. This is wrong on so many levels.

He called me by name. Of course he knows me! I've long stopped being shocked by people knowing my name. Don dated me before I knew him so all his people know me, about me at least.

"Thought you weren't coming anymore. I been waiting man", black guy says. He has this rich west African accent, I don't think it's Nigerian though but it closely resembles it. I'm not very good with Geography and guessing people's nationalities so I'll let it go. But let's just say I think I just met the 'tall, dark and irresistible' that the novels write about. You know that 'dark chocolate I wanna lick up, suck on and keep in my mouth' type. I need help. This is my boyfriend's friend and my boyfriend kills people for a living!

The interior! People are living out here and we are still wishing out there. What do you do with so much space in a house though? We make it to the living room and there's a toy car on the table over there and another one on the floor. I'm looking around at the portraits on the wall and wondering if it's a must to have these pictures of kids wearing school uniforms in houses. Every house I've been too has them. Even my grandmother has a picture of me in my high school uniform in the sitting room.

"Skat, think you can give us a minute?", Don dismisses me. Oh wow! Where should I go to in a stranger's house? To his bedroom and wait for him naked on his bed? Please!

"What?", I ask because I can't just get up and walk. Where will I walk to?

"Where's your goose? Maybe they can hang out while we praat (talk)?"

"She's at work. She's hating every second of it but she has to work", he says it with a smile and I can tell that the idea of his 'goose' working is amusing to him. I hope Don smiles like that when he talks about me.

"I'll wait in the car. I'll plan my party so long". I come to their rescue and throw in the party as a reminder to get me the money.

"Oh yes. Dude, I need you to give her R80K for her party and we need to buy her a car urgently as a gift for her birthday".

"You've been letting your girl walk this whole time?...Sorry Lotus, I'll make sure he gets you the car you deserve and in time for your birthday", why does his voice sound so sexual? I need to get out of here and go and pray.

"And get me your banking details, please". So polite! I need to get out of here now.

"Baby, I'll forward them to you". I lean in and kiss Don full on the lips just so this guy can know that I'm taken, not that he asked but prevention is better than cure andithi? Don looks shocked, he wasn't expecting that I'm sure. He's not one to wear his heart on his sleeve and appear all lovey dovey in front of people.

I shouldn't have worn these leggings. They make my ass pop and I can bet R250 that that guy is staring at my ass right now. I can feel him. Ok I need to pray urgently, my thoughts are getting out of control.

Banking details forwarded, Chelsea updated and she called me a whore for drooling over the black guy. She's one to talk. I know it's wrong but I kinda went around and took a selfie by the pool and put it on Insta with a 'Home on a Friday' caption. These people have a servants' quarters bigger than most houses I know.

Back to party planning since now I have the funds. That party planner responded with a R8000 quote just for his services! Yho! I chose the wrong career shame. Someone can make R8000 in one go and I make R5000 in a month. Life is not fair. I tell him I have R6000 and he says 'It's ok darling. DM when you get the other R2000. I'll make your party one to remember. Sue me if I don't!'. I like him already. He's got soul and the kind of confidence I admire in people. I respond with a 'R8000 it is *shaking hands emojis*. Can we meet tomorrow at 12 noon?'

'Cavendish, 12 noon, tomorrow. See you there doll *pink heart with a ribbon*'

I can see why it's easy for him to trust me. If you go through my Insta you'll think I sleep on top of money and drink champagne for breakfast!

After an hour or over, they come out and I get out to say bye. I didn't have to I think but well, this guy has a magnetic effect. We say byes and they say byes. I invite him and his 'goose' to the party and he says they'll come.

"My baby will be thrilled. She acts like she doesn't but she really loves these parties", he says. Ncooow, I hope Don is taking notes.

"She sounds fun. Can't wait to meet her".

"She's amazing. You can not not love her", he says.

Oh mann! Such a decent guy who loves his girlfriend.

"I'll send the details to Don after I'm done with my invitation video then he'll forward it to you".

He says cool.

"I'll do a transfer just now, before I leave", he says with that accent.

"Thanks. I need it to reflect before tomorrow noon, please".

"No worries. I only do instant transfers".

I don't know if he's bragging or what.

We're back home and Don is ready to go out again. I'm not sure it's a good idea. He just took his meds and he needs to rest.

"The more I lie dormant, the more they think they can overthrow me. They need to see me to know that I'm not down".

"But baby...".

"They found the guy who shot me. So the whole pack is waiting. I have to go".

I feel a chill run up and down my spine. That's not good news.

"Is he one of your brothers?".

"Yes".

"What will you do to him?".

I'm scared of the answer.

"Ask him a few questions then do what needs to be done. He shot at me, his own brother. We can't have enemies within the pack".

"So you'll kill him?".

"He made his choice when he pulled that trigger".

"Spare him Donovan. Please don't kill him", I think I'm gonna cry. He looks up at me and I swear that's despair I see in his eyes.

"I have to. They are watching me and even those on my side are losing faith in me. I need to restore that or I may as well commit suicide. I'm an alpha and it comes with expectations. It is what it is angel, always been".

"So you'll kill a man in cold blood? Look him in the eye and kill him?", my heart can't take this.

"The price of betrayal is death. I don't make the rules but I abide by them".

"But baby...".

"Don't make me regret telling you this Lotus. Gees! Go play Mother Teresa elsewhere!

Would you rather he killed me? I must be a reverend now and forgive him? Look weak in front of the boys just to please you? What do you think he'll do after I let him go? You think he'll believe I truly forgave him and let it go? Come on now, use your brain!".

Oh wow! I have no come back. Let me take my brain and go and chill downstairs. I think I want to go to my place. I'm not sure how I'm going to feel spending tonight with him, knowing very well he killed someone.

Caleb comes and takes him and I'm left alone with my thoughts. Why can't I have the Newlands life not this. This is too intense and I was never mentally prepared for it. I wonder how a refined guy like that is friends with Don. Not that I'm judging my boyfriend but I felt like they're worlds apart and I don't get what business they could possibly be doing together.

Let me forget all this and chat to my party planner about my birthday.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

No gangster is ever happy when he's at peace. The main reason he's in the business is to eliminate his enemies

Don is still not back and it's getting dark outside. I've been restless all day, praying for him and hoping all goes well where he went to - whatever 'goes well' means in his world. I get knots in my stomach every time I think of what he's doing. I know he's a killer, a GOAT at it but I don't think I'll ever applaud him for it. Death really scares me. I know it scares everyone but take the amount it scares you and multiply it by 10 and you'll get my fear factor. His phone is not going through and I can't sit like this all night. There's car keys downstairs and cars in the garage, surely Don won't mind me borrowing one. I can't wait to catch up with Chelsea.

There's a USB stick on and I press play so I can have some music to keep me company. Maino comes on and at first I judge my boyfriend's choice of music until the lyrics hit me hard. I can almost hear Don's voice through Maino's as he says:

"Is there a Heaven for a G?
A place where the criminals and drug dealers meet?
Please anybody will you tell me what you know?
Cause after they die where do gun slingers go?
Visions of a Heaven got me picturing the cloud
Now I don't even know if any crooks are allowed
Did a lot of dirt, did a lot of things foul
So do I got the right to still say I'm God's child?.....
Do you got a place for a crack dealing kingpin?
Tell me, is it Heaven for a G?
If it is, please save a spot for me!"

I wonder how he feels when he listens to these songs. I know he loves Tupac a lot because he says he relates but I had no idea the lyrics go this deep, damn.

Chelsea is almost ready by the time I get home. She thinks it's better if we leave Don's car at home and take hers in case he doesn't want it in Longstreet. Clever girl. Imagine his enemies spot the car and shoot and I die for nothing. I know I'm holy but when I grow up I don't want to be a martyr by association.

We pull up in Longstreet and park right outside the club like the bosses we are!
We now have permanent VIP status in Club Lotus. We order a bottle of Veuve Clicquot and cocktails. "Get us wings and sweet potato fries please", I add to the order. I remember I once made Don drive all the way here for this meal. That was fun. I'm trying my best to act normal and to enjoy being here but it's hard. I keep checking my phone for messages and trying Don's number but voicemail still. I hope nothing happened to him. I'm anxious.

I never used to get the hype about the VIP section in clubs. I mean, I've been to a lot of clubs and unless we talking top notch upper echelon clubs, VIP is a joke. All they do is make you walk up two steps, sit you on a white couch and separate you from the 'general public' with a red rope and yippee you're VIP, now buy a R2000 bottle! I still don't quite get it but I love the fact that we have a secluded corner couch in a dim section, away from the pov. We can see them but they can't see us. Perks of being a VVIP. I'm drinking but not that much because my mind is not all here. I hope Don is fine. What if he got killed? What if someone tipped off the police or worse the national army and they descended on the wolves and murdered them all? My mind went too dark too fast. That thought alone makes me reach for my glass and drink up. I need to relax and right now only alcohol can help ease my anxiety. Chelsea is pouring it down but again, she handles it better than me so let her be a fish all she wants.

"I'm going to the bathroom. Be right back", she says. I stay guard. Forget spiking, people steal drinks in clubs if you didn't know.

I try Don again but nothing still. I'm getting really worried now. He could be dead. Let me drink up.

"Babes, look who I bumped into!", Chelsea says, happier than thou. She is with three guys we were friends with in university. These guys knew how to party up a storm and Chelsea had a fling with one of them. I get up and hug them one by one with an exaggerated "Oh my gosh, it's been a minute. I missed you boys so much". Yea yea, I missed you so much I had your numbers but never bothered to reach out.

"What are you drinking? Whatever you want, order up", Chelsea says to them as they get comfortable with us. "Who's paying?" the one guy asks. Clever guy. You know what you order depends on who's paying right? If I'm paying I'll order a Long Island because it's cheap and alcohol packed so I'll get drunk quick but if someone else is paying, I'll order champagne darling and other expensive things. That's just the way it is.

"Lotus owns this club! It's called Club Lotus after her", Chelsea says and I just smile wondering why she would say that.

"For reals? No way! Nah, can't be", they laugh. I'm offended. So they think I can't afford to own a club? Yes I can't afford it but is it necessary to laugh at me?

"For reals. Watch". She calls a waiter passing by.

"Who is this?", she points at me.

"Lotus?", the guy says obviously confused. He knows me, I'm a regular and he's worked here a while. Plus Don told all of them to give me royal treatment whenever I come around, so he knows me.

"Yes but who is she in this club?"

"The madam?", he says, confused AF.

"Yep! I told you. Now order up. We don't pay here. It's Lotus' club".

Hehehe these boys were holding Castle light dumpies now they want Hennessey? But it's a Friday baby and since I'm so blessed let me bless others.

It's getting nice and the drinks are flowing and I've even forgotten about checking up on Don.

"I got something nice here", the one guy takes out a small packet with a white powder. Ok so I've never done drugs before, not even weed, but I know drugs when I see them. I say no but peer pressure gets the better of me and I take the straw, do what I saw the others do and snort a line. Oh no, I don't think that's how it should feel like. My nose is on fire. I get up to breathe

better and there is Caleb standing on the other side of the 'rope' watching us like a hawk. I'm sneezing and rubbing my nose at the same time trying not to be too obvious.

"What the hell is this?", Caleb is here now. He jumped over that rope and graduated from POVO to VIP. Shock all around. I feel myself sober up a bit.

"Please don't tell Don", I whisper my thoughts.

"Lotus, party time is over. Let's go", he says.

"What? Fxck no. Who do you think you are? Bossing her around like that?", Chelsea happens.

"Lotus, now!", Caleb ignores her.

"You know Caleb you're cute and all but playing a lap dog to Donavan really looks bad on you. Grow a pair man!", she says.

"Listen, I don't know how you talk to your little boyfriend but don't you dare think you can talk to me like that. Now it will help you to shut your mouth and get up so Lotus can pass". I've never heard Caleb this serious before. He usually smiles and takes things easy.

"Oh hell no! No one tells me what to say and what not to say. Who exactly do you think you are? Leave us alone party pooper!". Ok Chelsea is really drunk and she'll regret this because she kinda really likes Caleb.

"Boys, get lost right now"...the guys scurry away and make sure they take their alcohol with them. The loyalty to alcohol in this country is commendable. Now it's just me and Chelsea.

"Lotus, do you want me to call Alpha and tell him what you're up to here?", he's not smiling. I shake my head no.

"I don't do drugs Caleb. This was the first and last time".

"I believe you. Let me take you home", he says, much nicer this time.

"Leave her alone! You're taking her nowhere!", Chelsea yells.

"Shut up woman... Lotus?", he's looking at me and although it's not day bright I can see him.

"Let's go Chels. It's getting late and we've had our fun". I feel terrible about trying the drugs. I let myself down.

I reason with her and she eventually says fine and takes the champagne and we leave.

We sit in the back seat of Caleb's car and my nerves are killing me. It's too late by the time I realise that home is Cape Flats.

Don meets us by the door and Chelsea looks mad but I look sheepish.

"Bru?", Don looks shocked to see us.

"I found her at the club", Caleb says.

"You should have left her. She deserves time out with her friends. There was no need to bring her here", he says.

"She was doing snow white my bru".

My heart drops. Such a snitch! Like was that necessary? I see Don's eyes narrow before I drop my gaze. Oh man.

"Sure. Dankie for bringing her".

Caleb does the hand salute and Don does it back.

"You coming?", Caleb says to Chelsea before walking away. She looks at me and I nod my go ahead. I don't want to deal with Don with her around.

As soon as the door closes, his face changes to a shade of angry I haven't encountered yet.

"Was Caleb telling the truth?".

I look up at him and since I can't exactly deny it, I resort to silence. That Judas Iscariot Caleb! He walks to the kitchen and I follow.

He's leaning against the counter and I wish I wasn't so close to him.

"I don't ever want you near drugs Lotus, you hear me? Ever!", he says sternly. "Don't raise your voice at me", I'm tipsy so I'm brave.

"I'm not playing with you right now. Drugs? Cocaine? I know I dragged you into this life but drugs Lotus? Seriously?", he yells.

"It was only once bethuna! And it didn't even feel good! I sneezed the whole time and felt like I was suffocating! I'd never do it again".

"That's because you did it wrong! What if you try again and you like it? What if you end up a junkie?". He grabs me by the shoulders and looks me straight in the eye. Alcohol reasoning takes over.

"Oh, so it's ok when you sell drugs and make other people junkies?".

"Now that's a low blow", he says, loosening his hold.

"I'm sorry baby, I didn't mean it that way". I'm embarrassed that I even said that. He turns away from me and holds on to the counter.

"I'm sorry Don. I didn't mean it". I hug him from behind and keep assuring him that it will never happen again.

"But promise me angel, you'll stay far away from that stuff. If you ever feel the urge or feel like having a good time, promise me that you'll come to me. We can smoke some weed together. At least that's harmless". I nod my head. I've never smoked weed all my life and it was my first time snorting coke.

"Come, let me teach you how to roll a joint", he says eventually. Phew! That almost went sideways. Like the good sheep that I am, I follow to the side of the counter where their apparatus are still scattered. He's been smoking a lot lately because of his arm. He says it doesn't hurt much anymore. He takes the white papers which if I didn't know any better I'd think they were sticky notes, just thinner. He spreads some weed on there and I watch carefully, taking mental notes.

"See? Easy. Now you roll it like so..... Then seal it here like this and here..... Then you light it up..... Then hold it like this and you smoke... see?", he exhales the smoke through his nose before passing it to me.

He takes my hand and leads me to the couch and I sit with my legs draped on his thighs as we pass that joint between us. I don't feel anything, it's like I'm wasting my time but I keep smoking anyway just to humour him.

"How do you feel?".

"I'm good. Really good!".

I feel somewhere between drowsy and weightless, like I'm about to take off and float away. I'm starting to laugh more. Everything he's doing looks funny. The tattoos on his arm look funny. He gets up to relight that stub and the way he stood up is so funny it has me in stitches. When he sits back down, close to me, I won't stop laughing, I can't. I squint my eyes and look at his face. The blue of his eyes looks green and it's like I'm in a staring contest with a cat. When he says something, I roll over laughing my ass off. His voice sounds animated and I try to imitate his accent.

“You so high!”, he flashes me his gold tooth.

“No I'm not. I'm good. I just feel ummm... emmm. You're high. Are you high?”, I start laughing again.

I can't tell him I'm horny. I don't know the right word to use without sounding like a slut. It's been a while and with his arm sore we haven't done anything.

“Here, take a puff and blow that smoke in my mouth”, he says. I draw in a long inhale and lean towards him and blow the smoke into his open mouth. I giggle when he says “Do it again”.

We take turns filling each other's faces with smoke till the stub runs out. He throws it onto the counter with perfect aim and leans over. He blows the smoke into my mouth and I feel his hand riding up my thigh. His mouth doesn't leave mine. His tongue slides into my mouth and the feeling is intense, like I'm kissing him for the very first time. He kisses me some more, slowly, savouring my lips, his mouth doing magic to mine. Then he moves his lips down, tracing a wet line down my jaw down down to my neck. He pauses there, smooching and kissing as his hand tries to work on my top. I help him there and I pull it over my head. He pushes me back gently, my back resting on the cushions. He goes back in, down this time, nibbling my nipples over the lacy bra. He takes his time as my nipples strain through the thin material, begging to be released.

I let out a moan, every sensation is heightened and I want him right here right now. His hand has strayed all the way into my panties and I spread my thighs as his finger finds its way in. I undo my bra and throw it off, giving him full access to my breasts. He looks up at me with a naughty grin, biting his lower lip in that sexy way before taking a nipple in his mouth. He sucks a bit hard and oh so good. Shit he knows what that does to me.

My head feels light and the sensations are out of this world. I want this to last forever and a day. He gets off, kneels on the floor and repositions me. Then he goes down, kissing my stomach and tracing his way down with his tongue. He unbuttons my skirt and grabs both it and my panties and yanks them down. Did he just use his sore hand as well? Wow! I have healing powers.

“Open your legs for me”, he says and it's like the legs are obedient cause they move apart on their own.

"Wait baby". I try to stop him. I'm thinking I must run up to the bathroom and freshen up.

"What?". I laugh at the way he said that and throw my head back.

He slides his hands under me and grabs my ass, pulling me towards his face and his tongue goes to work. He's sucking, he's licking, he's tasting, he's eating me up like I'm his last supper. In a heartbeat, I feel my orgasm building up. All my feelings gathering up and colliding, threatening to explode like a volcano. Must be that accursed plant I smoked.

“Oh yess.... Right there..... Don't stop...Don” I scream out and I'm sure the whole neighbourhood heard that. I'm seeing the moon and the stars and the whole milky way on his ceiling. He keeps his tongue there, alternating between flicking on my clit and moving in and out of me. He grabs my ass harder and my legs start to shake. He keeps me there as I come all over his face. I'm shaking as he pulls his tongue out and wipes his face with his T-shirt.

“Don”, I whisper. I'm weak but I still feel higher than Mount Everest. “I'm not done with you angel. I'm not stopping, it's me and you today till you promise me I'll be the only drug you'll be addicted to”, he says. My head is spinning and even though I just came gosh I'm still so horny!

I help him out his clothes and giggle at the animation my eyes are seeing. Weed is the pits, I'm serious. He lowers himself over me and I gasp for air. I want to say something silly but he silences me with two deep thrusts. My legs wrap around him as he pounds me. Slowly, sensually, gently..... Harder, faster, deeper. It's so intense I'm moaning his name and holding on to him.

I keep cuming and getting weaker but he's not stopping. Oh yes! He pulls my legs off him and gets off me.

"Nooo" I plead with a trembling voice. We can't be done now. I want more! I'm not done. He lays me down on the carpet and is back inside me in a heartbeat. His lips are on mine, the hand on the hurt side is behind my head, the other is roaming, his body is grinding on mine, he's inside me and I need him to stay on me like this forever. I hold on to his back as he rocks in and out of me, sending me through the pearly streets of the heavens.

My senses are on fire, my legs are loose as jelly, I'm feeling him and like the joint we smoked it's lit AF. We are sweaty, my voice is croaky and I'm high as fxck. His skin on mine feels like a hug I never want to end. His thrusts get deeper and faster until he's nailing me to the floor. He shoots so deep like ball is life, coming in warmth deep inside me. He stays there, panting with me, holding me and all he says in my ear is "My angel".

He keeps looking into my eyes and he looks like he just tasted ice cream for the very first time. He kisses me like a hundred times in a row and I can hear a 'thank you' in each kiss. "I love you", I confess. I really need to stop. He doesn't give me an I love you too but I read it in his eyes.

"Your hand", my senses return to me partly.

"If it takes that much pain to feel the pleasure you give me then I'll do it all over again".

He kisses me on the forehead, on the cheek, on the lips and back on the forehead.

"My angel", he says.

"My angel", I imitate him and smile stupidly as I close my eyes.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

CAUTION: Strong language.

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There's honour amongst thieves but also, there's no honour among thieves...

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I must have fallen asleep and I guess he picked me up and put me on the couch. My back hurts a little but I can't help smiling thinking about last night. I fell in love with him all over again and I can unashamedly say he's the only drug I'm addicted to right now. I'm thinking maybe he's upstairs and I should go up and get me some morning glory. I'm busy smiling all by myself when I hear the door open. Really? He got up and left me here? So typical.

More than one voice? I sit up to look up.

"No, don't get up!", Don looks like I will fall over and die if I get up. Only my head is above the couch and there's the usual suspects, Hilton and Caleb and three of his brothers. The one

doesn't look a day over 18! They don't look like they are going anywhere so I might as well remove myself from this situation. This is upsetting. Donovan!

I get up with the fleece blanket around me. It's big but I struggle with it and make sure I remain covered. I'm not sure whether to pick up my bra lying at Caleb's feet or my panties lying over there. My skirt is in a heap on the floor and I'm sure they can all tell from my ruffled weave and smudged makeup that I was fxxked good. So flippen embarrassing! How on earth did Don let them in knowing I was here naked? What time is it anyway? He's fully dressed and I'm here hiding under a big ass blanket! Exactly how long was I asleep? Even that amazing feeling of being high is gone now.

I shoot Don a distasteful look and drag myself upstairs. The disrespect! You would think he'll do the right thing and follow me to apologise but no he leaves me there alone and I have to deal with Chelsea laughing at me on WhatsApp. She's one to laugh. She's still at Caleb's house.

'So how did it go? Out of 10, how did he do?', I can't hold my curiosity back anymore. She left with Caleb and was at his house all night so lunch bar (it's obvious).

'Dude! That guy is cruel!'

I stop and stare at my phone, imagining the worst and feeling my anxiety grow. Please don't tell me he hurt her because I won't be able to forgive myself this time.

'No he didn't force himself on me! On the contrary', she texts. She guessed well what my silence meant.

'I took off my clothes and threw myself at him and he kissed me and I thought we were getting somewhere. Then he told me to get into bed and sleep because he doesn't fxxk drunk girls'.

I can feel her pain shame but I can't help giggling. Such a gentleman he is. Because of that alone, I forgive him for snitching last night.

'So you got nothing? *laughing emojis*'

'Zilch...The more he resists, the more I fall for him. Pray for me'.

I'm still typing, 'I'll pray for you' when Don walks in carrying my clothes from last night.

He tries to kiss me but I turn my face away. He knows he did me dirty downstairs.

"Skat, listen to me. I need you to go home now. Dress up and go, I'll come around later and I'll explain".

Anger turns to worry and I look up at him.

"What's going on?"

"Disciplinary hearing", he says looking away.

"What?"

"I'll explain later. For now, dress up as fast as you can and go, asseblief", he cups my one cheek and looks me in the eye and I find myself drowning in the blueness of his. For once I obey with no questions asked. I go to the bathroom and do a quick freshen up and dress up in clean clothes. It might be freezing outside so leggings and a jersey will do.

"Come my baby, you have to go alone though. Take this (keys) and get in the white car outside and drive ok? Get home and wait for me. I'll come by later".

Now he's really scaring me but showing my fear will only make him feel worse so I say "Ok baby". He will explain later isn't. I'm ready to run out and into the car and drive.

His phone beeps and he reads the message. All the while I'm watching his face and trying to act like I'm not scared.

“Holy shit! Shit this is bad. Fxck!”.

“What’s wrong baby”, my voice betrays me as it comes out shaking a little.

“It’s too late. Stay right here. I’m in deep shit”.

“What’s going on Don?”.

“He’s here already. Listen to me, whatever happens stay here Lotus. Don’t make a sound, ok? Stay right here my angel. I’ll fix this”.

I nod, what option do I have? This is going bad and I might not know what is going on but I know it’s really bad. I’ve never seen Don scared ever since I met him but I saw his face and if that wasn’t fear then I don’t know.

I get into bed and hug a pillow. My phone is off just in case.

I can’t take this not knowing anymore. Curiosity gets the best of me and I quietly get out of bed and slowly open the door until I can fit through then tip toe down a few steps and sit. It would take someone thoroughly looking for me to see me, the light reflects on this glass here, so I’m as good as invisible from down there.

It’s like my ancestors wanted me to witness this because it looks like the meeting is only starting now. I wonder what they were doing this whole time. Maybe waiting for everyone to show up?

There’s a man they are all greeting. From their bowing and respectful handshakes he’s obviously a man of status. He has on a vintage style leather jacket, old school jeans and a brown hat with a feather on the side. He’s coloured too but darker than all the brothers and he has a pot belly pushing through his shirt, a gold chain heavy on his neck and when he takes off his hat and neatly places it on the arm of the couch, I see his face. He looks dangerous and the tattoos on his knuckles tell me he’s not someone you mess with. He must be some kind of godfather because he looks the part and the rings on his fingers scream 'Mafia alert'.

I haven't seen so many of the wolves in this house in one go. I start counting, 1, 2...8, Caleb, Hilton, Don, 12 and Al Pacone 13. There's 13 men in the living room! Eleven stand in a circle around Donovan and the G. I think he’s the General. I can clearly see Donovan's hung head through the space between Caleb and another guy. The guy takes his time, greeting them by name one by one. In response they show him their wolf tattoo and do that hand signal I’m now used to. His voice is thunderous, which is working in my advantage because I can hear him loud and clear.

He pauses a second and looks in my direction. My heart leaps to my throat and I whimper silently as I prepare to die. For a moment there I thought he saw me. I'm relieved when he picks up his speech and finishes his greeting ritual.

Don is standing in the middle of the circle. He’s greeted last and he shows that beautiful wolf on his neck and does the salute with his sore hand. He really knows how to handle pain, I’ll give him that.

“Alpha, look at me”, thunder voice says.

Don raises his head and has on an emotionless face. I guess he listened when we were told in Frozen that ‘Don’t let them in, don’t let them see...Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know’.

“Are we fighting for girls now? Which part of the Creed says that?”

“We’re not fighting for girls”, Don says.

“Yet when it came down to your brother and a floozy, you took your brother down”.

“He broke the law not me. He tried to assassinate me. I held a fair trial, gave him a chance to call his loved ones and bid them goodbye and I will personally make sure his family gets their money. I did everything by the book”, Don says.

The guy laughs in his face. I can’t see his face because he has his back to me and Don is the one facing my direction.

“She's not just a good fxck like you say she is, is she? She's yours now. You love her! And you of all people should know the price of love is blood”. He talks as mean as he looks, cold and heartless, like his heart was caught in a blizzard and froze into an ice stone. I don’t know him but I hate him.

I stay hidden, trying to be as silent as possible. I'm even afraid to breathe. All the other guys stay silent and in perfect formation, with hands behind their backs and heads bowed. It looks like a cult from up here. Only Don has his hands in front of him.

“Do you love her?”.

“Of course I don't. She’s a stable fxck, that's all. She's a good fxck that's why I keep her around. It's kinda hard to get good pussy these days”.

I feel my heart crumbling.

“Very well then, take her back to whatever dumpster you picked her from. Get her out of your house if she's nothing”.

So he knows I’m here? Can he see me?

“This is my house! I'll have whoever I want around. You don't get to tell me who to host and who to throw out!”, Don says, his rudeness creeping in.

“Take that back!”. I see the General (I’ve decided he’s the general, I mean) reach into his pocket. His right hand comes out with a knife which he flips and places on Donavan’s cheek.

“You do not raise your voice at me boytjie. I'm not part of your pack! I do not bow down to you, you bow down to me. Now take your words back and we can continue this”.

I cringe as I watch him slide his knife down Don’s cheek leaving behind a thin line of blood. He actually sliced him! I have my hands over my mouth in shock. Is that how Don got all those scars? People like this one sliced him and he took it like a lamb and let the blood flow till it clotted?

Don remains still and his voice is still when he says

“I apologise General. I take my words back”.

See! I knew he was the General!

“Very good. Now where were we? Yes I remember! So now we must go and avenge love?

We must fight for love? Love, the rule you learn first is ‘Thou shall kill their heart and fail to love all the days of their lives’. You took that oath after that little bimbo of yours, what was her name? Candice?”.

This man has zero respect for women. He called me a floozy and is now calling Candice a bimbo? May she come back and haunt him!

“Yes General”.

“We have a war of the packs looming. Divided we'll fall. You broke many rules Alpha and the Woodstock pack sort to teach you a lesson. Your brother shot at you to warn you not to kill you. Do you understand that the initial plan was to kill your girl for you? Do you that

favour because of the love your brothers have for you? They meant to rid you of your latest distraction. Their intentions were pure. They are your brothers and they were looking out for you”, he says.

“It's a pity they didn't get the bloody bitch! We lost a route and now we letting enemies walk freely in our backyards because of a pussy?”.

I watch Donavan's Adam apple move as he shallows. Am I the bloody bitch that should have been gotten rid of? I don't know how to process this to be honest. I'm a strong person I think but this is too much even for me. Yet I know I should sit still if I'm to continue living.

“You are an alpha and you have broken more than one rule. You can't be an alpha anymore. A lovesick puppy cannot lead the pack!”, the General says. Don swallows again and I see his eyes flick just a little.

“Let's get this over and done with...Brothers, those who agree that the Cape Flats need a new alpha, show by raising your hand”.

Tears are running down my face and I have my fingers crossed. I don't want Don to lose everything because of me. Please no, not because of me. He's a good man and a good leader. I almost sing a joyful song to the heavens when not a single hand goes up! In your face cowboy!

“Weaklings all of you. Led by your hearts and no brains in your heads”, he yells at the brothers but they remain resolute, their eyes cast on the floor. He goes off at them in Afrikaans and whatever is saying can't be good at all. I'm shivering and clasping my hands together. This is too real.

“I need a smoke”, he eventually says and walks towards the kitchen. He smokes in there and the brothers remain in formation like toy soldiers.

“So tell me your plan alpha. We have a gang war coming. You can't fight your brothers and fight the enemy as well. If you let this go and spare all the wolves involved in your shooting, I'm willing to turn a blind eye and let you carry on with your hoochie. Fighting this will be a distraction we can't afford!”, the General says. I guess it's true that smoking calms you down.

“I know that. My hoochie as you call her is my business, she has nothing to do with the pack. No where in the Creed is it said a brother can not bed whoever he wants. But what the Creed says is, 'If a brother harms another brother, he should be eliminated before his poison poisons the entire pack'. So if anyone comes for me, I'll fight for justice and when the inevitable gang war comes, I will fight for survival. I'm GIFTED and Gifted I'll Fight Till Eternal Death”, Don says, saluting with his left hand, a raised thumb and two first fingers.

The General guy laughs in disbelief.

“What is it about this bitch that has you thinking like you're brain dead? Huh?”.

“I don't know, maybe it's the way her pussy wraps so tightly around my dick when I'm fckng her?”.

I cringe.

“Do you love her?”.

“No! I don't. I don't love”.

“Do you have other bitches?”

“Yes”, Don says and my eyes pop open.

“But somehow this particular black girl has you under her spell! So I'll ask again, do you love her?”, the General asks slowly this time.

“I don't love her. I don't love”, Don says.

I'm terrified. I'm hurt. I'm shattered. So he's sleeping with many us? He has other girls? Is that why he always tells me I'm special after sex? Am I really special? The thought of him with someone else really hurts and if it wasn't for the fact that the General scares me to death, I would scream right now. It hurts, a lot.

“Then do the right thing. Kill her! Bitches sprout everywhere like weeds so you'll get another one”.

“What?”, Don lets down his guard and voices his shock.

“Kill her! She's made you weak and we can't afford to be weak now. I need all my four alphas together and all packs should come as one so we can win this war and maintain our routes. We lose the routes we lose the turfs so where will we deal?”.

“I can't do that. I can't kill her. I need her. She's a means to an end and I can't get rid of her... yet. Caleb and Hilton know the plan. I can't share the details yet until I get it right. I've never been one to sell people dreams”, Don says.

I'm not sure what's going on and if what I'm hearing is true or not. Caleb and Hilton back up Don's claims although it doesn't need a lie detector to tell that they're backing up things they don't know.

“You've still loved her. You have loved and for that you have to pay the dues. So pick, to get rid of her or your blood? It's a full moon wolf, pick wisely”, the General guy says.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

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‘Life is so fragile and unpredictable when you are in a gang. It's like playing poker. You think to yourself that you have a good hand. But, only when you reveal your hand do you sometimes discover to your horror that someone else's hand is better’.

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The silence is so loud, its screams are driving me crazy. I wish I had stayed in bed as Don said. Now I'm here and I can't unhear. My head is buzzing with questions but fear is keeping me grounded. My heart stopped when the General told Don to pick between me and himself and I'm not sure if it has resumed beating or not. What kind of choice is that? He's screwed either way. By picking me he'll confirm that he loves me and in his world, love is a punishable offence. If he picks himself, he gets to kill me I suppose and my name gets to go above Candice's on his back? I don't wanna die. I want my grandmother right now. I don't remember ever crying so quietly, I can't even swallow the lump in my throat just in case I make a sound.

I have a painful cramp gripping my right leg but I'd rather suffer that than a bullet through my heart. With all the fear and uncertainty inside of me, I don't know how I still have space to think about Don. I don't know but I feel terrible for him. Like he's in this mess because of me. All we did was love each other and have wild sex, we didn't hurt anyone. He doesn't

even have to buy me that car and the party doesn't have to happen. I don't want any of it if it means putting our lives on the line. It's taking a lot for me not to get up and tell the General guy that I'll leave Donovan if that's the ultimate price to pay.

The pain he bared when he spoke about how he killed Candice was too much even for him. If by any chance he loves me the way he loved her then killing me will destroy him. I have to protect him. I think I should crawl back up but I'm so scared to get caught and be sliced with that knife that carved Don's cheek. I didn't realise how tightly I'm clasp my hands. I'm praying for an extension on life and for Don to be spared. I'll do better I promise, I won't be late for church and I'll say my prayers every night and do my morning devotions. I'm praying that I'll suddenly wake up and realise I was dreaming.

"We don't have all day alpha. Her blood or yours? You know the rules". He moves his plump self towards Don and stands on his right facing my direction. His face scares me but I find myself staring. I want to look away because I'm scared my eyes boring into him like this will draw him to me. We always say we can feel people scorching us with their eyes isn't. His face is heavily scarred, his eyes are empty and his hairline is divorced from his forehead. I think I'm looking at the face of Lucifer himself yet somehow I can't look away. There's something about his face, like I've seen him somewhere before. He lifts his eyes and I whimper silently. I think I'm going to pee.

"On the count of five, I'll make the pick for you. I can't stand here all day".
Who hurt him? Why is he so angry? He doesn't even know me, why does he want me dead so badly?

Don remains silent, his face looking straight forward. He keeps swallowing slightly, I can see his throat move at short intervals.

The eleven brothers are still making the circle and have their heads bowed in perfect composure.

"One...Two...Three..."...with each count my heart drops into my stomach. It hurts so bad it's physical. He pauses at four and pulls his gun from the holster and places it on Don's head. I guess the brothers also can't stand the suspense because almost half of them have their heads lifted now and I can swear on my father's name that the 18 year old looking boy is shivering. Caleb looks helpless and Hilton looks blank as usual.

"Four...", I hear the gun click and I jump and catch my scream before it goes out.

"My blood. I'll shed my blood...", Don says. What? Please no he can't. I must do something. But what?

"My blood you can have but you won't kill me. I've done nothing wrong. I have not loved. Your accusations are baseless. But to satisfy you and prove my loyalty to you, I'll shed my blood...I'll give my finger, take on the right because I shoot with my left".

What? I cover my mouth with both hands to stop from yelling at him for being stupid. Is he crazy? He will have his finger chopped off? I get that it's better than dying but still.

"Fair enough", the general reluctantly drops his gun, puts it back on his waist and pulls out his knife.

"Hold up your hand, let's see which finger we can do away with".

How sick is this man really?

So hierarchy tames people this much? Don obediently raises his hand.

"I hear the middle finger is all some hoes like. I'll take that", he flashes a devious smile showing beautiful teeth. What a waste of bone!

"The Creed says a brother can, in his own will, take up the place of his alpha and pay the dues in his place...You can have my finger General", Hilton steps forward and brings his hands to the front.

"No cuz, you can't", Don looks at him with shock written in bold CAPS all over his face.

"My choice not yours, cuz. Put your hands behind your back and step back into the circle. I'll pay the dues my alpha", Hilton says to Don.

It's like I'm watching a movie, except it's like a horror movie and I'm on set and the serial killer is about to find me.

"Hilton please, I can take it", Don is pleading and he's not even trying to mask it.

"I know you can. But this is of my own will and I'm doing this. Now step back Donovan!".

This is the first time I've ever heard any of his brothers use his name. I thought maybe they were forbidden from saying it or something.

Don looks like he'll cry, my poor baby. The General is looking at them like 'what are you playing at?'.

"I'll take the fall for my alpha. Have my finger", a brother I don't quite recognize steps forward and brings his hands to the front. I find myself wanting to scream 'YES' and cheer him on.

"Me too", Caleb steps forward.

"Me too", another says.

One by one they "me too" and step forward.

It's like the old man will lose his mind and I'm here wanting to laugh in his face. I don't know what this means exactly but I love the support they are showing Don. He's staring at them with a shocked face. They are doing this. YES! Standing up for their alpha.

"Idiots! All of you! Idiots!", he yells at them. The way he's waving that knife is making me jittery. He'll cut someone if he keeps slashing it in the air like that.

"The Creed says if an alpha is accused of a horrendous crime, the decision to punish should be collective. If seven or more wolves declare him guilty then guilty he is. But if seven or more wolves decide he's not guilty then he's absolved", Caleb interrupts the barking General. "Are you challenging my authority wolf?", the General turns to him and barks with a threatening tone.

"No. I would never do that. But the creed is binding".

What is this Creed they keep referring to?

"We shall vote. All who absolve our alpha, hands please". Eleven hands shoot up and I find myself sobbing into my hands. The General laughs but he knows he's one against twelve.

"Well played wolves. Well done", he claps his hands as if genuinely applauding them.

"Would it be too rude to ask you to leave now?", Don says, with all his confidence restored.

"Very well Alpha...I'll let this pass...Come and see me tomorrow. We need to talk...Brothers, a war is coming, brace yourselves", the General says.

"We are GIFTED", he adds.

"And Gifted I Fight Till Eternal Death (GIFTED)", they all say, Don included.

I take advantage of the talking and quietly creep up and away. My heart rate hasn't normalised yet and I take several deep breaths.

I'm just standing there, feeling sweat in my armpits and a painful dryness in my mouth. I should've never witnessed any of that. I keep my eyes open as much as possible because each time I blink, the face of the General flashes before me. I feel like I know him. Maybe he's from my nightmares.

The door opens and Don walks in. Caleb and Hilton follow in. I can't help but lunge at him and breakdown for the first time since the horror began. He embraces me and I take in his scent and cry unashamedly. I'm mad at him but I love him so much and I'm happy, so happy that he's here with me.

"Ok, cut it", Hilton obviously.

"Leave them be my bru", Caleb advocates for us.

"Nee, I don't have all day. I want to know what the fxck that was? What's that stunt you pulled Donovan? What if he had asked what the so called plan is? What will we have said?", Hilton and his monotone. I can't tell if he's mad or dead.

"I'm sorry my bruh, I had to think fast. I can't lose her man, look at her. My heart beats for her", Don says and I feel my heart skip a beat. I feel all types of ways. This is the closest to 'I love her' he's gotten.

"I always thought I groomed you better than that. If I had a heart, it would break seeing how I failed".

This whole cousinship of theirs still confuses me. I pull myself together and look up at him with glassy eyes and a wet face. He looks down at me and all I wanna do is hug him some more. But Hilton grabs me by the arm and yanks me back. That hurt real bad.

"Easy man", Don jumps in but I know I've done enough damage already just by being me so I'll shut it. I sit at the far end of the bed and hope if I stay quiet they'll forget I'm here.

"The general had a point you know. You've become soft and it's pathetic to watch!", Hilton spits his venom with no filter.

"I'm not soft, never been, never will be!", Don.

"Oh yea? Yet you were ready to lay down your finger for her. Ready to endure that much pain for her?", he says.

"I would have, just like I will do the same for any of my brothers", Don says.

Hilton looks at him and I cower. He makes me so nervous.

"Donovan, before you're my alpha, you're my blood. I'd gladly die for you, as my brother, my cuz and my alpha. I'll take a bullet for you anyday so make sure when that happens it's not because of some girl".

"Come on man, ease up. Let's talk business", Caleb mediates.

"I'm outta here. And Alpha, take care of that face", Hilton says and doesn't wait for a response.

Now I can breathe. The devil is gone. Phew! At least I can relax around Caleb.

"That was close my bruh. You know what this means", Caleb.

"Ja. I have to win the three alphas onto my side before he gets them on his, otherwise we're all dead".

"Ja ne. I don't know. I want to say it will be alright but it's either you end up in the cage or in the ground and I don't know which one is worse".

I've never seen Caleb looking this helpless before. They know I'm here, andithi?

"We need guns, the proper stuff. Every one of us should have more than one tool", Don.

"It's the only way. But where will we get them? We can only take so much from the cops".

“I know. I have a plan. Remember my professor friend?”

“The black one?”, Caleb raises an eyebrow.

“Ja him. He’s our way out of this mess”.

“Huh? How? He’s legit isn’t he? Educated and shxt, running proper stuff?”.

“Well, his record is clean as a whistle and that’s our way out”.

I wish he could explain what exactly he means because I doubt I can ask.

“Are you saying what I’m thinking?”.

“Yup. It will work, just trust me”, Don assures him.

I’m curled up on the couch on my phone. For once I failed to tell Chelsea what happened earlier. It sounds too unreal to tell it to someone. It will just terrify her and I don’t want that. As the main door opens, I black out my screen and pretend to be sleeping.

“Baby”, Don shakes me a little but I remain ‘sleeping;’. Don’t ask me why I like doing that, I don’t know either.

“You disappeared on me. I was worried sick about you!”, that’s Caleb’s voice. I stiffen as I wait for Hilton to speak and I’m relieved when that doesn’t happen. I guess it’s just them two.

“I went and visited pops in jail”, Don says with a low voice.

“You did what? Are you out of your mind?”, Caleb raises his voice and Don ‘Shhhh’s him.

“Why? Why would you do such a thing?”, his voice is lower now but the shock is just as vivid.

“I need to get him out of there. It’s time we had a new General”.

“You want the General dead? And who do you think will agree to pull the trigger on him? You know we live by a code and whoever you ask to kill the General will put a bullet through your brain”, Caleb sounds umm how can I say, traumatised?

“I’ll do it myself. I had a nice little chat with one of the Woodstockers who plotted my shooting and you know I have my ways, so he sang. He confirmed what I already suspected, the General wanted me dead. He ordered the hit on me. So blood for blood, isn’t that what the Creed says?”.

“You did what? All on your own? Damnit Alpha! What if that Woodstocker runs and tells the General what he told you? Actually you know he’ll do that!”, Caleb yells at him.

“He won’t”, Don all calm and shxt.

“Why not?”.

“Because dead men tell no tales!”, Don says and I feel a chill in my bones.

“No no Alpha, I know when you get like this! You stop thinking my bruh! You killed another brother over a girl? And now you want to kill the General? Then bring out your father to be our new General? For real my bruh? Do you want to die that much?”

“Yes”.

“The old man is safe in prison, let him be. You know the rules dammit! You can’t visit him! We don’t make direct contact with our brothers in jail for a reason! Dammit!”.

“But he’s not my brother, he’s my father Caleb!”.

“He may be your father but you know damn right he’s your brother in the family. He’s a Wolf, you are a Wolf. He’s on the inside, you’re on the outside - contact prohibited”.

They bicker on and the more they talk, the more I wish I had said no to him the first time he ‘abducted’ me. This is not it.

“I spoke to my friends already. Pretoria will happen and that will be the solution to all our problems”.

“I don’t know. I think you’re way in over your head. But you’re the alpha and I’ve got your back. So call your professor friends and let’s meet at Hilton’s tomorrow. Operation Pretoria it is. I’m all in”.

If I thought I was confused before, you should see me now. I’ve so many questions I haven't asked and new fears to address. Does it ever end in this game of theirs? Because where I’m standing right now, it feels like quicksand. We keep going down and it’s a matter of time before we sink all the way in and drown in sand.

In the beginning I didn’t believe he was a gangster. I think I knew he was but I just decided to believe he wasn’t for my own selfish feelings. Then he showed me his bad side and it was like bungee jumping without a rope tied to my feet, falling with no constraints, feeling like I was flying. It was fun, taking on gravity in a thrilling free fall towards a raging river at the bottom. But it hits me now, that kind of thrill should never be fun. It’s dangerous and it can only end in one way. Gravity will always win and my face will kiss the water just before it takes it all in and breathes it into my lungs and chokes me to death. If I had to describe my relationship with Don, that’s what I would say.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

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Blood makes you related. Loyalty makes you family.

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I hate the fact that tomorrow is Monday. I hate to admit it but I enjoyed my 'sick days' and now I'm sulking because I have to show up at work. To be honest, I'm scared of what Dr Dirk will say. He was upset the last time he called me and nami I've been under performing for a while now.

Work should be the last thing on my mind but I think my brain is doing that thing of avoiding dealing with trauma and focussing on lesser problems. What I witnessed was worse than a daymare. They discussed me and bargained with my life like I'm a cow. I've never been more scared in my life. Then Don said all those things about me and I want to ask him, I need to ask him but I'm not sure about the timing.

"Are you going out?", I panic when he gets up and walks towards the door. He can't go outside. What if they shoot him?

"Not yet. I wanna lock up".

He goes out, I guess to check the gate. He returns a few minutes later and joins me on the couch. He doesn't need to offer, he's my person so I have rights so I move myself closer to him and rest my head on his chest and snuggle up. He covers us with the blanket and holds me like a baby. We sit there in silence. I have so much to say but I don't know where to begin. The whole thing with the General keeps playing in my head.

"You're shaking. Are you cold?", he pulls the blanket up and covers me up to the shoulders.

"I'm scared Don. I don't wanna die".

I'm so scared I can't even cry, I'm just shaking. He tightens his hold around me and I sink into him. I want him to protect me and hide me away in his arms.

"You're safe. You have me".

"He wanted to kill me baby", I can't stop shivering.

"And for that he will die. When it comes to what's mine, I don't play". He says that with a dangerous tone, I feel my blood run cold for a second.

"Don't worry about anything. I'll fix this. I need you to go to work tomorrow, plan your party, go out with your friend, go jogging, do all the things you like. Worry about nothing, I'll make sure we are fine".

"Party? No baby we can't. I'll celebrate next time".

"Your birthday is on Friday. You will proceed with the plans. One small meeting with my General shouldn't make us change our plans".

Did he just say 'small meeting'?

"No, I'm not doing it", really, partying is the last thing on my mind.

"I think you misunderstood me angel. I wasn't asking, I was telling you!".

Blink blink! I want to argue but I'm low on energy and his tone was too assertive.

We sit there, me cozied up to him and his arms around me. I'm beginning to think he's immune to pain or do gunshot wounds heal that fast?

The things I heard, I want to ask him about them but I don't have the guts. I'm scared of the answer. If he says yes everything he said was true then what? I'm not ready to let him go. I need to lessen the chaos in my head though so I sit back up and look him in the face. He really should do something about that fresh scar on his face. Half his face is red and that scar looks like it's swelling.

"Hilton...", I start my question.

"Is my cousin and he practically raised me. He's not that much older than me but he's the next best thing I had to a father".

Ok, that wasn't what I was going to ask but thank you for the intel.

"Would Hilton kill me?", that's my first question.

"Yes", without hesitation.

My eyes dilate and my lips part.

"If you became a threat to me, yes he would. But he's not crazy, he wouldn't just kill you for fun". Not very assuring still! I think he's joking, he has to be joking because wow!

My mind is doing a lot of toning down today. I should be frozen with terror right now but I'm still here looking at my man and wanting to kiss him. Those lips spoke about me like I'm nothing but he's here looking at me like I'm everything. My heart is sore for so many reasons. I can't not know this or else it will drive me insane.

"Donavan.....those things you said about me...".

"Were not true".

"So you're not sleeping with other girls?".

"No. Not after I met you. The very first time I fcked you I lost interest in all the other bitches".

Can he maybe try to be less crude or is he so far gone into cruderville I can't have him back?

"You said I'm a means to an end!", I sit straighter.

He looks at me and laughs a little and shakes his head like it just hit him.

"Wait. In fact, how do you know what I said?".

He looks at me accusingly and I look down.

"I told you to stay in the bedroom but you came out to eavesdrop? Do you have any fxcken clue who we were dealing with? Why couldn't you just do as I told you?". I stay looking down.

"He would have killed you! I was out here burning bridges, feeling all weak, ruining my cred, trying to save both our asses and you just couldn't stay put?".

I have no answer still.

"I can't do this with you if you can't listen to instructions. You'll get us both killed! The fxck is wrong with you?".

He went from zero to a hundred and now he's just breaking my heart.

"No, no angel, you're not about to start crying! I risked it all for you but you care so little you put our lives on the line just like that! No mann no!".

The first tears fall and I sniff.

"You have no clue about the things I go through, do you? Do you even care to know? Do you even want to know how they make me feel? How running the streets is like? How having all this power but knowing I could drop down dead any moment feels like? How playing small to feed the General's ego is like? Do you?".

Of course I do! Sometimes I don't ask because I'm scared of the answers but of course I care for him. He's hurting me with his words. I'm not a bad girlfriend. I was curious that's all and I guess this is what they mean when they say curiosity killed the cat. I look up at him with eyes full of tears and whisper my, "That's not fair!"

He looks at me unmoved and as my tears fall down he looks away and gives that small laugh of his.

"When you're done crying you'll find me in the bedroom", he gets up and walks without throwing me a single glance.

If only he knew how I also wish I had stayed put and heard none of it. I need him today more than ever, how could he get mad at me?

I'm not good with sorries but I will try this time. He was pissed and with reason and as hard as it is to admit I was careless, I know I need to apologize. I dry my face with the back of my hands and follow him upstairs.

He's sitting on the bed with his head bowed and his elbows on his knees. Is he crying? No ways, Don doesn't cry. I doubt his eyes can produce tears. He's just angry that's why his head is bowed, I decide.

"Don...baby....Don", he ignores me. I stand in front of him, looking down at his beautiful hair whorl or is it called a crown? The circular part of the head where hair swirls like a cyclone as it grows in different directions? He got a haircut not so long ago and his short pitch black hair reminds me to pray hard that my future kids have their daddy's hair. And eyes please please. Can the boy have his face and voice minus the accent. Kids cross my mind and I feel cold in my womb. He doesn't want kids and with good reason. But I want them in the future. I also want matching mother-daughter outfits to light up my Instagram.

Focus Lotus!

"Baby, I'm so sorry, I just...I'm really sorry baby. I didn't think, I just...I'm sorry Don". He ignores me still but I got this. I go on a begging spree, saying my sorries, explaining my fears, asking for him to understand.

"I keep thinking I'll die, like that man will come for me. I don't like this life Don".

He looks up at me and yup he was crying or at least he has glassy eyes so I'm just making an intelligent assumption.

"I told you I'll protect you, didn't I? Don't you trust that I can do that?". I don't like it when he's like this, he becomes distant and I always feel like I'm losing him.

"I know you can baby. It's just that guns, killing people, death...that's just not my life".

"But it's mine and you're in my life, ain't you?". He raises an eyebrow and if I didn't know any better I'd think saying no will come with a brutal punishment.

"I am, of course I am". Like I'm here, ain't I?

"Ja so why you acting all brand new on me? If you didn't want me, you should have left the day I told you who I am!".

Ouch.

"That's unfair!".

"Unfair? You know what's unfair? Me putting my street cred on the line and compromising the pack just to protect your ass. Me breaking all the rules because I can't think straight when it comes to you. Me ready to lay down my life for a chance to be with you. What's unfair is me killing someone who wanted to kill me so I can stay alive and you judging me for it! That's what's unfair!".

He gets up, looks me square in the face and I don't recognize him. He isn't angry. He blinks and a tear rolls down. I want to hold him so bad but I remain frozen.

"All I need to know is that I have you. When I'm out there, I need to know that it's all worth it. So tell me Lotus, do I have you?".

I don't hesitate, I nod my yes and keep looking at him looking at me.

"I love you Don, more than anything".

He remains quiet, still looking at me.

"It won't happen again I promise", my voice comes out in a whisper.

"It better not or I swear!".

I don't know why he's being like this. He's so cold.

"Shower and get into bed, I'll be right back. I need to talk to Hilton".

"Please don't leave me", I find myself begging.

"Look Lotus, I have to dala what I must. I'd love to stay by your side all day long but things don't do themselves. So now if you don't mind, I need to go and talk to my cousin".

Wow. What a wow.

I can't help the tears shame and I look away too late. He's hurting me. It's so weird because I don't cover my face, so I'm looking at him and trying not to whimper too much. It takes a minute before he sighs and steps up to me. I'm thinking big hug and maybe some 'I'm sorry angel' but none of that happens.

He cups my face and makes me look at him. How disrespectful of my tears! I try to pull my face away but he has me in a hold.

"Look at me".

Being the rebel that I am, I want to fight my way out but the goddess in me calmly looks into those ocean eyes.

"What do you see when you look at me?", he says.

"Ummm your face?". I'm not sure I get the question.

"Look closely. Stop lying to yourself and look at me. I have scars, I have tattoos, I have blood on my hands, I deal, I run, I take what I want, I've done things I'm not proud of. I'm a monster

I know that. But I'm asking you, what do you see? What do you see in me? How can you still love me?". He chokes on that last part.

My turn to swallow hard and fix my English.

"I see the love of my life when I look at you. I see a good guy who lives his truth and takes care of his own. I see a kind hearted man who loves his brothers with his life, who loves his community and takes care of children and puts them through school and makes sure they have everything. I see a man who has survived the worst but still makes the best of everyday".

I try not to blink too much but I do nothing to mask the rawness in my voice.

"I see a man who wasn't supposed to love me but broke that rule and gave me all of him. I see a guy I would take a bullet for without a second thought. So with all your scars and tattoos and even that silly gold tooth, I love you with everything".

He smiles a little, I guess because of that gold tooth thing.

The hug comes unexpectedly but it's deeply appreciated. I feel warm and forgiven in his arms and to be honest I want make up sex right now but ey I don't wanna be that girl.

His phone rings and I cuss in my head. Like who's taking this moment away from me though!

"I'm on my way my bru"...I hear him say on the phone.

"I gotta go. Hilton doesn't like to be kept waiting", he kisses me on the forehead.

"Yhuu uHilton! You'd swear he's the alpha!", I say with a dropped voice.

The eye he gives me tells me I should shut up or he'll pick between me and his cuz and I think they say blood is thicker than water.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

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He's gone and sigh! I feel all sorts. Sad because he was mad at me, terrified because that general guy wants my blood, mad at myself for risking my life the way I did, guilty because Don has a nasty scar on his face right now because of me. I don't know who designed love and decided pain and all these feelings were good accessories but can you please tell her that we get it now, can she please return love to its factory settings - Happily Ever After.

30 minutes gone and still he's not back. I'm hating being alone and Chelsea's phone is off. But Mark Zuckerberg loved us so much that he gave us the green App. I make small talk with some people, I ignore Dr Dirk's messages...there's 6 unread but I won't open them because of the traitorous blue tick! I'm curious though so I make the phone rotate to landscape so I can at least read the last one without opening it.

'Come to my office tomorrow at 8:30 am!!!'.

Okay, calm your titties Doc, will you? What are those three exclamation marks for? Gerarahere.

Then Chelsea, still offline. I wonder where she is. My best guess is she's with Hulk. She's been going through the most. She doesn't handle rejection very well and Caleb has been colder than a freezer. I think she should just forget him and focus on Hulk. They have something and their situationship is better than most relationships I know. I know she says the only thing she catches is flu but I'm sure she caught feelings for Hulk a while back.

I leave a voice note for my mother, just saying hi and asking if she and her mother would love to come to Cape Town for my birthday. I know she doesn't quite like Cape Town. She lived here years ago before I came along and ruined her life. I ask anyway and I think it's no point lying anymore so I tell her that my boyfriend is throwing the party for me and will pay for their trip and stuff.

'Hey stranger', a message comes through.

'It's been a minute. What's up?', I text back.

'Nada, just been thinking about you but thought I'll take a backseat and wait for you'.

'It's been hectic. Work and stuff, it's been crazy', I text back.

'I know. Been busy myself. Don't you wanna come up to Joburg on the weekend? Please baby'.

I stop to think.

'Eish Dalu, I'm sorry but we need to talk. Let me call you tomorrow and we talk'.

'Sounds serious', he texts.

'It is'.

'Cool then. Whatever it is just know that I gots you. I love you Lotus'.

But why though! Why is he this person?

I get out of the bathtub carefully because really, a broken arm or collarbone is the last thing the queen needs on her birthday week ok! I soaked up really nice, had a bubble bath and a glass of wine. I watch enough movies and I'm faking it till I'm making it. If the water hadn't run cold and the whole cold water out - hot water in cycle hadn't become tiring, I would still be in there. It helped relax my mind a little and although I'm still a bit mad that Don is still not back, I have some peace in my heart.

"Oh holy Mary mother of sinners! WTF dude!".

He gave me such a fright! How long was he standing there? And why is he looking at me like a starving animal?

He bites his lower lip like that and I'm there thinking damn I finally got it right in this men department.

I reach for the towel but he steps quicker and grabs it.

"Let me do that". Husky voice? Alright.

He starts drying me, from my neck slowly down. He passes too quick over my boobs and I want to complain. He lingers on my stomach and goes down. I step my feet apart enough to allow him easy access. Being dried never felt so intimate!

He lifts me up and settles me on the edge of the sink. There isn't much sitting space but he perches me there anyways and goes down on his knees. I let my legs spread and hold back on

the sink to stop from falling. I'm sitting so uncomfortably but what's a little pain in the face of all this pleasure? He buries his head between my legs and there's no go slow as he laps at my clit. With his fingers, he spreads and goes back to kissing and sucking and eating me like a buffet. With my head thrown back, I let out a long moan. That seems to gas him up as he does it again, a little harder this time, a little kisses, sucking, licking, flicking his tongue, driving me nuts.

My legs start to shake and I grip the sink harder, moaning more rapidly and my whole body starts to join in the quivering. I'm close. He stops and I want to yell. I was so close! How could he be so cruel! I keep my stance. My mouth drawn in an O, my eyes shut, my head back and my breasts heaving up and down with my increased breathing.

"Do..don't stop!", I groan my delayed response. What the hell! Such unprovoked torture! He steadily gets up and leans over me. With one hand he holds the back of my head and brings me forward. His mouth presses on mine and I let his tongue in, tasting myself as I take in the essence of him. I'm getting into it when he pulls back and winks at me.

"It's bedtime angel, let's get you to sleep".

"Who sent you!", I make an unamused face at him. Like what is this? Why am I being punished?

He lifts me up and carries me to bed and lays me on my back. My heart dances when I watch him take off his hoodie. Fingers crossed that he takes everything off already and gives me what I want. He stands looking over me and I see him swallow. I know he loves my body but I can never get tired of seeing his response to it. The lust in his eyes pleases me.

He pulls me to the edge of the bed, grips my knees and spreads my legs, pushing them up around my chest. Flexibility always comes in handy. I look up at him trying not feel self conscious. I'm too spread out but I'm too hot and bothered to care. Can he please put me out of my misery already.

"Hold your knees and keep them there. I have other plans for my hands", he says with that voice and I do as told. I know he has the perfect view of my most intimate part and in a way that's turning me on.

"Lay back down angel and hold your legs" he says.

It's really hard but yes Zaddy, I'll do it. How can I not when he tells me like that. He runs his fingers and teases me painfully. Brushing across slightly and kissing just there. The torture!

"Please Don", I beg.

"Please what?", he says without looking at me. His finger finds its way in and I hold my legs tighter and grip that finger.

"Please what?", he asks again.

I wanna say please fxck me but how do I say that politely?

He presses that finger inside me and I try to ride it. I need this. I feel myself getting wetter by the microsecond and when he keeps the finger in there and brings his mouth down on me, I can't take it anymore.

"Khawundiphe tu (Please give it to me)".

I don't know if he understands that but he stays there a little while longer, doing his thing.

It feels like I've been waiting for this moment all my life. As he goes inside me I let out my appreciation by moaning his name. My back still on the bed and my legs now crossed and on this shoulder, I surrender all of me to him, laying it all out for him to take.

“Oh yes!” I scream.

I'm cuming intensely but he doesn't stop. I'm a trembling mess, I'm useless. He pulls out of me and lords that sound! He turns me around and has me on my knees. I'm so weak, I'm just there. He holds my waist in place and I let out a gulp as I feel him deeper. Grabbing a handful of ass, he hits the spot like he invented sex. Hard, savage, deep yet so sensual and so fulfilling. But I'm so weak, I can't keep the position.

“Stay with me angel”, he says, in a voice so deep it gives me goosebumps.

He flips me over and pushes my legs apart. “You don't have to do anything, just keep that p*ssy open for me. Can you do that?”.

I nod furiously and pull his body down on mine. He kisses me and I kiss him back. He's loving me gently, going at it slowly, giving it to me like I deserve it. I want more, harder, but I'm loving this. I want everything. All of him in me forever.

“I love you Don”, I confess in between the kisses.

“Lotus”, is all he says in response.

We are sweaty, I'm screamy, he's groany. When he picks up pace, I feel my walls clenching and gripping, threatening to explode again. As I'm still shuddering and trembling in his arms, he drives deeper and deeper and he fills me up in familiar warmth.

He lies there on me, in me, catching his breath as I catch mine.

“You are my weakness Lotus but you are my strength”, he he! Trust P-power to make men poetic.

“I love you so much Don”, snuggling closer to him.

“I know my baby and thank you for it”, planting a kiss on my lips and wrapping himself tighter around me. He winces as his arm hurts. He hasn't healed yet, my poor baby.

"I just need to know that I have you. That your allegiance is with me. That you're mine. Can you assure me that?", he says it so desperately, I feel it in my heart of hearts.

"I'm yours Donovan. My allegiance is with you and I'm team you all the way". After tonight I should actually call him Dzaddy...ummm Zaddy is more like it.

Now I know for a fact that #DaluMustFall

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

Monday!

Today was the longest day of my life. Don woke me up at 5 am and made sure I made it on time to work. The 8:30 am meeting with Dr Dirk was not as serious as I thought. I guess he's just a keyboard warrior after all. Only able to shout at me in messages and over the phone but face to face dololo. He sounded like he was pleading when he said "Lotus I need you. Please give me that energy you were giving before the audit. Please". The double 'please' convinced me he was begging for real.

Then the morning dragged and not because of lack of work but because of too much of it. Incompetence makes me sick. Why can't people just do their jobs without supervision? We're all adults here, in fact all these people are even more adult than me. Yerrr! Human beings bore me.

It feels like I've been at this 'updating files and cooking up numbers to make the books look clean' for forever and a day. No paperwork was filed and none of the mandatory daily checks were done. Can't people just do their damn jobs without waiting for me to come and police them? We're a team here or at least we're supposed to be.

I'm looking at the temperature of the oven and I'm tempted to lie and write down a higher number just so it can be within specification. But this is serious and I can't lie and pretend like I didn't see it. I don't know how I'm going to break this down to Dr Dirk. He'll flip and I know when it comes down to it, all blame will be put on me. It's really bad. 20 degrees Celsius below the minimum specification! I told Dr Dirk months ago that we needed a new oven but he said nywe nywe why throw it out if it's not broken. I told him the temperature sensor was faulty but he kept saying "make it work Lotus" as if I'm an electrician!

I'm trying not to panic as I go down to talk to the supervisors. I have to wait for them because 'we're still finishing up here'. They deliberately undermine me but not today Satan, I'm walking with the Lord.

15 minutes later they decide to grace me with their presence. After exchanging pleasantries I get to the point.

"How long has the oven been malfunctioning at? Did you check the core temperature of the chicken when you pulled it out of the oven? One shrugs her shoulders and the other says, "Only yesterday. The temperature of the chicken was 65 inside".

"And you still carried on?", I can't even mask my shock.

"Yes, production had to go on. Don't worry Lotus. The maintenance guy is coming to look at it sometime this week".

"Good Lord. Why do we have spec sheets and standard operating procedures then if you people just do whatever you want?"

I lose it. They make discontented faces at me as if I called them stupid or something, which if I did it wouldn't be a lie right now.

"Did anyone tell Dr Dirk about this?"

Eyes down.

"Oh well, heads will roll today. Someone is going to get fired for this and it sure as hell won't be me. Do you even know how bad this is? This is ready to eat chicken! Ever heard of Salmonella?"

Their silence is pissing me off so I better walk away from here. It's still the beginning of the week and I'm trying very hard to stay in the light.

I'm relieved to see that all the other ovens are working as they should, it's just this chicken one that's a problem. I check the temperature again. Ja ne! Deep breath and shoulders up, let's find the boss and face the music once and for all.

I find him with a cup of coffee and looking too good for his own good. I break it down for him and he seems unfazed, which annoys me even more. So he knew about this and did fokol? He knows I wasn't employed just to pass audits, right?

"The maintenance guy will have a look at it Lotus. Let me call him right now to remind him", he picks up the receiver and begins to dial.

"Put that phone down John!", I snarl at him. I shock even myself but I own it. I'm relieved when he puts it down and looks at me with an impressed look. So men really like a woman who can put her foot down? Ok, mental note. Gosh, this man is good looking, no wonder Chelsea wanted to drink him up like the white latte he is. Focus!

"We need to do a product recall Sir". I throw in that 'Sir' just to annoy him. People with PhDs hate being called any title but Dr because they sweat for it so I'll call him Sir today.

"What are you on about?"

"The chicken oven is faulty. I told you to get a new one. The temperature is 10 degrees lower than spec and your supervisors signed off the dispatch anyway".

He looks at me like he already knew and that further pushes me off.

"You have to get your lawyers ready Sir".

"Is that necessary?", he says.

"Look, you employed me to do this job and this is me doing my job and trying to save your company if it's not too late. You have those supervisors on the floor, you pay them 3 times more than you pay me because I'm black I suppose. But color doesn't translate to knowledge, does it? Now they are going to cost you this company".

"Colour Lotus? Those are serious allegations. How do you know their salaries? That's confidential information!", he tries to snap but he's turning red. I'm sure he's beginning to see how serious that oven issue is. At least he's man enough not to deny it. I hate lies unless I'm the one telling them.

"We need to do a product recall ASAP. I'm going to call all the major supermarkets and you call the small delis. Send a chain email to recall all our ready to eat chicken products with this batch code. Actually, let's recall everything on the shelves. I'll call the Microbiology Lab and request an urgent analysis on retention samples. I'll go to the supermarket down the road and get a few products for them to test as well. Salmonella should take them about 48 hours so we could get our results on Wednesday, then we'll be able to predict the extent of the damage".

"No Lotus! We won't be doing any of that. Do you know how much money will be wasted if we do a product recall? Do you know how much it costs to do a micro sample and now you want to send all these samples?", he stands up but I remain seated.

"Oh but we are doing it! Sir, if anyone gets sick or dies from our products, they will sue you for everything you have and they will shut down this place. And if people die, you might spend the rest of your life in jail! So make your pick".

I watch his face turn redder and I start to sympathize with him but he can't cut corners with this one.

"Are you sure this is the only way?", he eventually says.

"Yes. And time is of the essence. Every second we waste here leaves our products on the shelf for someone to buy them".

I think he's going to cry shame. He's so red.

"Ok. Tell me again what should be done", he dumps himself back on the chair.

I break it down for him again, emphasizing that because the chicken did not reach the temperature-time combination required to destroy heat resistant microorganisms. So it means they remained alive in the chicken and we've since packaged it and dispatched it. And because we warmed the previously frozen chicken, we activated the microorganisms and so

now they are multiplying and almost everyone who'll eat our chicken will fall sick. I quickly remind him of the Listeria outbreak not so long ago and how hard it is to repair brand damage.

I think he's starting to see the severity of the situation now.

"Is there a chance that this won't affect us? Any chance at all?"

"I won't lie to you, chances of that happening are very slim. I'll do my best to manage the situation though, that I can promise you...Forward any customer complaints to me please".

He nods and keeps nodding.

"Ok, let's get to work. I'll be by my desk if you need me". He nods again.

I've been on the phone with our different clients for over 2 hours now. Dr Dirk has sent the emails and I'm calling every supermarket, store and deli on our list. I sound like a machine, saying the same thing to everyone. Now I have to remember disposal procedures.

I shut down production for today so we can have all hands on deck to deal with this crisis. Dr Dirk called the supervisors to his office and I don't know what he said to them but they looked rustled a little. Whatever. I have no time to nurse anyone's feeling today. I don't even get paid enough for this.

"Sir, please sign here", I let myself into his office.

"It's Doctor, Miss Janse van Rensburg!"

"Sorry, Doc I meant". Yep it grounded up his titties. Objective met.

"What is this?", he receives the paper I hand to him.

"It's a letter stating which days I was away from work. If people die or worse, I don't want to be implicated. I was not here when the decision to dispatch undercooked chicken was made so uxolo but I'm not going to jail mna!"

He tries to say what what but I'm firm and he signs.

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This has been the busiest day ever and I'm worried about this company. I think I actually care about Dr. Dirk. This could be really bad. I have a varsity friend who works as an intern in the Department of Health. I give him a call and explain the situation to him.

"If it's bad then the health inspector will come and audit the place before making a decision to either temporarily or permanently shut it down.

"Oh no!". I might have been able to sway Dalu from the path of righteousness to giving me an undeserved pass but I won't win with a health inspector.

"Let's hope it's not big Lotus. It could be catastrophic....But you guys passed the audit recently so I'm sure everything else is fine!"

Shucks! What did I do? I 'persuaded' Dalu to give me a pass and I hid evidence of all things broken. If this becomes a serious issue and the health inspectors are involved they will come down here. Then they find this place like the pig sty it is and then question Dalu's auditing skills. They could have him deregistered and I guess that would mean shutting down his company. My word, the guilt will chow me alive. Let me call him and give him a heads up on WhatsApp.

I keep going back to see if he has responded to my 'Hey D'. Blue ticked? Wow, since when does he blue tick me? I'm so paranoid I select the message and go to info.

Delivered: 30 minutes ago.

Read: 26 minutes ago.

What a wow!

It's been a long day and it's way past knocking off time. I just want to go home and have a power smoothie and sleep. My feet hurt really bad and I'm getting a headache. I send a quick text to Don to say I'm not coming through tonight and another 'Hey' to Dalu.

I find Chelsea already home and dressed up like she's didn't change after work, coat and boots.

"Hey", she gives me a hug.

"Hey".

"You look drained!".

"I am drained. It's been a day from hell. Major crisis at work". I start to take off my coat. I didn't tell her about today because I was too busy for my phone.

"Don't take it off, we're going out".

"On a Monday? No babes, can't. I want to sleep. I have to be at work at 7 tomorrow".

"More reason why you need a drink. You're supposed to drink every day of the week, don't you know that?".

"Chelsea!".

I can't. I want to eat and sleep.

But she wins my heart everytime she comes up with these theories of hers.

"Sunday we drink because we're Christians and water was turned into wine for a reason.

Monday - Monday therapy.

Tuesday - to heal Post-Monday Syndrome.

Wednesday - Midweek special.

Thursday - phuza Thursday.

Friday - Woza Friday.

Saturday - it's a crime not to drink on Saturday. Issa weekend!".

I don't know how she does it. She cheers me up without even trying. I'm all giggles now I think I'll take her up on her Monday Therapy offer. Staying in Retreat kinda really sucks because there's no fancy mall here to restaurant in and Cavendish Square? Chelsea says no. So Longstreet, Club Lotus it is. Clubbing on a Monday!

I can never get used to this. I'm getting myself all emotional thinking about it. Don named his club after me before he even asked me out. He loved me before I even knew him. He means the world to me and maybe it's time I accepted that me and him speak a different love language. I tell, he shows. I wish he could just admit it though. I need to hear it. We all know to assume makes an ass of u (you) and me. Assume = Ass - u + me.

I'm on my second Bernini blush. I'm keeping it slow and low (on alcohol) today because the last thing I need tomorrow is dealing with that crisis while nursing a hangover. Chelsea says legally speaking, when push comes to shove, Dr Dirk will take the fall and maybe the supervisors. I'm safe, she says. She's proud of me for making him sign that statement of absence yam. I'm just telling her how Dalu might lose his auditing certificate and according to my friend, a criminal offence could be opened against the directors of DM auditors and since Dalu is the director, he's twice screwed.

"He's rich beyeps. His parents will take care of it for him. Just let it go and stay away from him. Don will kill him or worse he will kill the both of you".

Speak of the devil. My phone screen comes on and it's Dalu calling.

"You gotta be kidding me! What will it take for you to get the message Lotus? A dead body?"

I roll my eyes and pick up my phone. She's not my mother.

"Sorry baby, I couldn't call you back sooner. I've had a crazy day".

Huge relief. He wasn't blue ticking my ass, yes!

"It's alright D. It's just I have something important to discuss with you".

"Yeah, you said that last time. I'm sorry I haven't been available. It's been crazy".

"Ok, call me later then. It's urgent".

"Alright my baby, I'll do...Where are you?"

"Club Lotus, having drinks with Chels".

"Ok. Catch you later then. Love you".

And he hangs up.

This boy is dating me, isn't he? I won't even mention it to Chelsea because I know what she'll say and it's enough negativity for one day. And Dalu better call me later to discuss this!

"Get me a Bloody Mary please. Double shot". I need something stronger now. Chelsea approves and we are back to talking. She has this cheering me up business under control. She keeps saying how my grandmother is going to go down on her knees and starts praying when she meets Donovan. My grandmother believes that tattoos, dreadlocks, piercings, black makeup and all that attract demons. Wait until she realizes I'm sleeping with a guy who looks like he goes to hell for vacation. She will give me the 'your womb is a sacred place Lolo. Don't just let anyone in there. The transfer of sexual energy is on a spiritual level. All the demons and dark energies of a man get deposited into your womb when you let him have you. Be very careful who you open yourself up to. Anyway, why are you children having sex at your age? Who will marry you?'

The speech of hers always leaves me feeling cold. If it's true then sleeping with Don, considering his career path, is a disaster. I'm as good as Legion.

I know for a fact that my mother will flip and go cray cray when she sees Don. She hates amagintsa (gangsters). But I can handle her, she's not a stress. It's my grandmother that has me worried.

"Isn't that Caleb?", Chelsea sits up straight and a nervous smile flashes across her face. Yazi Caleb is the only guy who's ever managed to make Chelsea nervous and unsure of herself.

"It is...and Don".

I don't want to talk to them though, with Don we'll end up either fighting or going home for a sensual night or most probably both. We fight hard these days but we make up harder so the scales stay balanced.

They are on the other end so they might not see us yet. But I know the minions working here will tell him the 'madam' is here. I told him I'm going home to sleep.

"Another one please, double Vodka yes".

"Ya me too please", Chelsea gulps the remainder of her cocktail. Caleb has her bad, it's amusing to watch.

We go back to discussing our friendcation next month. It was on my list and Don said he will finance it so we need to plan. I'm still telling Chelsea that Don said his black friend, the irresistible devil, will get me a passport in a day! So no queues at Home Affairs and no waiting. She smiles and says "It takes 7 - 21 days to get a passport but go ahead and break the law sweetie". I'm not sure what to make of that so I let it go. She's become quite judgemental.

Hands close over my eyes and I'm trying to claw them off and trying not to smile too much. I'm tipsy so laughing is coming easy. Look at me giggling like a school girl!

"Stop it Donavan!", I giggle on.

The hands relax and fall off.

"Who's Donavan baby?"

I turn around in all my shock. Dalubuhle Mthethwa? What the hell? How is he not in Joburg?

"What are you doing here?", I'm legit scared and I can feel myself sobering up.

"Can't I surprise my girl? I was on my way home from the airport when I called you. Then I heard your voice and I had to see you. I thought I'll surprise you. I've missed you".

He leans over to kiss me and I dodge strategically.

"You mean you left your car at the airport for that long?", Chelsea comes at a tangent. Really, the fact that Dalu paid thousands of Rands for long stay parking at the airport is the least of our worries right now. We're in Don's club and Don is around.

"You don't look excited to see me Lotus. Are we good?"

I think I'm going to be sick. Caleb is coming our way and that only spells trouble. I'm shaking at the thought of Don. I wonder where he is, I can't see him.

"I know you", Caleb says to Dalu.

Chelsea is standing and I'm looking at her helplessly and she's looking back looking equally defeated.

"I don't know you", Dalu says.

"You will know me don't worry. Come with me", Caleb grabs his hand.

"Dude, get your hands off me. Like WTF dude!", Dalu in all his cheese-boyness.

"What are you doing here?", Caleb looks him in the face. I feel so helpless right now. My heart is thudding at the thought of Donavan coming through any second.

"I'm with my girl and her friend. What's your problem?", Dalu.

My heart sinks all the way to my toes. Caleb shoots me an unamused eye and gets back at Dalu.

"Come with me rich boy".

"No man, WTF! I'm not going anywhere with you. Do you want me to call the cops on you for harassment?"

I wonder who taught these kids their rights but forgot to tell them when to exercise them.

"Go Dalu. I'll explain later", I whisper through shaking lips.

"You won't explain anything Lotus. Clearly you've failed to take care of this, so we'll do it for you".

"Lotus what's going on?", Dalu looks at me confused and shocked at the same time. I look down and start praying in my heart. I want to run after them when Caleb leads him away but Chelsea stops me.

"Go and find Don Lotus. Do whatever you have to to make sure he doesn't hurt that innocent guy. I'll follow them".

I nod and she's gone before I can get my body to work with me.

I can't find Don. I've looked everywhere in this club. His phone is off and the waiters say they last saw him with Caleb a while ago. I go outside but I can't find Caleb either, or Chelsea or Dalu. There's Dalu's car parked across the street. There's no one in there. Where did they take him? And there is the car we used to get here. It's Don's car. I never took it back that last time I 'borrowed' it and he hasn't asked for it back. I've been thinking about it as a temporary car while I await my promised car.

I try Chelsea's phone. It rings till voicemail. Dalu's, same story. Caleb's is off and Don's off as well. What a difficult! I sink and sit down on the pavement, looking at cars passing by. It's dirty but I don't care. I don't know what to do and I have no idea why I'm dialing Hulk right now.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT

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May God have mercy upon my enemies because I won't. I'm street, so look both ways before you cross me...

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I've messed up plenty times in my life but this time I've thoroughly outdone myself. Nothing can save me and Although I'm pretty good at the lying game, I doubt I can weave a lie convincing enough to get out of this one. Don will chop me up into pieces and eat me for dinner. I wonder where they disappeared to. Why can't people pick up their damn phones? Maybe Don was already outside when Caleb came for Dalu? I looked for him everywhere inside the club and he was nowhere to be found.

It's cold out here and I'm shivering as the light drizzle sprays my face. The wind is making my nose run and now I'm sniffing. Cape Town weather has been brutal in the past few days. I'm hugging my knees and letting my tears flow all the way down my face. I doubt anyone would notice them anyway. Dalu should have never come here. I thought he was in Joburg! All I wanted was to discuss the work crisis with him. I didn't mean for any of this to happen.

I shiver at the thought of Don. He's going to be mad, not mad angry but angry insane. I keep hearing "I need to know I have you skat. I need to know that you're all mine". And I promised didn't I? It looks bad from the other side of the fence but I can explain. I wasn't contacting Dalu about love things or whatever, it was to give him a heads up about the disaster at work.

Every second lost sitting on this dirty concrete is a lifetime to Dalu. I need to find them and save him. But where do I go to?

I try Don's phone - voicemail. Dalu - rings till voicemail. Chelsea - rings till voicemail. Ja ne! I want to dial Don but I'm legit scared right now. I love him but I can never forget the day he pointed a gun to my head. This time he'll pull the trigger. Don doesn't take disrespect lightly. To him loyalty is everything. He's the 'What doesn't kill me can make me kill you' type. For once I can't even pray.

A message pops up from Hulk and I hurriedly open it with my frozen fingers.

'I missed your call', it reads.

I can't type back fast enough, besides what would I type? I call and he answers on the second ring.

"Lotus. Everything ok?"

I close my eyes and compose myself. Nothing is ok right now but I need to keep it together so I can at least speak.

"I need your help", I drop my voice and keep my eyes closed and my one hand slightly over my mouth.

"With what? Is Chelsea ok?"

It's cute how he loves Chelsea but never wants to admit it but now is not the time for ncooows.

"I don't know. We were in Don's club then Dalu came then Caleb took him then...".

What? Did Hulk just hang up on me? Must be bad network because no ways. I call back and he answers thankfully.

"Leave me out of this Lotus. I have no desire whatsoever to be on Alpha's bad side! Deal with your mess. And do not mention my name! I won't die because of your whoring!"

Oh wow! Did he just? Ok! Wow! But now isn't the time.

"They took Chelsea too!", I quickly say before he thinks of hanging up on. He remains quiet and I wait, not sure what exactly I'm waiting for.

"Lotus, you had that guy, what's his name again? Ronald, Roland something. You had Chelsea caught up in your mess. Now you have her caught up in your mess again! What kind of friend are you?"

I freeze, excuse the weather. How can he even compare the two? He's making it look like I intentionally drag Chelsea into my problems. That's not fair and I hate his tone!

"You like attention too much Lotus that's why. I told you this would happen. Now you want to drag me into it? Whatever happens to your cheese boy and to Chelsea is all your fault".

Ok now I'm going to cry for real and it's my turn to hang up. I needed help not a phone call with Judge Joe Brown!

"And then?", someone kicks me slightly and I jump. Expecting the worst always makes me jumpy. I look up and terror washes over my face. I must look like I'm staring direct into the face of death.

"What's wrong skat? What're you doing here?"

I'm shivering and I'm not sure if it's the cold or it's fear.

He gives me a hand and I take it.

"Shouldn't you be home sleeping? Why are you here? Where you looking for me?", he says so kindly I can't fathom.

What mind game is he playing?

"Your face is red! Why are you crying? Lotus?". See the side effects of being light skinned! Now I react to emotions like white people.

The tears are coming but I have no voice.

"Did you come here looking for me? Did someone hurt you? Why are you crying?"

I'm looking up at him with tear filled eyes, shivering and scared out of my mind. He looks concerned and the guy he's with looks uncomfortable. It must be not knowing what to do.

"Come, let's go inside", he takes my hand.
"Should I see you tomorrow? Need time?", the guy he's with says.
"No, come on".

The bouncer steps aside like royalty is approaching and I follow Don up the steps and all his way to his office.

"I love you Donovan...", I start.
"I wonder where Caleb is...", he says at the same time making me stop talking. I'm no longer crying but I'm still sh*t scared.
"Caleb?", I change my speech.
"Yeah. He was here somewhere
I went out to get something down the road. I thought he would be in here. Didn't you see him?".
Phew! Breathe out. Fine, it's still too soon to celebrate but at least I have a chance to try and get ahead of the situation.
"He went with Chelsea. You know those two", breathe out again.
"Oh ok. Why are you here though baby? Something wrong? Talk to me Lotus", he lifts up my chin and my gaze meets his.
"I missed you so much and I needed you. Work was hectic. My boss made my life a living hell today and the company might shut down...", why am I crying now?
He looks at his friend as if asking for approval to embrace me. His friend nods and he takes me in his arms and let's me cry.
I need to get Don out of here and keep him apart from Caleb for the rest of their life. That way he'll never find out. I just hope Chelsea is ok. Hulk made me feel terrible. If Caleb hurts her, I don't know what I'll do. I think I'd kill him.

Poor guy. He's been drinking whiskey while Don and I were having a crying-comforting session. He looks unfazed though. Earlier he looked uncomfortable but now he's just like whatever, do your thing boy.

"My bad, angel this is Elik. Elik you've met my girl, Lotus". Only now he does the intro! I know the guy though. He's the one who sent me that R80k for my party and he will be getting me a car. Today his alluring aura has no effect on me, I have bigger problems.
"Nice to meet you again Elik, sorry you had to see me like this", I give him my hand to shake and blush a little. I hate being seen as weak!
"No worries. Nice to meet you again Lotus".

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My phone rings and I answer immediately.
"Chelsea, are you alright?", my heart picks up pace.
"Yeah, it's been crazy. Where are you?".
"Don's office. Where's Caleb?...Don was looking for him", trying not to be too obvious.
"I don't know. He drove off with Dalu and left me standing there. I tried to stop them but I lost. I'm coming, getting into the club now".
Oh dear Lord. Maybe I should tell Don the truth so he can call Caleb and stop him. But Caleb is a good guy, he wouldn't hurt a fly. But he's a gangster and has killed people before. My

poor heart. When all this comes out, this rough diamond, called Donavan Don Alpha Lemon etc, I've come to love will kill me.

"Chels. She's coming....Can we go home baby please? I had a long day", I want to take him away from here and keep him to myself so he doesn't meet up with Caleb.

"Can't. I have a meeting with Elik here and Caleb".

"Please baby. Can't you cancel? I need you my love", puppy eyes, needy voice and all.

"No Lotus. It's a matter of life and death. You and Chelsea go home for me ok?".

Tears well in my eyes again. How come other girls can manipulate their man with words but I can't win with mine?

"Tell you what, leave the door unlocked and I'll come to your place and wake you up the right way".

On any other day, that would have given me tingles but today no. He remains here, Caleb returns here and tells him everything and I might just be dead by tomorrow morning.

A panting Chelsea budes in without even knocking. She stops dead in her tracks with her jaw dropped.

"Elikplim?".

"Chelsea".

I look from her to him and I get an awkward vibe. She knows him? He knows her? Kanjani?

"What are you doing here?", she ignores Don and I and walks up to him.

"Chilling with Lemon. And you?".

"I'm here for Lotus, my bff".

I look at Don hoping to get some answers. What's going on here?

"You looking good as always", he says and adds that bewitching smile of his.

"You don't look too bad yourself", she says.

I want to pull her outside already so she can fill me in already!

"You girls go home now...leave the door open baby", Don says his byes and I follow Chelsea out.

"I have your car Don", I stop at the doorway and turn to tell him. Buying time is what I'm doing but clearly failing dismally at it. He laughs a little,

"Later my skat".

Why is he laughing though? Mxm. I don't want to see that beautiful black man ever again. I made a complete fool of myself busy crying in front of him and now this! And this leaving Don unguarded isn't sitting well with me at all.

Chelsea can read me like a book so she knows I'm in no position to drive. As she takes us home in Don's car I give up waiting for her to volunteer the 411 about that guy Elik back at the club.

"So, spill. That yummy guy? You know him?". Of course she knows him but you know what I mean.

"We have a history", she says. I wait for her to continue but nothing.

"You dated him?". That better be before I knew her because I'll feel betrayed for not having been told in real time.

"Dated is a strong word. Remember that Ghanaian guy I was crazy about? The one who took me to Dubai for that crazy weekend", she has this smile of memories on her face and I'm looking at her like she may be something else but my bestfriend is prettier than yours'.

I remember the Dubai trip. They had to fly Emirates to get the eVisa and they did it on their way to the airport. I never met the guy but he made her so impulsive, she was ungovernable those days.

"That's him? Oh wow! Oh no, now I can never look at him the same again!". The things she told me about him, you won't believe. I feel like I know him naked. Me and her get very descriptive when we share naughty deets! I still think she was exaggerating. No one can be that good in sex! Even Don is good, very good but he can't match up to the things she told me about her mystery Ghanaian rich guy.

"I thought that guy was a professor? No way that sexiness in the club is a professor. Dude!". I went to university, I know professors and that guy isn't one of them. He could be an Accountant or lawyer or maybe a Forex Trader but he looks way too divine to be a nerd. She can't fool me.

"He made you happy. Why did you break it off again?"

"He broke it off with me. He grew a conscience one day and told me he wanted to go back to being loyal to his girlfriend. A**hole!".

Oh I remember now, she had a hard time getting over whatever she had with him. But as always she had Hulk in speed dial.

I was beginning to feel better but my 5 minutes of forget-reality are up.

"Do you think Caleb with hurt Dalu?". I hope she just says no even if it's to ease my mind.

"That's the least of my worries. What will happen when he tells Donovan? That should be your question".

I shrug my shoulders.

"Should we call the police?", she suggests.

"And say what? That will anger him even more. And in the 1% chance that Caleb doesn't tell, I'll have played myself".

"I guess. There's nothing you can do though. Let's just wait it out and hope for the best".
What other option do I have?

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This has been the longest night of my life. Hulk came through and had a fight with Chelsea because he says I'm always putting her on the front line and she was defending me as always saying none of this is my fault. They made up I hope. They're in her bedroom so ja I'm going they're fine.

My stomach is rumbling but food is the last thing on my mind right now. The stress! Worse my mother is coming on Thursday, supposed to be at least because I might be a Gone Girl then. We all know Caleb is a snitch. Her tickets are booked though and she's excited, I'd hope to disappoint her by dying before she makes it here. I send her a 'goodnight. I love you' and she responds with a 'gdnyt. Luv u mo bby'. She's very special. One day I want to sit her down and ask how much energy she saves by writing shortened words.

Dalu's phone is still on voicemail.

Don says he's on his way. I might be imagining it but I could swear he was pissed. I left the door unlocked anyway.

Let me pray.

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HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

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The gun was taking too long so she took it and shot herself in the foot

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I left the door unlocked for nothing! Donovan didn't show up and that's not sitting well with me. His phone is off and I can't explain the fear in my heart in words. I have so much on my plate as it is and the last thing I need is fights with Don. I had a rough night, nightmares had me Michael Jackson bad. So I have a slight headache from not getting enough sleep.

I'm up early because the crisis at work needs me. I have no idea what I'll do about that. I'm hoping for the best and I'll pray about it. Once this comes out and people fall sick, my career is ruined before it even starts. Once it's said "JD Foods Salmonella outbreak" the first thing everyone in the industry will ask is, "Who's the QC?" and that happens to be me. No one will blame the boss, or those overpaid bum, or the floor staff. The QC always takes the fall and this time I'm taking Dalu down with me. My work, should anyone find out that we know each other outside the office then he's thoroughly fxcked, straight up no lube! The media will make it look like "Boyfriend makes girlfriend wrongfully pass audit, killing dozens of people in the process".

Dalu! My heart picks up pace at the thought of him. I open his number and stare at it then decide against calling him. I leave him a short WhatsApp message: 'call me'.

It's 5:15 am and my head is already this busy! I wish I could slide back into bed. It's so cold and I want to sleep all day. But ke ijob yijob mtshana. It's going to be a long day.

Chelsea seriously needs to stop taking the car keys to her bedroom. I didn't need to see that! Empty condom packets on the floor add to my stress. I better get my period when it's due, please please, I don't want to be a mother.

I call my mother as I drive down Main Road. It's past 6 and she's mad that I woke her up.

"We nontombi! Don't you have a watch?", she growls me.

"Ave uneDrama! (You're so dramatic). If I don't wake you up, who should I wake up?", she's so annoying.

"Don't you have boyfriends you can bother Lothasi? What do you want?". So much drama so early!

"I just wanted to talk to you sisi, akukhonto (there's nothing)", cold feet.

"You've got to be kidding me! Did you see the time? Stop being a nag and go back to sleep!".

That stings a little.

"Askies sisi yhoo. The thing is I'm in a situation and I don't know what to do", I try to change the subject.

She hung up and left me talking alone? Yerrr! I wish people knew how much I hate it when someone hangs up on me!

I can't call anyone else. I try Don's phone and it goes to voicemail. I have half a mind to make a U-Turn and drive down to the Cape Flats but I rest have to go to work. What option do I have than to listen to the radio since no one loves me.

'Due to the instability in the Cape Flats and the failure of the SAPS to manage the gang situation, the National Army has been deployed to stop the gang related violence by all means necessary. The commander in chief of the Defence Forces is adamant that if gang leaders are rounded up and eradicated then the brutality and inhumane behaviour observed in the Cape Flats can be resolved. This is a national plea, if anyone knows any gang leader or has any information about gang members, please call 0800 980 456 toll free. If the information checks out, the informant will be receive a reward of R20000. Gangs are a cancer in our communities that we've allowed to go on for far too long. It is time to put an end to the beastiality, says the commander in chief'.

I feel a shiver run up and down my back. Don! Is he safe? The traffic light is red so I try his number again but still nothing.

The day is long and it's phones ringing left right and center! I'm so busy that I even forget my problems. I skipped lunch even. By 6 pm I'm dog tired and can't take anymore. I ask Dr Dirk if he'll pay me for overtime and he says yes. Lucky him. I was going to quit had he said no.

I haven't looked at my phone. I ignore most messages and go to the relevant ones only.

'Heard from Don yet?' ~ Chelsea

'Come to my apartment after work. You owe me that at least' ~ Dalu

'Sup?' ~ Don.

I've never scrutinised three letters so much in my life. What does he mean Sup? Did he mean 'Supper' as in I should come over for supper? Or sup like what's up? A greeting? A question? A threat? Good Lord, what does 'Sup' mean?. His phone is off again! Aaarrggghhh.

En route >>> Cape Flats

National army or not I'm going. I'm a civilian after all and the soldiers have an obligation to protect me.

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Don is home and his gate and main door is open. The brotherhood is here, I really hate soccer season damn!

"Hi. Where's Don? I mean Alpha". I greet nervously. There's six brothers here including Hilton. Only one says 'Awe', the rest don't even look at me. What a wow. I'm about to ask again where their alpha is when Hilton points upstairs and I nod my thank you.

I find him on the phone and I wait nervously, thoughts racing each other up and down in my head. I need a good story and fast.

"Lotus!", he says blandly when he eventually gets off the phone.

"Why are you greeting me like you don't want me here?". I cross my arms getting ready to be defensive.

"What's up? You look like you're ready to fight", he smiles at me.

My brain screams: Fake Smile! Don't fall for it!

He gives me a hug but I don't hug back. If I get angry first he won't have a choice but to be sorry and lenient with me.

"Why didn't you come over last night? You said I should wait up! I waited".

"Oh ja. It was very late when I left the club so I thought to leave you alone since you have a job in the morning".

"You could have called instead of disrespecting me like that!".

"Disrespecting you? Skat, what's going on with you vandag (today)? Are you okay?". He frowns a little but I remain in character.

"I tried calling you several times today! Why was your phone off?".

"Maybe I didn't wanna be found, did you consider that?". Shxt, he's getting annoyed now. He should be apologising!

"And what are you doing here? Didn't I tell you to not just show up? It's not safe out here!"

"Don't raise your voice at me, I'm not part of your pack!" .

He looks at me and he looks defeated for a second.

"Seriously?...I'm looking out for you here! 55 people have been killed in the past week alone! Do you wanna be part of the statistics?"

"Yeah well, killed by your likes isn't". That's a thought that shouldn't have become words.

He looks at me and squints a little.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Silence. I didn't mean it that way.

"Say what you mean! Look me in the eye and say exactly what you want to say".

I look down. Shucks. I'm so angry. Why am I so angry?

"You mean to tell me that you came all the way from your perfect little paradise to come and pick a fight with me? Do I look like I have time to play your little games right now?"

He's pissed off now and that's pissing me off. How dare he gets mad at me for being mad at him!

"Say what you mean. What's all this? The fxck did I do to you?"

"You killing people! People are dying and it's all your fault", I lash out at him. He steps close to me and his breath fans my face. I step back and he steps closer, we repeat until he has me pinned against the wall.

"Is that what you think?", his voice comes out in a husky tone.

"Yes and I'm sick of it. I'm sick of you and your little friends and your narcissistic ways. Of all things you could have become, you chose to be a gangster, igintsa Don! And you gonna stand here and tell me how it's not safe out there when you are part of the reason it's not safe!"

"You think I chose this life?"

"We all have a choice and you chose to be a killer, a kingpin, a drug dealer and who knows what else! You chose this life ewe!", why am I yelling? His hand closes around my neck, not too tight but enough to shut me up. He pushes me harder against the wall and there's no love at all in his face.

"Please don't kill me", I whimper

"Because that's what I do for fun, right? I go around killing people. That's what you think of me?"

I regret every word I said. I was deflecting but I crossed several lines. What came over me? "Don...", I lift my hand to touch his face. I think that was pain I saw flash across his face. I'm so so sorry. I didn't mean it like that.

"Is that what you think of me Lotus?", so cold and uncaring.

"No baby I didn't mean it that way", I try to undo the damage although I think I already spoke too much.

"Well you said it. Do you think I enjoy carrying a gun around? Do you think when I was ten at school and my teacher asked what I wanted to be, I said a gangster? I had dreams too you know, I was going to be a pilot and fly all over the world but I came to terms with reality. I grew up around gangs. To get to school I had to dodge bullets and get harassed for not belonging to any side. So I chose the Wolves because my father had run with them and got out. I thought maybe I too could run just to stay alive, maybe I could climb up the ranks and one day get out. Do you think all my brothers chose this life? We chose to live in these conditions? For an educated person I expected you to know your history! Haven't you looked around and seen how our people are struggling? You think my brothers enjoy this life where we only have three roads; to jail, to hospital or to the grave! We don't kill, we defend to survive. You don't see that by now?"

I feel terrible and I think I'm going to cry.

"Don...", he loosens his hold around my neck and stares daggers at me.

"Why am I even explaining myself to you by the way?... You know what, get the fxck out of my house and go back to your perfect little life".

"Come on baby, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way", I plead.

"Get out Lotus before I say things I'll regret!". I search his eyes for love but there's nothing there. If anything I think he hates me right now.

"I'm sorry Don, I didn't mean to", I'm embarrassed that I even said that. He turns away from me.

"I'm sorry Don I didn't mean it that way. Please baby".

I keep saying sorry until he turns around. He smiles at me so sweetly I'm confused and spooked at the same time.

"It's alright my skat. Now take all your sorries and get the fxck out of my house".
What? So what was that smile?

I need to think fast but it's thoughts and mind scheming that have me in this position to begin with so maybe not.

"Get out!", he raises his voice and I'm startled. I'm sorry though, from the bottom of my heart. I want to say sorry but he said I must take my sorries and go.

"I came with your car. I can't just leave it. How will I get home?"

"Take it".

"Don, come on baby. I love you, please baby".

"I'm the last person to define love for you but I doubt your judgemental ass knows what it is either".

That stung.

Second last resort.

"This is not fair! I said I'm sorry a hundred times. We can't be fighting like this. My mother is coming day after tomorrow and me and you need to present a united front". Please work...He loves my mother. Well, hearing about her at least.

"She's your mother not mine, so I don't understand what you mean".

"She's my mother!", I'm now reaching and I know it.

"Yeah, my mother is dead so again what's your point?"

Maybe I should take my L and do the long walk downstairs and go. I messed up and I doubt I can discuss Dalu now.

"You're still here?", his eyes are boring invisible holes into me.

Last Resort.

I lock the door and start undressing. Angry sex usually ends in forgiveness. He just stands there looking at me. I won't let his eye discourage me though. I keep going until my clothes are a pile on the floor.

"Are you done?", he looks at me like I'm dressed! Like can't he see all this? Is he sure he doesn't want to touch this? Ok I just used my last resort so I don't know what to do now.

He steps towards me and I'm thinking 'yay!'. He kisses me hard and grabs my ass so hard it really hurts. Then he stops like he realized that he shouldn't be doing that. My disappointment is beyond articulation.

"Get into bed. I'm going out. I have people to kill....Don't wait up".

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER FORTY

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He did say I shouldn't wait up after all. It's past midnight and I've been waiting. His phone is off, no surprise there. I want to go and find him but he locked me inside the house. Can you believe it? He locked me inside! What if there's a fire and I need to get out? That coloured boy really doesn't think.

I feel terrible for the things I said to him. My plan backfired badly and I'm here now regretting every single word. I love him, I really do but ey I don't know. Me and him are like fire and petrol, we always gas each other up and not in a good way. We love hard but I think we fight harder. But I think I really hurt him today. If only he could come back so I can give him a hug. It's this Dalu thing man, it's haunting me. At least he's alive. I hope he has all his limbs intact or I can never forgive myself. I'm yet to go and see him so I can explain myself. I keep thinking that Don knows and is playing mind games. I don't for one second think Caleb would have kept quiet. This whole thing is driving me crazy. That plus the crisis at work equals me mentally drained.

I have to make peace with Don. My party planning is well underway and I've spent close to R40000 so far! The cake is being done, Chelsea and I are doing dress fittings tomorrow and my mother is coming down on Thursday so ya no, breaking up with bae is not a viable option. I'm so sad though and I have this pain in my heart. I know it's self inflicted but it doesn't hurt any less.

I text: 'Baby, I'm sorry for everything I said to you. I love you and I don't want to lose you. I'm going to sleep now. Be safe'.

One tick. Sleep where are you? I know many think it's a myth but counting sheep actually works.

"Good. You're awake now", he says unapologetically after harassing me out of my sleep. I'm grumpy and mad. How can he wake me up like he's waking up a soldier at camp? Hay suka! My phone says it's 1:13 am and he woke me up. For the why mara ye? Does he know I had to count to 231 before I could fall asleep. I'm so pissed off I can't even hide it.

I think he just came home. He looks tired, I wonder what he was up to tonight. I'm too pissed to ask though and considering how we left things earlier, I doubt I have the privilege to ask questions. He'll probably say "I shot someone. Judge me, give it your best shot". So no not gonna ask.

"Right, sit up straight. I'm going to talk to you now".

"I'm sleeping!", unamused.

"You're awake. Now sit up straight".

Talk about trying me so late at night! And why is he sounding so commanding and serious? But let me humour him.

"Thetha, khawulezisa (speak, make it quick)". I cross my arms and purse my lips.

He gets up, picks up the ottoman and sits on the side of the bed near me.

"Baby, I need you to listen to me and hear me".

Ok that sounds serious. I don't respond and he goes on anyway.

"I'm not your stupid ex-boyfriend, I'm not your boss man at work and I'm definitely not your father! So you need to stop taking out all the anger you have at them on me!", just like that, he jabs at me unprovoked. What did he just say?

"Your ex hurt you, your boss undermines you, your father never showed up for you. You hate your mother for not telling you who your father is. You don't have a brain of your own without your girl Chelsea. Do you see the pattern here?", he actually sounds serious. I'm so deeply offended.

"What the hell is this about? What are you doing?", I look at him, I'm starting to get pissed off. Really!

"You have all this anger and resentment inside you and you take it all out on me! You desperately want our relationship to fail so you can prove to yourself that all men are horrible simply because all the men who've crossed your path have been horrible".

What? And no, this is not Don. Someone fed him this. Don doesn't talk like this. I can't even respond because wow!

"Baby, you can't even think on your own. You have to run everything past Chelsea! You're too dependent on her. I know you think you owe her for what your ex did to her but I avenged that so now you're even. You can stop worshipping her now".

I have no words. None. I'm in shock. WTF! This boy is insulting me. Bringing up my father and Ro, and now calling me an invalid without Chelsea? I guess he grew an extra pair of balls because wow!

"I'm a gangster Lotus. That's not going to change anytime soon. I do what I do. It's not the best life to live but at least I don't lie about it and make others feel bad so I can feel better. I'm the best there is in my world so what others do in theirs has fokol to do with me. But you my

angel, you have to constantly bring up the shxt I tell you just so you seem better than me", he says.

"That's not true", I'm still in shock so that's all I say.

"We talk here and we're good then you run to Chelsea and she tells I'm bad for you then you come back confused and talking shxt to me. I'm not fxcking Chelsea so these stupid games have to stop".

Chelsea did nothing. That was all me.

"I'm insulted Don".

"Are you? The truth hurts that much?".

Oh Father Abraham, lend me some faith. I need it so I can believe I'm incapable of murder.

"I'm not sure what it is you want Lotus. One day I think you love me and the next you hate what I am, then you say you love me. How can you love me but hate who I am? Educate me, how does that work?".

Why is he saying all these things?

"Don?", I look up at him. I don't understand. My crossed hands have long fallen and I'm getting hurt more and more.

"Merishka was right. You want to love me but in your eyes I'm beneath you and you're embarrassed to be associated with me. You want a suit and tie man, with degrees and an 8-5 job. So you get mad everytime you realize I will never be that man for you".

Of course Merishka played therapist on him! I should have guessed. That Merishka! To think I loved her once upon a time.

"Oh so you went and discussed me with Merishka. You two psychoanalysed me and came up with all this crap? Lind'qhela kak'bi!".

"Yes", he says bluntly.

Fxck Merishka for trying to be Don's mother. She should take several seats and leave me the f alone! The next time I see her, she'll know me.

"You discussing me with people now? You're telling people about my father and my ex and my job, are you serious right now? I told you those things in confidence"

"You tell Chelsea everything! You even tell her how I fxck you! So fxck off with your better than all attitude. I'm sick of it".

He really doesn't care I think.

"What?", why is this nigga swearing at me?

We have a back and forth and it's escalating very fast. We're going to regret this in the morning, I have a feeling. I know he says he doesn't have a heart but damn, he's giving a new meaning to 'heartless'. He says I'm an angry woman and I say things to try and hurt him. He believes I'm pushing him away because I'm so used to men leaving me, so since he's treating me good and not leaving me, I'm starting to push him away. Merishka really brain washed him tonight.

"You don't even love me! Not even once have you ever said it", I yell at him.

"If you're in this to hear me tell you that I love you then you're wasting your life. You'll never get those words from me. I don't love and that's it, it's never gonna change".

My poor heart. Of all the things he said today, this one hurts the most.

"You don't love me Don?", my voice sounding too pitiful. He looks at me as if searching my face for something then looks away and leaves it unanswered.

"I told you, I do not do love. What is love? GTFOH with that nonsense. Love is for the weak and do I look weak to you?"

"Oh so I'm weak? I love you so that makes me weak? Am I weak?"

"Yes you are", he says bluntly and I gasp, I'm tongue tied.

"Look, Lotus. You can be childish, selfish, inconsiderate and straight up disrespectful. I like you sweetheart, a lot, but I don't have time for games. I have so much to take care of. I have the General on my case about you. Do you even know how much I have to defend this thing I have with you? My people think I'm whipped and I try and treat you nice but you turn around and spit in my face".

I'm looking at him, hurting even more. Selfish? Childish? Me?

"If you're tired of me and all that's me then go home and rest my queen. Forget about me", he says that so calmly I want to pull my hair out.

I didn't mean to cry but he's breaking my heart. The tears are coming faster and faster. I hear him sigh and sigh again, probably deciding whether to walk out or to comfort me. I'm praying for the latter and I'm relieved when he sits on the bed and pulls me into his arms.

"I know your ex hurt you badly baby but please man, I'm not him. You need to stop punishing me for things other men did to you. How can you not see how I've let you in? Against everything I believe in, I've trusted you blindly and let you in....Don't cry my angel. I hate it when you cry".

Ok now it's like he pressed a button because I'm bawling my eyes out. This was him talking and not Merishka and it touched my soul.

"I can't lose you", I say to him when I eventually get it together.

"You won't if you get your act together. Grow up for me skat and learn when to shut your mouth, please man".

"And you need to learn how to talk!", not too unkind but yes he should learn how to speak to a lady. He smiles just a bit and I know I still have him.

"Those things you said about my father, it's not true. And I'm over Roland", he had no right.

"They hurt you, don't act strong with me. I'll protect you. Whatever his name is is paying for it. As for your father, I know you want to know who he is. I want to find him for you but I wouldn't know where to start. I can ask your mother when she comes".

"Ask her how? I've been asking her for as long as I can remember with no luck".

"She will answer me. People usually answer when I ask them questions".

Is he insane? He would torture my mother or am I exaggerating?

"No! Don't! I don't need to know who my father is, I'm ok", yet I can't ignore that vacancy that's been in my heart from day one, the void that only meeting my father can fill.

"If you say so....You have to sleep. You have work tomorrow", he brushes back my weave with his fingers.

I'm tempted to ask him to call his doctor to write me a sick note but there's a crisis that needs me.

"Any chance of you giving me before I sleep? Make up nyana?"

"If I didn't know better I'd say sex is all you think about.... But I'm not complaining", he bites his lip like that and I'm sold. I might as well say sorry now

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HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER FORTY ONE

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THURSDAY.

I'm knocking off an hour earlier today so I can go and pick my mother up at the airport. Dr Dirk is nice these days so he okayed my leave. He's treating me like I'm important these days and he's forever red in the face - side effects of being pale, you were your troubles in the open for the whole world to see.

We are still playing the waiting game, waiting for someone out there to die from food poisoning after eating our products and for the Ministry of Health to rain down on us. We might just be on the safe side since the incubation period of Salmonella is up to 72 hours meaning someone should have come forward by now. But we can't celebrate yet because past cases show that some illnesses have been documented 16 days after exposure.

Production is still on hold and as much as I feel bad for the labourers because no work no pay, this needs to be done. We're repairing the factory and doing all the things I've been telling Dr Dirk to do for months now. He's a good boy these days so he's doing as I say. That nasty pothole on the floor has been covered, we have a new oven, we sent the scales out for calibration and the ceiling is being fixed as we speak. We are finally doing what we are supposed to be doing. I told Dr Dirk that if all goes well then meaning if no one decides to die or report an illness, then we will resume normal duty on Monday. That gives the constructors enough time to 'heal' our pigsty, I mean factory.

If I'm being honest, I'm doing this for Dalu. If there is an outbreak, then at least the inspectors will find the factory in order and no one will put the blame on the auditor who turned a blind eye to a rotting factory. It's the least I can do.

"Bye Dr Dirk", I wave at him through his open day.

"Lotus, a second please", he says and I roll my eyes as I double back and walk into his office. He's delaying me. I smile generously anyway as I say my "Ja Meener".

"Your party tomorrow, you mentioned that you only take cash as presents. How much are we talking?"

I realised seku late that my asking for cash only made me look like a money hungry black woman but since I already sent out the invites I need to stand by my decision.

"Whatever you can afford Doc. Money is money".

"Alright, will you have a speed point or you want hard cash?"

I pause a little, I didn't think of that you know. "I'll have a speed point yes", surely Don will let me use one of the club's ones.

"Ok, I'll swipe then. I hate carrying cash".

"No problemo. Let me run, my mother us landing in 40 minutes and between throwing myself into the oven and keeping her waiting, I'll pick the former anyway".

He wants to laugh I can see. He probably has a picture of a crazy woman in his head.

"Before you go, I wanted to give you something for your party, it's not much...don't take it to mean I'm saying you can't afford it on your own...feel free to say no...I just thought maybe you know it might you know come in handy". Oh dear, being white must be hard these days. You can't offer a black person anything without fear of them saying 'oh so you giving me handouts? You think I can't afford it'.

"Whatever it is, I'm sure I'll appreciate it. So spill, what is it?"

"A barrel of wine", he says.

"What? For real? Are you serious? Wow!". I can't even hide my excitement. Good Lord, this man is offering me alcohol and he wasn't sure I'd say yes?

"You'll like it?"

"Like it? A barrel of wine? You mean love it? Because yes, I'll love it". I want to hug him right now.

"Phew! I wasn't sure how you'd take it. Send me an address to deliver to tomorrow and I'll have someone take it there".

Wow John! You really have a heart somewhere beneath that frugality, don't you? I'm re-energized so I run down the stairs to where I parked. I check how much wine is in a barrel and it says ~300 bottles. Thixo! I already have an idea. I'm going to gift everyone who comes tomorrow a bottle to take home. There'll be two bottles on each table plus all the other alcohol Don already provided. I don't know how to feel, they not to laugh, ok so some shebeen didn't pay 'tax' to the Wolves so they 'took' all the alcohol in that shebeen and that's what will be served tomorrow. So he took all the money he had put aside for the alcohol and donated it to The Peace Makers. Now get this, The Peace Makers is an organisation against gangs and gang violence. So how a gang leader funds an NGO against gangs surpasses my understanding. Quite messed up but I meant it when I said I won't fight Don and his ways anymore.

There's traffic already! Bathong, it's not even 3:30 yet! Cape Town and its never ending winter! It's still raining and this wind will blow me over if I'm not careful. Can anyone tell me why there's more traffic in winter than in summer? I've always wondered.

I'm forced to listen to the radio to pass the time while I find my way to the highway at snail speed. There's a discussion with an 'expert' about gang violence in the Cape Flats and how the army is doing a commendable job at stopping 'these calamitous barbarians responsible for the despoliation of the impecunious and squalid Cape Flats'. I can't listen to this! So now we must listen to the radio

with dictionaries in our hands? This so called expert could have just said 'these savage gangsters causing unrest in the already poor Cape Flats'. I hate it when poor use big words to try and let us know how educated they are. It's preposterous!

Big words aside, why is this expert lying though? The army is doing nothing. Arresting a few runners is nothing to clap hands for! The way they are going on as if gangbangers are not human is making me sick. What do they know? It's so easy to judge from the terrace, but it's foolish to paint everyone with the same brush. Did this expert just say 90% of males in the Cape Flats belong to a gang? I wish I had airtime to waste so I could call in and advise him to stop being a moron before it's too late.

I can't listen to this nonsense anymore. Time to listen to Chris Brown. 'Up To You' starts playing and a memory of Dalu and I making out in his cleaner than a priest on a Sunday flashes in my mind. I press next, feeling a little pain in my heart and a knot in my stomach. I did Dalu wrong, didn't I?

I'm taking the ramp when my phone rings, rudely interrupting Chris's Privacy! I let it ring on because I need all my faculties working together to keep me focused on the road. It's raining so it's quite blurry and the roads are slippery so I'm not taking that risk. I only answer on the third call, when I'm now safely on the highway.

"Baby".

"Sup my angel".

"I'm good. I'm on my way to the airport to pick up my mother".

"Ok so you're driving? Why are you in the phone when you're driving?".

"Leave me alone Donovan!".

He laughs and my heart melts. He means so much to me than he knows.

"Listen, about tonight, I was thinking that maybe I shouldn't come".

"You're crazy! You're coming and that's it". Tshini!

"But baby...", he tries to wiggle himself out of our dinner date with my mother!

"But nothing lala! You're coming and don't be late tu".

"Eish, ok fine Miss Bully! Now get off your phone and stay safe for me alright?".

I'm smiling like an idiot.

"Ok, talk later then. Love you".

"Sure" and he hangs up.

I'm using Don's car, the other one that's very nice. I took back that one and no way in hell would I take any of his dropped, pimped up cars. How would I drive over speed humps? Potholes wona? No, cannot! And that bursting sound they make just isn't for me.

Parking at the 20 minutes free zone at the airport is a nightmare because of these Uber and Taxify drivers. They are all over the place like vinegar on chips. I just made it right on time. I'm dramatic I know, I'm holding a placard with my mother's name in it and waiting there. I promised myself that I won't fight with her the entire weekend. I want to love her and build something solid with her. Mental note: No talks of my father this weekend.

Oh there she is, looking flyer than a kite. Jealous down, my mother still gets it. She has hips for days and those jeans are shaping her up so good. Damn, mami! I can't believe my father left that. Why she's wearing shades indoors though I have no clue. She's seen me too and her smile mirrors mine. She's so naturally beautiful, perks of being Xhosa I suppose. I don't mean to brag but beauty is one thing we have in our tribe. We hug and kiss, she looks genuinely happy to see me.

She complains about turbulence as we walk towards the parkade. It's not long before I'm laughing. The drama and exaggeration in this woman!

"What's this?" Looking at the yellow plastic bag she just gave me.

"Ngamagwinya (vetkoeks). Umama forced me to carry them. She said she knows you're not eating well and you're thin now so here".

Sounds like my grandmother yes.

"She wanted me to carry samples and beans in a Tupperware. I 'forgot' it, sorry my baby". We laugh at that. I dig into a vetkoek after we drive out. No one makes them like my grandmother.

I'm making the most of this drive with her because I know when we get home Chelsea will just take over and I'll be sidelined. At least she's sharing a room with me so we'll catch up again after Chelsea is done with her.

"So Chelsea bought a new car?"

"Ha a, it's not Chelsea's...it's my boyfriend's".

I look straight ahead, coming her eyes drilling me.

"Your boyfriend? Do you have a blesser Lothasi?", with an accusatory tone.

"No mama".

"How old is this boyfriend of yours? What does he do? What's his name?"

"His name is Donavan. He's 30".

"Donavani? What kind of name is that? Is he Xhosa? What does he do?"

"He's coloured", looking straight ahead.

"Coloured? Lothasi! What does he do? He's only 30 but he has enough money to buy me an air ticket, give you this expensive car, throw you a party and give you all that money you keep sending to us. What does he do? You keep dodging that question".

My heart is picking up pace but I'm trying to stay calm.

"He umm, he runs".

"Oh ok makes sense. He's an athlete. So he's a celebrity so? Anyway I'm not shocked. Coloured people are fast, look at Chad le Clos".

LOL.

"Sisi Chad le Clos is a swimmer!"

"Same thing...At least he sounds decent. You invited him over ne? I need to grill him".

I swallow and keep looking forward. I'm not looking forward to tonight I won't lie.

"I will be nice. I only want the best for you my baby. You might not believe it but that's the honest truth".

I know, deep down I know.

Didn't I tell you Chelsea will take her from me in no time? Unlike me and her ego fight 89% of the time, Chelsea and her are always good...like all the time. She's too interested in Chelsea's life it gets annoying sometimes. Like now Chelsea just said, "Sis I need urgent help. I have three men haunting my nights. One, Hulk - our situationship has been going on for way too long now. He even says he loves me sometimes it's weird. I might love him, I don't know. He's always there for me. Two, Lotus's habits made me bump into an old flame of mine. He didn't say anything but I could see it in his eyes that he still wants this. The way he dumped me before was brutal though so put a star on that one. Three - Caleb. The love of my life. He likes me, I can feel it but I think he's scared that I'm not his type and I'll break his heart. He's playing hard to get and I'm losing my patience".

I'm expecting my mother to bite her ear off so imagine my surprise when she engages her, "Always be with a man who loves you more than you love him. This ex of yours who dumped you, leave him alone unless it's to get him back, make him fall in love with you then dump him to give him a taste of his own medicine. Hulk, yhoo nawe Chelsea and that guy, get married already, kunini lisenza am up and down! As for this Caleb, who is he?".

"Some rough guy. He's in a gang with Lotus's boyfriend".

Chelsea! I see my mother's hand freeze. She was dicing peppers and she just stopped. I explain before she even says anything.

"Not a real gang sisi. Like come on now. Chelsea means he's friends with my boyfriend. 'Igenge' as in squad or group, you know the word".

I see her chest fall and I silently breathe my sigh of relief. Chelsea and her mouth, hay suka mann! She mouths a silent "I'm sorry" before they go back to man picking for her.

Not that I was asked but I'd pick Hulk for her.

DINNER

Time is flying and each second that goes by is a second closer to the inevitable. Don having dinner with us. My mother insisted on this dinner and the more I made it known that I was against it, the more she believed I was dating someone dodgy. So I let her win and had to borderline force Don to go with it. I'm very

worried. Don is not everyone's cup of tea. The scars and tattoos make him look like a certified killer plus he's blunt and crude. He doesn't know how to talk, he has verbal diarrhoea. I understand him but not many would and I doubt my mother will.

The three of us are cooking up a storm and unlike my mother, I'm not looking forward to the dinner. I wonder why Chelsea is Team Sisi and not Team Me today. She better keep her mouth shut or else me and her will have a problem. I will be the one to tell my mother that I'm sleeping with a gangster and I'll do that in year 2030.

All is set. I excuse myself and go to my room. I get down on my knees and pray for a non dramatic dinner. Can my mother behave today, can Don not swear and may Chelsea tame her tongue. Amen.

'I'm outside', Don texts just as I'm done, as if on cue.
'Coming'.

I'm nervous but I have to keep it together. I don't want to scare him any more than he already is. It's funny though, a whole Don, an alpha of one of the toughest gangs in Cape Town, a man who leads and commands for a living, is scared of my mother? He's such a confusing human.

He's standing next to the car, leaning on its body a little, looking all shades of good and cleaned up, I can't help throwing myself into his arms. He put in all this effort for me? It means a lot to me. The fact that he agreed to do this in the first place means everything. He may not love me but at least I know I'm not just a fuck buddy to him.

Hugs and too many kisses later I free him from my hold. Nice jeans, nice plain sneakers, a hoodie covering his neck tattoos perfectly, he shaved, he has a new haircut, he smells nice. Something else looks different. Where's his teardrop tattoo?

"Merishka covered it up with make up", he says. She did a good job I must say, you would have to be looking for it to see it. I push Merishka to the back of my mind, no negativity tonight.

"You look handsome baby. I think I just fell in love with you all over again", I stand on the tips of my toes to kiss him. He squeezes my ass and his fresh breath fans my face. No sign of alcohol or weed on his breath, just clean. I'm too impressed right now.

"Thank you my skat".

He really shouldn't bite his lip like that when he looks at me. He knows how wet it gets me.

As much as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so is handsomeness. Chelsea thinks Don is ugly, she says the only thing going for him is his eyes. I don't think so. Although he's not an Adonis, ugly is too strong of a word. I love him just the way he is and yes his eyes my lord.

There's nothing he can ever do to cover the scars on his face and I'll be damned if I let anyone make him feel bad for having them. Not even my mother gets a pass so she better behave.

"I wanted to wear a shirt and a jacket but it left my neck out".
Ncoooow mann! He would have put on a formal shirt for me?
"It's not a fancy dinner baby. You look good, very good".
"Why are you smiling like that?", he taps my nose with his finger.
"Nothing. It's just you. You're perfect", I keep my smile.
He blushes and gives me that smile.

"Come, let's not keep your mother waiting. Help me get stuff out of the car".
I'm wondering what stuff but I don't ask. He brought cake for dessert, an expensive bottle of wine and he has a nice colorful bouquet for my mother. Talk about going all out. Don knows how to buy flowers? No ways, all this screams Merishka. Again, forget Merishka and her over involvement in my boyfriend's life.

"And what's in that brown envelope?", I know what's in it, I just don't understand why he's bringing it.
"Money", he says innocently.
"For what?".
"My brothers thought it might be a good idea to give your mother money as a thank you for you know, giving me you".
I can't help laughing. So all those guys don't understand the concept of lobola? They think you meet the mother and pay up whether you intend to marry or not? So cute. Was there a meeting before coming here? He called Merishka and his brothers to ask for help with this date? So cute.
We've never been on a date come to think of it but it's ok. Now that I know he can be changed, I'll teach him flowers, chocolates and restaurants.
"Leave the money baby, you don't have to pay for anything...yet", giggles.
I toy with the idea of him marrying me and paying lobola. It's a pretty sight in my head.

My mother and Chelsea meet us by the door. Talk about being forward! It's like my mum is looking at a ghost. She quickly masked it with a smile but I saw the look she gave him and I hate her for it. She's one to judge, she has dated questionable men before. One guy she once dated stole her money and disappeared, another one tried to rape me, so please she shouldn't even think of it.

"Welcome", she gives him a fake smile and takes the flowers.
Chelsea takes the wine and I have the cake in my hands.

I'm sitting next to Don and opposite Chelsea, my mother is next to Chelsea and opposite Don. I don't know why I'm relieved that Don can eat with a fork and knife. I'm not judging him, I don't give a flying fish if he has table etiquette or not but we are here to impress my mother so it might have been a disaster if he picked up the wrong knife or if he couldn't hold the fork properly.

There's long gaps of silence between the question and answer session between my mother and Don. He's polite and he's speaking proper English, I can tell even Chelsea is impressed.

It's going very well. I've relaxed a bit and I'm also talking and Chelsea has joined in. I update them about the crisis at work and Chelsea tells us about the case she's helping with at work until my mother gets too personal! I cringe and put my hands under the table so that no one can see my clenched fists.

"You have too many scars on your face. You look like a skollie (hooligan/criminal). What happened?"

Don takes his one hand off the table and onto his lap. I take a sip of my wine and hold my baby's hand with my left, under the table. He doesn't lose composure though.

"This one, I was stabbed in the head. I was in a coma for 3 weeks. This one, I was cut by some skollies", he emphasises on the 'skollies'.

"This one, someone wanted to take Lotus away from me and when I wouldn't give her up, he cut me".

He was in a coma? How come I've never heard that one before? And that one the General gave him, I remember it like it was yesterday. I tighten my hold on his hand. My mother gives me the 'we'll talk later' eye. She probably thinks Don was fighting with another guy for me.

"Oh ok. They look pretty bad. Some might mistake you for a criminal".
Silence all round.

"So Madonna, how did you get here? Did you use a taxi? My daughter has your car", she continues.

"I drove, my other car. The one she recently brought back", he says.

"How many cars do you have?"

"A lot", he says.

"A lot is not a number".

"Five I think, maybe six or seven, not sure".

I squeeze his hand harder. He should have just said two.

"What do you need all those cars for? Why are you wasting money on cars? Don't you know that a car is a liability? Do you have a house?"

"Yes I do ma'am. More than one. But I love cars very much", he sounds so timid you wouldn't believe!

"What I hear you saying is you have a lot of money! Are you paying the bank every month for all those cars and houses?"

"No ma'am. I don't owe anyone for them".

"Oh ok. I hope you're not stealing those cars or doing fraud", she says, sipping on her wine.

"Where are your parents?", she resumes her interrogation. It's going to be a long night! We are not even on dessert yet and she has been questioning him like he killed someone.

"My mother passed away when I was little and my father is in jail".

I know he hates that subject so I'm hoping she won't go deeper into it. Oops, looks like I hoped too soon.

"Did your father kill your mother? Is that why he's in jail?"

"Sisi, please", I come to the rescue. I don't know what happened to his mother but I think she's out of line now.

"No. I killed my mother. I was playing with my father's gun thinking it's a toy. She came to take it from me but I shot her. My father on the other hand, I..."

"It's ok nyana (son), I'm sorry I asked. You don't have to tell me".

The silence that follows gives a new meaning to awkward.

"So Madonna", she starts again and I roll my eyes heavenward. Isn't she tired of grilling him?

He hasn't touched any alcohol today. He doesn't drink wine anyway. I bought him beer but he said no he's fine.

"Are you using condoms with my daughter?". I choke on my wine and Chelsea is so shocked the wine that was in her mouth sprays on my face.

"Sorry, I'm so sorry. It's just ok wow!", Chelsea says.

Don remains still. I don't know how he's doing it. My mother is mad.

"I asked you a question", she says. So she's really not letting it go?

"I used to", Don says. Does he have to be that honest?

"Used to?"

"Yes, when I first met her I used condoms".

"Then what happened?"

"Then we would have sex unexpectedly or in places out of the house and we didn't have them, plus we would have it so many times or she would just get on me in the middle of the night and so we just went with it".

I just want to die. My mother's eyes are wide opened.

"So you mean to tell me that you're sleeping with my daughter without condoms?"

"Yes ma'am".

Such honesty should be a crime. No wonder he went to jail. His trial must have been the easiest. The judge probably asked "Donavan, did you do this?" And he just said "Yes your honour".

"Why? Are you trying to get her pregnant? Have you been tested?"

"No ma'am", he says.

"Lotus Janse van Rensburg! Why are you having sex without condoms? You want to get pregnant? Are you on contraceptives? What's wrong with you?", she raises her voice and I look down.

Damn you Donavan! He shouldn't have answered that question. Chelsea is enjoying this! I'll get her.

"So Madonna, you want to get my baby pregnant?", she turns back to him since I've remained mute.

"No. I don't want children".

A pause of silence. That statement of his always hurts me, but today it's embarrassing.

"Why?"

"I have my reasons", Don says. I think he's starting to get annoyed by my mother.

"You're playing my baby wena. What are your intentions with her?"

"Intentions?", he asks, looking confused.

"Will you marry her?"

"No", he says bluntly. I look down and wish this dinner had never happened.

"What? So what is this? Do you even love her? Do you love her?"

I know the answer that's coming and I do not wish my mother to hear it. I jump in.

"Don, please help me in the kitchen", getting up before he answers.

"I'm not done with him. He's disrespectful! He doesn't love you Lothasi".

"Ha a sisi, it's enough now. Don, kitchen, now", I'm happy when he follows me.

"I'm sorry", he stands behind me as I lean on the counter. I know he is, it's who he is. Couldn't he lie for me? Couldn't he just tell my mother what she wanted to hear. But naye she went too far. What was all that? I'm being selfish. I know the man I'm with. What I didn't know is the coma part and his mother.

I turn around and take him in my arms and just hold him. I want to cry so badly but no, not tonight.

"I didn't know about your mother baby. I'm so sorry. I'm sorry my mother asked you all those questions". He doesn't say anything, just lets me hold him there. The things he's been through are enough to make anyone give up on life. And I know he doesn't love, he doesn't want marriage and he doesn't want children. And since me and him are still here together, connected in a way, I guess we'll just vibe till whenever.

"I love you. I don't care about any of it. I love you", I lift my face so those blue eyes can know I mean it.

"I love you Don".

Still he doesn't respond but he gets it because his hug got tighter.

"Lothasi, give me a moment with uMadonna", my mother interrupts our moment. And why on earth is she calling him Madonna? She gets to me yaz.

I leave them to talk though and I hope Don doesn't slip up. Let me go and have Chelsea laugh in my face.

"I'm not stupid! Show me your neck right now", I hear my mother say in a hushed voice. I freeze in my step. What? How? Why?

I can't let my mother see Don's tattoos. What prompted her to wanna check him in the first place? Did Chelsea say something? And what does she mean she's not stupid? I wouldn't put it past her. Does my mother know Don, by any chance? Nah! That's absurd. What then? Questions no answers. My heart is racing in my throat as I double back into the kitchen. I was going to tell her who he really is and what he really does in year 2030! Was asking her to wait 11 years asking for too much?

I find her way too close to Don and holding him roughly, the way bullies hold up their prey. He's holding the neck part of his hoodie tightly so that she doesn't succeed in pulling it off him. It looks wrong, like she will whoop him any second from now. Now she's crossed a line. Where does she get off woMan handling him like that? I hope she realizes that him not pushing her back is not because can't but it's out of sheer respect. His hoodie had lifted in their 'Show Me Your Neck Struggle' so I can see his gun tucked in at his back.

I'm fuming and at this rating I'll start breathing fire. My mother has a higher degree in triggering me. It's like she was born just to trigger me! I've been trying to be civil all night as she grilled my boyfriend, asking one inappropriate question after the other. Now she wants him to strip for her? Nah fam, not on my watch.

I roughly pull her beautifully manicured, long nailed hand off Don. She had a handful of his hoodie in her grasp and now it's creased where her hand had been. She remains staring at him with her feet ajar, firmly rooted on the tiles. I know her when she gets like this, my grandmother technically raised me and her together so I know her mannerisms. She's very confrontational and never backs down from an altercation. She makes sure she has the last word, everytime. She's fast approaching the 'hold my earrings, let me straighten this bxtch up' stage.

Don's face looks somewhere between amused and annoyed; but his eyes tell me he's pissed. I know the look very well because I evoke it a lot. I can't blame him. He was on his best behaviour tonight and this is the thanks he gets? My mother wanting to attack him and undress his neck? One of them needs to grow up and it's not Don.

"What is wrong with you? Can't you just be happy for me for once? Do you have to ruin everything for me?", I yell at her.

"Lolo, you don't understand", she tries to calm me down.

"Ewe I don't! Why are you attacking him? What did he do to you? What's wrong with you!", I'm on the verge of tears.

"Don't raise your voice at me wena Lothasi! Who do you think you're talking to?"

"Or what?", I put my face in her face.

"What's all the noise? What's going on?", Chelsea airs her confusion as she joins the party.

"Khawume Chelsea! (wait Chelsea)", my mother and I say at the same time. She raises her hands in surrender and says nothing more.

"Why do you always pick the bad ones to be your boyfriends? Why? Aphelile amadoda eKapa (are there no men left in Cape Town)", she's now talking Xhosa and I'm grateful because I don't want Don hearing this.

Now that's low, even for her!

"I don't know, maybe I take up after my mother after all!", I turn on my attitude. A hot klap lands on my face and Don pulls me away. My mouth is wide open in shock. I wasn't expecting it.

"Uyand'qhela wena Lothasi! You're disrespectful and you think you've made it in life. I'm your mother. I'll whoop the coloured off your arse right now!", waving a shaking finger in my face.

She's working on my last nerve but the last bit of her sentence froze the words on my tongue. Did she just call me coloured? I'm not coloured! What the hell is wrong with her!

"Hey, guys, stop it. Lotus, don't. You know you'll regret this. Don't! Let it go. Let's go outside", Chelsea tries to be a peacemaker. No one is paying attention to her really. We can hear she's talking but no one cares. Don is pinning my arms to my body, rendering me immobile. He's saying nothing and one look at his face and I would like to know how he's so calm in this chaos. He looks like he'd rather be somewhere else, like we are small children making noise.

"Continue Lotus, continue! You'll end up pregnant and running for your life! They don't want children these people. You'll have a forced abortion, mark my words! You think they're playing when they say they don't want children? He just told you at the table that he won't marry you and he doesn't want children yet you let

him do you without condoms. He couldn't even answer me when I asked him if he loves you or not. But ke continue sana lwami, you're a grown woman andithi. Go ahead and learn the hard way. Just don't come crying to us when he chooses his life over you and treats you like a piece of shxt, which he will, give it some time". What is she on about? OMG, such drama in one human being. When I don't respond, she looks up at Don.

"Take her, go and get her pregnant and throw her out. Go and shatter her dreams and let her see your love for her turn into hatred when she tells you she's pregnant! Take her, what are you waiting for?"

I'm looking at her like she's mad. Maybe she has gone mad! Who in their right mind attacks people for no reason? And all this? Was it necessary? Really sisi? I know she wanted to embarrass me and she outdid herself. I'll call the Oscar's to mail her trophy.

"You know who her father is, don't you?", Don finally speaks. There's authority in his voice. Anyone would cower but not my mother! She's scared of no one and nothing.

"What's it to you?", she sniggers at him.

I think he means to say something but he talks himself out of it. I'm looking at her and I can't fathom how such a beautiful woman could be filled with so much hatred! Who hurt her?

"You know what, I'm out of here. Dankie for the dinner and the free show. It was a pleasure meeting you sisi", he brings his hands together in respect and bows a little.

"You know who my father is?", I'm taken aback. If she knew all these years but made me believe she had no idea, I'll never forgive her. I forgave her for sleeping around and made peace with the fact that I was probably a product of a one night stand. She sometimes would say he died but it always felt like she was hiding something. She wouldn't tell me who he was, where he was buried and all that. The topic always ended up in full blown fights. But I've always wanted to know. I don't want to build a relationship with him or ask for anything from him, I just want to know.

"Your father died before you were born! You know that! I won't be interrogated by kids mna. Had you told me I'm coming to Cape Town to clap hands for this nonsense of yours, I wouldn't have come! You need to remember I'm your mother!"

I look at her and shake my head. Waze wandihlaza! Zayaphi intloni? (She humiliated me!)

"Don, let me walk you out".

"Bye Donavani! You've had your fun, now leave my daughter my alone. She deserves a better life and you know it!", she says that quite calmly, I'm officially convinced that she's Legion. Too many voices live in her head and I can't keep up. Tonight she was beyond unnecessary. She single handedly spoiled everything. "No offence, but where I come from, I tell people what to do not the other way round", Don says, politely even. My cue to drag him out, his no-filter side is surfacing and if I let him exchange words with my mother, I might not have a mother, a boyfriend or a birthday party tomorrow.

I take Don's hand and usher him out of the main door and down the steps. We walk in silence all the way to his car. He pushes me against the car and kisses me without warning, grabbing me hard as he goes at it and I don't protest. He's all over me like vinegar on chips. I catch my breath when he finally lets my lips free. I can feel his hardness against my body. I wonder what suddenly turned him on and I know I need prayers when I feel myself toying with the idea of riding him.

"Thank you for inviting me over. I'm going home now", he says like he wasn't all up on me a few seconds ago.

"I'm sorry about my mother", I'm honestly beyond embarrassed.

"I know you are skat. But learn (teach) yourself not to be too sorry for other people's actions". Oo-kay!

"Let me learn you something my angel", he lifts my chin up and I look at him in the dim light, expecting life changing advice.

"You talk too much. That's your first mistake. You'll never win an argument or get facts out of someone by over talking them. Let them talk, you do the listening". Did he say I talk too much?

"Are you taking her side Don?", I think the hurt is audible in my voice.

"No. I wasn't aware there are sides to take. All I'm saying is, you don't always have to talk too much. So now collect yourself, don't scream and shout, go back and ask her politely who your father is. She knows".

"How do you know she knows?", I cross my arms.

"I could tell. I'm good at reading people, just because I never act on it doesn't mean I don't know", I don't like the tone he said that with nor the sharp eye he gave me.

"While at it, ask her how she knows I'm in a gang. She knows more than she's letting out".

"She won't tell me! She makes me so angry, yeeerrr!".

"Will your anger get you answers? It's answers you want isn't it? So stop throwing around your toys and ask. You talk too much skat".

I hate his coldness sometimes. He should be on my side without any reservations. And if he says I talk too much one more time, I'll slap him.

"I can get the answers out of her if you want me to", he says carelessly.

"No Donovan! You're not going to torture my mother to find out who my father is. How sick is that?"

"Sick to some, normal to some. Two sides of a coin", he shrugs it off like it's nothing.

Wow!

"I gotta go skat. I have another date to get to".

I shoot him an angry look and he smiles sweetly at me.

"Relax! It's not a girl. I can not survive another interrogation".

He laughs and I blush. How can my mother not see how sweet he is?

"I'm meeting Caleb to finalize details of today's job". It's past 9 pm but he works odd shifts so alright, I won't ask.

"You go back inside and fix things with your mummy okay? She's your mother my angel, you only get one. Make things right", he gives me a reassuring shoulder squeeze.

I nod. I'll try, no promises but I'll try.

A kiss on the lips and I'm melting.

"You're very pretty, you know that", he says it like he just realized it now.

Blush blush.

"Can I see you later? I know I'll need you later, please?"

I find myself nodding. How I'll get out of bed at midnight with my mother sleeping, and go and get busy and make it back before she wakes up is something I'm yet to see.

We hug and say goodbye for the umpteenth time.

"Lotus, I need your advice on something".

Oh wow, that's a first!

"Shoot", before he changes his mind.

"Tell me this, for once in my life I'm not sure if I'm doing the right thing or not. I need you to okay this. I need your go ahead on it and I need to know I'm doing it for you too and it's what you want. Please skat", he sounds so desperate I'm lost but I'm concerned.

"What is it?", I furrow my brow a little as I look him in the eye. I can tell it's not good and I don't want any more bad vibes tonight. It's the eve of my birthday bethuna. Can a girl know peace please.

"The pack is falling apart. The one person who's supposed to keep us intact is turning us against each other. He hates my guts and I know he's waiting for the right moment to order a hit on me. He will kill me and I have no doubt he will kill you too. He's buying time and playing mind games. I need to put an end to it, for you, for me and for the survival of the pack. So much is at stake, but if I get it wrong, I have the world to lose...I'm a threat to him and in my world, you eliminate threats before they eliminate you".

I think I know who he's talking about but to be sure I ask anyways.

He steps up closer and envelopes me in his arms. His chin rests on my shoulder and I can feel his breath on my neck. He stays there for a moment, saying nothing, just breathing.

"I want to kill the General".

He holds me tighter, I guess he expects the usual fights I give when he mentions killing someone. But nothing in his words tonight stirs my moral compass. Nothing at all makes me feel bad or guilty. For the first time I understand what he means everytime he says he has to kill someone first before they kill him. The General wants me dead and he will take Don out too when he gets the chance. It's a jungle out here, there's no clear line between right and wrong. I also tighten my hug around him and lift my head up a little so my whisper is not drowned by his hoodie.

"Kill him".

CHAPTER FORTY THREE

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I'm lying in bed, curled into a dollar sign, with my mother's arms around me. The number of times she has said "I love you Lolo", tonight make up for all those empty years she never said it. My mother didn't want me when I was young and she didn't hide it. She would leave me alone in the house and go partying with her friends. My grandmother would find me asleep or crying and she would scream at my mother the next morning. None of her screams worked because usisi would leave me again the next day. I was probably four or five. She didn't even breast feed me and I remember an altercation we once had that ended with her yelling "I should have aborted you when I had the chance". Those words never left me and although today she explained herself, I'm not exactly soothed. She's withholding back so much so how can I let it go? The more she refuses to yell me, the more I want to know.

This one time, she took me to town with her friend. They went into the changing room and left me waiting on those seats in the shoe section. Three hours later, I was still waiting. She forgot me in that shop! She laughs about it but hey it's not that funny.

As you already know, my grandmother raised me. She worked 7 days a week as a house maid for a rich family. When the madam of the house had another child, my grandmother had to move in with them. She couldn't leave me with my mother obviously and she couldn't afford a maid so she took me with her. Those were the best days of my life. Hate their kind as I do sometimes, that family kept us afloat. Only when the country started 'going to the dogs' as they put it and they

relocated to Australia or somewhere there, did heaven end. We went back to the township.

Ok enough about my history lesson, let me tell you what happened earlier. She took me down her memory lane and I guess that's what prompted my own trip down my memory lane.

So earlier, after Donleft, I went back to the house. My mother was waiting and Mahatma Gandhi, damn autocorrect, I mean Chelsea was waiting too, ready to put out the fire. I felt bad every time we would turn to her and tell her to stay out of it. She ended up just standing there looking helpless.

We resumed the screaming match when I got back inside. Now that Don was gone, my mother didn't hold her disapproval back. She called him ugly guys! She called my boyfriend ugly and skollie looking! She said if she saw him approaching on the streets, she would cross over to the other side of the road and hold her handbag tight. That hurt like a mother!

I was back talking her and pointing out her own questionable choice of men. She's one to talk, we're peas in a pod me and her. She called me a whore and I told her that
"Umvundla uzeki ndlela (like mother like daughter)"

That's when she took her phone and said she had had it with me and was calling my grandmother to tell her I'm sleeping with dodgy characters in Cape Town. She knows that will shut me up any day and today wasn't an exception.

The mention of my grandmother hushed me. I respect that woman with every fibre of my being. I don't want to ever disappoint her and maybe that's my weakness. Thoughts of her keep me grounded sometimes. I went from belligerent to apologetic in no time and I was there saying things I didn't mean like "I'm sorry sisi".

She stormed off to my bedroom and left with Chelsea. I must have been red in the face, occupational hazards of being light skinned! I was thoroughly worked up. Chelsea looked tired, it couldn't have been easy to stop World War 3 all by herself. But that didn't stop her from giving me a hug and repeating similar words to those Don had said earlier.

"Go and talk to her. Be the bigger person babe. Many people won't like Don but you can't fight everyone who doesn't. Go and make things right".

I know she's right but I just wanted to cry. She held me in her hug and in that silence I could almost hear Don saying "You talk too much skat".

"We have your party to finalize you know. I'll handle that. I took the day off tomorrow so no worries at all. Go talk to your mum and make sure the both of

you wake up on your best behaviour tomorrow. That party is happening with or without you!", she lightened the mood when I'd stopped crying.

"You know I love you, right? I'm on your team", she said, more serious and less cheesy.

I don't know what I did to deserve her. She's an angel and I'm the luckiest girl on earth to have her for a bff.

I found her taking panados from her handbag. She gets migraines sometimes because of her long, stressful hours at work. I stood by the door watching her take them dry and sit on the bed. She kicked off her shoes, curled in bed the way I'm curled now and started sobbing into a pillow. I wasn't expecting that to be honest. She looked fragile and broken, I failed to connect her to the dragon lady I'm used to. She had cried earlier but those had been tears of anger. This time they were of a pain untold. I found myself swallowing as I sat next to her. It took a minute before I convinced myself to embrace her.

My hold must have triggered her because her sobs became piercing cries. My own eyes watered in response. I held her tighter and cried with her. When all is said and done, she's my mother and I love her as hard as she makes it, I love her.

"Do you know why our surname is Janse van Rensburg?", she dried her face with her hands as I did mine. I shook my head no. I just know that it is her surname and since I was born out of wedlock, I took it up when I was born. I also know that it's a topic that my grandmother never wants to discuss. It's a forbidden topic at home, which is weird because we are stuck with the surname for life.

"A Mpondo king called Tshomane adopted a white girl that survived from a sinking ship and named her Gquma. When she was old enough, she was married to one of his sons. The girl was not the only survivor there, there were three other white males with her. One went back to his country on another ship but the other two remained behind. They were given wives, land and livestock. One of them was called Wilhelm Janse van Rensburg. But our people being our people needed isduko (clan name) so we kept Sukwini as our clan name. The white men and their wives had coloured children who spoke pure Xhosa. It went on until the generation of my father, your grandfather. Obviously we got darker and darker down the line".

I looked at her like, blinking. I was convinced that she'd just made that up. How come I never heard of it before? I've heard rumours back home that we are descendants of the white man. But my grandmother said we were not and wouldn't discuss it further, so we were not. My mother speaks Xhosa just like me and being light skinned and having a softer afro is nothing unusual. Black comes in fifty shades after all. Skin tone doesn't disqualify one as black. So nothing ever

made me think we are remotely coloured. I always thought we got the surname from my grandmother's former boss or something. Thinking maybe he couldn't pronounce the Qs and Xs in her surname and gave him his instead. I mean, they renamed her Margret so I mean. It wasn't uncommon back then.

So my great grandfather was white? Had land and yet we grew up in poverty? I can feel the anger building up in my veins.

"But wait, that must have been many many years ago, why is that important?"

"You need to know your history! Because clearly, history enjoys repeating itself!"

"Have you never wondered who your grandfather is?"

I shook my head no. I never really wondered. My grandmother told me never to ask that question and I never did.

"He was a Janse van Rensburg. A descendant of the ship survivor, he still had land. My mother worked for him back in the 70s. Don't ask me how or when or how come but he got her pregnant".

I couldn't believe it. Most of the time I like to think that my grandmother is like mother Mary, that she got pregnant miraculously, because it's my grandmother and I refuse to think of anything wayward.

"So what happened? Did he marry her? Did they divorce?", I urged her own, her hands still in mine.

"He threw her out like a dog. I was about four and was visiting her for the holidays. My mother had now graduated to a housemaid. They never had a relationship. He just used to have his way with her but she couldn't leave. She now had me to take care of and jobs were hard to find. She fell pregnant again. He kicked the baby out of her stomach, literally. I thought she would die. He dragged her outside, left her bleeding on the ground and called her all racial slurs you can think of. I thought she would die. Another worker called for help and they took us away. She was taken to the hospital and obviously no charges were filed. She never went back there and that's a name we don't discuss anymore".

She's back in tears and I have my own now. My strong, strict, loving grandmother with warm arms, a warmer heart and the warmest smile ever, went through all that?

"So ya, her sister helped her out until she got another job. She sent me away to her mother ezilalini (rural areas). I had just finished primary school when my grandmother died and I had no one to live with. She took me then and said she would make a plan. I don't know why but men started happening. I was a mess. She was struggling and could barely feed us, that and all the trouble I was causing made her life a living hell".

I'm wasn't strong enough to listen to all that but I let her spill.

"An uncle in Cape Town offered to take me in as the schools were better there. It was hell Lotus but he did the best he could for me. Being black can be a curse in the wrong places! Then one day, I was out partying in the tarven with my friend

when I met the man who would turn my life inside out. It was all rosy and I was young and in love, stupidly so. Money was not a problem. Although he told me countless times that he didn't love me, I held onto the hope that deep down he did and kept going back to him. Being young and naive, I got pregnant even though he had told me from day one that he didn't want kids. Stupid me, I went and told him I was pregnant. He ordered me to have an abortion. Mind you, abortions were illegal then so it was to be a backdoor thing, probably with coat hangers and stuff. I agreed and told him to prepare everything and I would do it the coming Saturday. He agreed and he made it very clear that there was no two ways about it. He told me that he would claw the baby out of me if he had to and that if I even thought of keeping that baby, he would kill me. That triggered memories of umama and I couldn't bear it".

"I went home, packed all my things, used the money I had saved from him and got onto a bus back home. The shame Lotus! I never spoke about it and I swore to take the secret to my grave. I've never told a single soul who your father is. Then I had you, beautiful and big eyed, you would warm my heart with your little laugh and I would cry when you'd fall sick but you had his eyes and your face reminded me of him. I hated how you brought his face to my mind. I tried going back to school but it didn't work out. So here I am now".

I wiped the stream of tears that flowed down her face.

"So who's he? Who's my father? Is he alive?"

"Yes, he's alive as far as I know. I can't tell you who he is, for your own good baby. You have to trust me", she said.

"But I want to know!"

"Trust me, you don't. He's a dangerous man. There's no telling what he will do if he ever found out about you. Please sana lwam, trust me on this one".

I remained silent, negotiating with my inner self to be still.

"Is he coloured? Or am I supposedly coloured because my ancestor fell off a ship and made the devil who fathered you?"

She looked at me and I immediately felt guilty for my choice of words.

"So I'm coloured!", a thought escaped my mouth.

"Suka! Don't you see it everytime you look in the mirror?", she said.

Honestly, I don't. It never crossed my mind, not even once, although many usually assume I am. Chelsea is coloured! See her hair? Now look at my afro. Maths says it can't.

"You hate Don. Why?". I figured a change of topic would do me good. She looked away and I had to ask again.

"Because I know his kind Lotus, it can never end well. I know I never show it but I love you and I want the best for you. You're gorgeous and unlike me and your grandmother, you have a chance at a good life. You have a degree and you can have any man you want. The odds are in your favour, so why do you want to

throw all that away and walk in my footsteps?", she sounded desperate so I kept quiet to avoid breaking her spirit.
I'm with Don and that's it.

Chelsea budged in without knocking and I faked a smile.

"Am I interrupting something?", she waved her phone animatedly.

"No not at all, what's up", I plastic smiled at her.

"Your party sweetie", she wiggled her apple bottom between me and my mother. She's such a bad reader of situations. If only she knew how that party is the last thing on my mind right now. I wanted to ask her to leave but she was so into it, I sighed and let her be.

"You fitting your dress in the morning Sisi and Lotus we need a new pair of shoes for you, the ones you have just went on special at Steve Madden meaning someone could pick them up too. We can't risk you wearing the same pair as someone else on your special day!"

"I'm not getting married Chels, it's just a birthday", I reminded her.

"Hello! You call an R80000 party a birthday? Pssh!"

"R80000?", my mother interjected.

"Yep. That Don you met earlier is a walking bank. He has money for days and is buying Lotus a car. Whatever Lotus wants, she gets. He's an alpha, you know what that means?", I slapped Chelsea on the lap to shut her up. WTF!

"Lotus!", my mother looked at me like she just saw the face of death.

I ignored her and tried to stay distracted by Chelsea. When she left, I changed into my PJs and curled into bed. She did the same and got into bed. And here we are, spooning like lovers. She says I'm her whole world and she loves me to death yet she won't tell me who my father is. I make sure my phone is on loud, the leader of the pack will need me after his big job tonight and he doesn't know it but I need him more.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER FORTY FOUR

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I'm the Bonnie to your Clyde...

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"Leave your phone alone and sleep", my mum says, cuddling closer. I ignore her and continue going through people's statuses on WhatsApp. I need Don to come and get me, he said he would. I was chatting with Chelsea not so long ago and she, in a nice way, told me I'll be disrespecting my mother if I go and get screwed by Don then come back and sleep next to her. I hate to admit it but she has a point. If

I go and do the things then come back and sleep on the couch, will that also be disrespectful?

It's almost midnight and I text quickly before I change my mind.
'Don't come over baby. Let me see you tomorrow morning, please'.
'I'm almost there, come out', he texts back.
Text driving? Bad Don!

My mother is sleeping I think. I do that creepy thing Don does when I'm sleeping, staring at my face. Looking at her right now you wouldn't believe it's the same talk-a-lot drama queen some of us know. She looks innocent and I wish I had her fuller lips. I had no idea she went through all the things she went through. I get that she was protecting me and all but I'm grown now, I deserve to know who my father was. It was one thing thinking that maybe she didn't know him as well. That was a better pain than knowing she knows but won't say.

I slowly get out of bed and slip my feet into slippers and tiptoe out. It's drizzling outside as usual. By the time I get into the back seat of that red car, I'm freezing cold.

"Awe".

"Hi Caleb", I greet back. I hope my disappointment doesn't show. I hoped Don was alone.

"Hi baby", I lean into the back of his seat and show my face.

Caleb laughs and I look at him confused.

"If only people knew how the almighty alpha they are terrified of is called a baby in other places".

"Shut up", Don says but not in a hostile way.

"He's my baby, look how cute he is", I tease him and he acts annoyed but he's blushing.

"So? Is it safe to take you home? I'll bring you back in two hours", Don says.

"No, my mother is in. I can't".

"I'll bring you back! If Caleb wasn't here, I'd have you right here in the car and leave but he's here".

Wow, ok. I don't know why I still get shocked to be honest.

"Sorry, you have to make use of your hands today. I can't just disappear".

"Come on Lotus, I promise I'll bring you back. Ok in an hour?", he sounds so cute right now but no can do.

"But we agreed earlier", he sounds defeated.

"I know but I'll make it up to you tomorrow. I'll do that thing you like", I giggle and he laughs a little and looks away.

"Get a room you two", Caleb says.

Why is he even here!

"Goodnight Caleb. Baby I'll see you tomorrow". I step out of the warmth of the car straight into the freezing outside. Don steps out too. I'm getting wet so I give him a hurried hug and run towards the shelter of the verandah over the main entrance. He's walking behind me. We stop at the main entrance to the building where the raindrops can't touch us.

Now I can give him a proper hug and wet kisses before I go back upstairs. I can never describe how addicted I am to this guy. He smells good and he gets good grips on my body and his lips are soft and he kisses me like he means it.

"Did you?", I whisper.

"No, got there and some runner was leaving. So had to postpone, but very soon". I don't know why I'm relieved but I am.

"Ok baby", I hug him again. Discussing who gets to live and who doesn't is not a part of my life but this is an exception. The General wants to kill me so he should die first. The scar of Don's face is a good reminder of how evil that man is.

I'm looking at Don and feeling all sorts. He has the hood of his hoodie on and he looks so dangerous I want to jump him and marry him all at the same time. Then he looks at me and I can't help it.

"Why are you smiling like that?"

"It's you", I bite my lower lip and keep my eyes on his.

"What about me?", he does that thing with his lips and I'm sold.

"You're perfect for me. I love everything about you", I abuse the word everything like many often do.

"Everything?", he lowers his head and rests his forehead on mine. I nod slightly hoping he can feel it.

"You making it worse for me, talking like that. You sure you don't want me to take you home and start your birthday the right way?"

I can't say no but I also know I can't.

"Bye baby. Let's meet at the club at 10 am?"

"Sure", but he doesn't let me go. He pushes me harder against the wall and as he kisses me, his hand roams under my pj top and finds my breast. He keeps it there and the feeling is threatening to drive me crazy.

"You have an amazing body", he whispers in my ear and I whimper back. What is he doing to me.

"I wish I could lift you up right now and eat you up", his voice got hoarse and my memory takes me back to the time he lifted me all the way up in his kitchen and had me screaming my orgasms for the whole neighborhood to hear.

"Let me go. See what you've done to me", he guides my hand to his *cough cough* and he's harder than a rock.

Let me start my birthday on an adventure. I get down on my knees and work his belt. The lights of the car go off and I figure Caleb could see us so he had to kill the

lights to protect his eyes. Not that he could see anything really, Don has his back to the road. Mmmmm. I don't know what to do with the end product so I swallow every last drop.

"Lotus!", is all he says before we say our byes.

I brush my teeth and quietly sneak back into my bedroom.

My alarm goes off at 05h30 and out of habit I press snooze. I need an extra 10 minutes.

"Either wake up or switch that stupid thing off", my mother snaps after I snooze it for the third time.

I drag myself out of bed and all the way to the bathroom. I walk this painful path every morning but I'm not close to getting used to it. Waking up is the pits and it doesn't help that Cape Town winter lasts 10 months.

Only after my long hot shower do I remember my plan to call in sick. What a waste of morning sleep. With the towel around me, I get back into bed, set a new alarm for 08h30 and go back to sleep. I ignore my mother trying to strike a conversation. Who has stories to tell so early! She must wait.

8.30 am

My alarm goes off and this time I wake up without snoozing the damn thing. I had a weird dream. I was having drinks with the General. He was nice and we were laughing and toasting to my birthday. It was a beautiful dream but now that I'm awake I know it was a nightmare. That man is the devil himself.

I'm alone in bed. I rub my eyes as I dial Dr Dirk to call in sick. The factory is now back to work but not completely, we're still waiting for any news about a dying consumer and construction is still underway on one side of the factory. They don't need me really.

"Lotus", he answers at the second ring.

"Good morning Meneer. I'm not coming in today. I'm not feeling well", I fake a cough.

"We both know that you're not sick but take the day off and prepare for your birthday party. See you in the evening", he has a mocking tone on.

"Ummm eehh...", I'm dumbfounded.

"Happy birthday Lotus. Your barrel will be delivered around 12 today", then he hangs up and I'm thankful.

I exchange my towel for a gown then follow the smell of eggs to the kitchen. Chelsea is alive and wide awake with her gown, uggs and a messy bun. They are done making breakfast and it looks like they were waiting for me. I think I'm going to cry. They hug me and say all sorts of 'we love you and we will do

whatever it takes to make sure no one spoils this day for you'. So much love in the a.m. I capture the moment in a selfie and Insta it with a "Chapter 23" caption.

They went all out with breakfast. Chelsea made my coffee as creamy as I like it. There's croissants, cheese, eggs, bacon, beans, bread, tomatoes and hash browns. I'm going to stuff my face with all this unhealthiness. I hate to admit it but when Don moved into my life, healthy habits started moving out. I can't remember the last time I jogged or did my Saturday park run and I've been skipping church a lot. I'll start eating healthy on Monday, I'm packing on weight.

A 'happy birthday my girl. I'm very proud of you and I love you very much. You are my treasure. I hope you are still going to church nontombi' message from my grandmother brings tears to my eyes.

The mood is light and we are laughing easily, hugging too much, eating too much and just having fun. I'm even excused from doing dishes today. I stand there and watch them cleaning up and chatting away. Chelsea takes us through today's plan. We have a party planner though and he'll be supervising the decor and all the shebang at the club. I trust him completely, he's proven to be efficient and worth every Rand I paid him. I'm meeting Don at the club at 10 and Chelsea will take my mum dress fitting then I'll catch up with them around 12. Sounds good to me.

Jeans on, jacket on, boots on and my hair, face and nails on fleek, I step out to go and meet my boyfriend. I don't know about you but I'm feeling 23! Guess whose car is parked outside!

"We said we're meeting at the club!"

"You said so, I didn't", he smiles and I can't help but melt. I disappear into his hug and stay there, taking him in and loving every breath.

"Are you ready?", he strokes my back.

"For?"

"I don't know, for today. That's all you've been talking about for the past month so", he teases me.

"I have a surprise for you. Caleb said I'm supposed to take you out and do something special with you".

I stay smiling, thinking 'you didn't have to tell me it was Caleb's idea'.

"So what did Caleb say we must do?"

"He refused to say. He said I must think of something and then surprise you with it. So let's go".

Wow! He's a special case but I jump into the madam's seat anyway and get comfy.

"You look beautiful", he says and I blush. If I got R20 for every time he made me blush, I would be rich by now.

I text Chelsea to let her know that Don picked me up. A message from Dalu pops in and I just see 'happy birthday ... baby ... I miss you....'. I blacken the screen faster than you can say screen.

"You ok?", Don gives me an eye. I'm clutching my phone tightly and my palms are sweating. I doubt my vigorous nod is convincing but he lets it go anyway.

I loosen up when he says how I blew his mind last night. He's talking a lot today. Complaining about Caleb acting like he knows all about girls, about Hilton being too uptight, about the army disturbing peace in his neighbourhood and many innocents dying in the crossfire. It's getting too deep so I change the subject to something more fluffy.

"So baby, Caleb doesn't want Chelsea or what? What's his story?".

"I don't know. When he wants her he'll have her. She's throwing herself at him", he says. "That's rude! She's hot AF and Caleb should stop acting like he doesn't want her! She's way out of his league anyway". Mxm.

He looks at me and laughs. "Your girl has been around. Hulk hits that, Elik hit that, Kyle, Clyve, Michael, Tony...should I go on?", he says.

"Ok now that's just mean", I regret bringing it up.

"Facts are mean? Look, Caleb is a grown man, he knows your friend is easy, if he wanted her he would have hit that by now. But he has his reasons and unlike you girls, we don't sit around discussing feelings and hearts".

What a difficult. I should have never brought this topic up.

"Ok fine, but does he like her in anyway?".

"I don't know, ask him next time you see him", bluntly and he keeps on driving. Ok no, I have no further questions your honour.

We pull up at a farm in Durbanville. Not those farming farms but those barren ones that are used for horse riding, paintballing and all that. I'm itching to ask what all this is about but I know he will tell me if I ask and that will spoil the surprise.

"Alpha", a tall, buff Afrikaaner meets us. The tattoo of a wolf on his neck is unmistakably. Exactly, how large is the wolf gang? He's dressed like Walker Texas Ranger complete with a cowboy hat. And he has a deep Afrikaans accent that pronounces even the R in here!

"You must be Lortus", he shakes my hand hard.

"Yes, Lotus. Pleased to meet you".

He's done with me and goes back to Don. They do a back and forth in Afrikaans before Chuck Norris walks into the shed.

"Come", Don says, walking away without even checking if I'm following.

Sigh.

It's a shooting range! Weird birthday activity but ok. Maybe we will shoot clay pigeons, can't be real guns.

"Explain", I stand in front of him, looking up at him.

"I'm going to teach you how to shoot a gun".

"What? Why?".

"Because everyone should know how to shoot a gun...", he says it like he's saying duh.

Chuck Norris interrupts us and hands me earmuffs. I sense hostility from him but it's fine. I'm used to Don's people not liking me.

"Put those on, like so", Don demonstrates

"Why?".

"Because the noise of the gun going off will leave you deaf. Put them on".

He puts them on me and moves one off my ear so I can hear him.

My Afrikaans is not that good but I can understand some.

"When I heard that you now have a teef (bitch) and you're all lovey dovey, I thought it was a lie! Your father must be disappointed", Chuck Norris says.

"You know who will be disappointed? Your mother after I bust open your skull", Don says.

"You would kill for this...", he starts but Don doesn't let him finish.

"You know I like you and I've always been good to you. Don't push me now, you know my other side, you sure you wanna see it?".

Chuck Norris shakes his head no.

"So stay out of my business and I might just continue being kind to you. You're the only one who knows I brought her here so if I hear anyone else saying it, I'll know whose balls I need to cut off".

"My lips are sealed".

"Good, now get out of here", he says that bit in English.

"Let me teach her my alpha. I'll teach her well", the now timid buff man says.

"I'll teach her myself my bruh. Get lost", Don. He's pissed.

"Won't you teach her how to use all of them?", Chuck Norris asks.

"No. She'll learn the Glock and shoot from here then I'll teach her close range. Get out of my face my bruh", Don says.

When I grow up I want to be Don. I want to be young but have the power to silence even old people.

I seriously need to get some very soon because I'm getting turned on by the way he's groping me as he tries to make me stand in what he calls the 'right way'. The first shot is a disaster. It doesn't even get to the target and I stagger backwards and almost fall. I try again and it's a worse disaster than the first.

"Grip hard angel...stop flinching...no, don't lean back...lean into the gun like so...yes...let me close your ear then shoot", he instructs me.

I shoot and yes, a bullet through the target. Not near the heart or head but still it's a win for me.

"You doing great but you're still unstable. Look", I cover my ears and he shoots a perfect bullseye with one hand, it makes me feel useless.

"Try again. Stand in a fighting stance. Dig your heels into the ground...move your left foot forward a little...good...roll your shoulders forward...look at the target like this...perfect...hold it right there let me close your ears and you shoot". I shoot and get the target. I do it again and I feel like a professional. I'm doing this. "You got it! But you're still teacupping. Do like this. Put this hand over this one like this. Now try again. Focus skat, you can do this"...And I do it. Bulls eye! Don picks me up and twirls me before kissing me with a passion I don't understand. "You're so sexy right now", he says after the long kiss. We practice some more and it's getting better and better. Close range is even easier and I'm less tense now. Contact shooting is scary because that dummy felt human and it had me feeling like I killed someone.

Time flies. It's been two hours already and Chelsea is blowing up my phone. We find Chuck Norris polishing some guns outside and Don tells me to wait in the car. I use the time to touch base with Chelsea and tell her how exciting spending the morning with Don has been. I don't get to telling her we were shooting guns and how thuggish I'm feeling right now because she blurts out, "come to the club now so we can finalize everything!".

"I'm sure you can do it on your own babes. I'm taking Don to his house now so I can get some birthday loving". She tries to protest but I hang up and flight mode. Nothing is allowed to kill my vibe today. Not even her, sorry. I'll do what I want, when I want, how I want. Dankie.

Don is excited and impressed with my shooting skills. He says I'm a natural. He asks if he should take me to Chelsea and mama dearest but I suggest we make a quick stop at his house instead. He obviously likes the idea, see how he's biting that lower lip.

2 pm

Chelsea will lose her mind today. I've been gone! It's just that we got over excited when we got back and got to some serious loving. The tension was too much and we just had to go at it. He made love to me and held me in his arms like he was remembering me from a past life. His eyes kept finding mine and everytime I would look into them, they made love to me too. I wanted to make myself useful and get on top at some point but he told me no, he said he was all about pleasing me. You can officially call me dickmatized.

I take selfies with him, with my ruffled hair and his sexy eyes. We look perfect together, if I do say so myself. He's a pale kind of light and I'm a yellow kind of light.

"We would make such cute babies".

"If they looked like you", he says.

It could have been the sex talking or maybe he now considers the possibility of kids in our future.

"So you now want kids?", I ask excitedly.

"Of course not", he shuts down my vision of a bright future with those three words.

He reminds me not to put the pictures on the internet and I say my yes with a smile. I know, come on.

I wonder what he drank today. He's insatiable. I'm trying to shower in peace and now I'm here on my tippie toes moaning his name.

I'm now 3 hours 20 minutes late for our meet up. I disable flight mode and the missed call notifications start pouring in. I call Chelsea and immediately start explaining. To my surprise, she's casual about it. "I gots everything under control, enjoy your man", she says after my flimsy excuses. Phew, what a relief!

"You really need to stop letting your girl control you like that. It's your party, your birthday, your rules, fxck her", Don appears from behind me.

I won't even respond because I know I sounded terrified on the phone. I stood her up though so I'm at fault but I won't justify myself and risk Don calling me weak.

"Can we talk?", he stops me as I exit the bedroom door.

"Of course. Wassup?".

He takes my hand and sits me on the bed and pulls an ottoman and sits with his legs between mine. He stays there, playing with my hands and saying how nice my nails look. He jokes about how he's sure his poor back is all scratched because I was digging into him.

"I didn't kill the General yesterday", he eventually says.

"Oh ya that".

"As we were getting there, a runner was leaving. So had we gone ahead, it would have been obvious that we did it".

"Ya but you're an alpha so the runner won't snitch. Isn't his allegiance with you?".

"Our allegiance is with the pack. We don't kill our brothers. In as much as most want his ass gone, no one will take my side if I take him out".

"Oh I see. But you could pay the runner to keep quiet maybe?".

That's how they do in the movies isn't it? Pay someone to unsee and unhear things.

"I don't work that way. Bottom line, I didn't do it and the plan has changed".
I give him a 'go on' look.

"If it comes out that I killed the General then my brothers will come for me. As much as we all hate the SOB, he's still the leader of all packs, the father of our family. If I kill him, I leave my brothers no option but to kill me. Everyone knows about my beef with that dog and I'll be the first suspect when he dies".

I'm not sure where the conversation is going but I'm listening.

"I need someone else to do it. Someone I can trust".

"Caleb? Hilton?", I know he trusts them with his life.

"Hilton will never do my dirty work and Caleb, no. When the General goes down, all eyes will be on me and that automatically means on Hilton and Caleb too".

"How will you prove you're innocent if someone does the job for you?".

"I'll gather my pack and invite the other alphas. I'll have a few friends from the police too. I'll have all the important people with me. So when we get the news that someone killed that bastard, it obviously won't be me".

Makes sense. His slyness is such a turn on.

"It has to be someone no one will suspect and the last person the General would think would kill him. He's a shoot now ask questions later kind of guy. So if the wrong person shows up and he suspects danger, he will kill", he says.

"So who will do it for you hunn?".

"I don't know skat. Trust doesn't come easy in these streets".

We sit there, both of us deep in our own thoughts and deliberations. I'm the first to sigh and break the silence

"I'll do it".

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER FORTY FIVE

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"Dating a Clyde comes with its perks. Watch me next Friday, I'm going to put the extra before vagant!" Chapter 31

Today is next Friday, I mean FryYay!

There will be Glitter

There will be Glam

We will drink champagne darling and drink wine from the barrel

Drink it down to the very last drop.

VENUE: Club Lotus

THEME: Suit and Tie/Black Tie Attire
IN ATTENDANCE: Anyone Who Is Anyone
Anyone I found important enough
Anyone who needs to see that I've made it in life
Plus ones I've never met before
The wolves
RSVP: Be There or Be Square
TIME: 6:30 for 7 pm

It's the queen's birthday and whoever said black people don't know how to keep time surely hadn't met the black people I know. They showed up before time even and they dressed the way they were told to dress. I know I said strictly by invitation but if you show up dressed the part and you're with someone we know, then we shall welcome you with open arms. The more the merrier innit.

The bouncer wished me a happy birthday and congratulated me for going for what I wanted relentlessly. I was taking the compliments as he dished them until I realised he thinks I had been coming to Club Lotus for years so Alpha could notice me and be my boyfriend. If it was my club, I would have fired him on the spot.

On the outside, a pretty sign reads: 'Closed for a Private Function'. Club Lotus is upstairs and the usually dark flight of stairs from the outside up to the club is well lit today. There's a red carpet flowing up the stairs for the grand entrance of my guests. It looks like a totally different place today. I can't believe Don made all this possible for me. I would have never seen it in my wildest dreams. It's like a fairy tale come to life.

The first thing that greets you at the top of the stairs is a table with champagne, mimosas, wine, beers...pick your poison. Next to that is all sorts of finger food and eager waitresses to deliver it to your table. I wanted topless waiters but I was reminded that I'm throwing a classy party not a strip show. Disappointed but isso kay.

On the wall above that table are the words 'She leaves a little sparkle wherever she goes'. The theme of the decor is gold and black, I wanted my own thing but the party planner insisted that if I wanted to bring Hollywood to Cape Town and throw a party no one would ever forget, I had to go with gold and black. Looking at it now, I'm beyond glad for it. It really is sparkling. What with the chandeliers, the golden centerpieces and fancy glasses on the tables. He did everything I wanted and even that I didn't know I wanted. I owe him a big review on Instagram for pulling this off.

I keep getting emotional all by myself and then blinking back my tears so I don't mess my mascara. Most people are here already, except my boyfriend and his

people of course. I doubt they know why we have something called time or the importance of keeping it for that matter. Not that I mind, I'm used to Don doing what he wants and when he wants to. I wouldn't be surprised if he forgot.

Merishka and the ladies from Don's project show up and I greet them personally. They didn't seem to like me much when we went to Aquilla Game Reserve the last time but Don said if I'm going to be with him for the long run then I have to learn to leave my heart and feelings out of situations and get along with his crowd. And no he wasn't asking. So here we are exchanging plastic smiles and them giving me big hugs. They brought gifts! Which part of 'gifts in the form of money only' did they miss? I take the gifts anyway and hide them under the table. A waitress ushers them away and I grab Merishka's hand and stop her. It's a new chapter of my life and I want to start it on a positive.

"Thank you for coming. I know you don't like me much and you think I'm not good enough for Don, but I'll tell you this. I love Donovan with my life. He's not the easiest person to love and he's never said he loves me too but I love him enough for the both of us".

She takes my hands and makes that face adults make when you've said something touching.

"I know you do my kind (my child). You hurt him deeply when you were messing around with the other boy. Don is a good guy but he's also dangerous when pushed. He would have killed that boy. What man wants to share his woman? An alpha at that? If you're going to be with him for life, it will do you a lot of good to understand him and his life style. He's a good guy".

I know he's a good guy who does very bad things more frequently than the average guy.

She looks around the club and then back at me. "You would be a fool to think he doesn't love you". Then she ushers herself away. I'm happy that Don has Merishka as his voice of reason. That he has someone to turn to when he needs a shoulder. I don't like her anymore but she's good for him.

Chelsea and I have the high table. She's like a 'matron of honour/best girl' of sorts. She looks elegant in her black dress with the corset top that has her looking like a younger Beyonce. She wanted to wear a golden gown like me but I shut that bullshit down. There can only be one queen and the last thing I need is my best friend looking better than me on my day. She's already prettier so she can sit down. So I'm in gold and she's in black.

Dr Dirk and his plus one arrived at 6:30 on the dot. White people and etiquette! He looks younger and completely divine in a black suit, white shirt and black tie. If I was single, I would ask him out. His partner, I think I saw her at his birthday party, looks royal in a classic red number and her blonde hair in a French braid. She has a practiced smile and walks with a royal glide. Being this proper must require a lot of energy. Can never be me.

Chelsea's parents are here too. They look as rich as they are with her mum wearing real pearls and carrying a real Bottega Veneta leather handbag. Her uncle, aunt and cousin came along too for the party and made the drive from Wellington worth it I suppose. They are sharing a table with my mother. She's talking their ears off and whatever she's saying must be funny because they keep laughing. She looks happy and that's making me happy. She looks 10 years younger in her gown and her hair, nails and make up are on fleek. We had a professional makeup artist beat our faces to perfection and a stylist do things to our hair. You would swear I'm getting married.

Damn! My boyfriend has the hottest friends in the world. That lively table over there has three fine black brothers and an equally fine sister. "Elik, Kofi, Lumka", Chelsea says. She's still hung up over the Elik guy and only heaven knows why because Hulk is here and Caleb will be coming through soon. For someone who prides herself in 'the only thing I catch is flu, I don't catch feelings', she catches them bad. But not my business. I fell in infatuation with that black guy the first time I saw him. He exuded charm, masculinity and looked like someone I would love to wake up under. Chelsea confirmed his sexual prowess alright but now that I'm looking at his younger brother, equally dark but more on the sweet side and reminding me a little of Dalu, I'm having inappropriate thoughts.

With Africa's finest is a girl probably my age. She obviously got the memo and she's looking like it's her party in her little number and very high Louboutins. They are having a party of their own at that table, laughing and toasting to whatever. She keeps leaning in on her man and acting like she wants everyone to know he's hers. Insecure girls bore me.

I know I have to be a good host and go and say hi to everyone. And since Chelsea has abandoned me again, I go at it alone. I thank Dr Dirk for the wine and introduce my mother to him. He has only good things to say about me. I'm in the mood today so I say good things about him to my mother. How rude! He asks my mother how old she is because he says she looks like my sister and not a day over 30. And what do you know! My boss is only a year older than my mother. I thought he was much younger to be honest. His plus one turns out to be his little sister. Since he didn't want to be the only single person at the party, she came to his rescue.

"Us single people must stick together", my mother makes herself comfortable at their table and instructs me to bring her bag and glass of champompo. I already feel sorry for Dr Dirk as I walk away from their table.

I have a table with my friends from university. The loudest table in the building. It's a whole reunion and my people are rowdy! They popped champagne and with that loud POP sound they went crazy. All eyes are on them but do you think they give a flying fish?

"Congrats babe for owning this club! You're goals shame....yazi I lost your number", one I didn't invite says, taking my number.

"Her boyfriend is life! What man buys you a club! Mine can't even buy me data".

"When you come here and party with Lotus and Chelsea, the alcohol is free bro. You drink whatever you want", one guy says. We partied with him once, I don't know why he's making it look like we're besties now. That party didn't end well anyway, Caleb scared them off before kidnapping Dalu. I'm glad he doesn't bring that up though. They are going on and on about how awesome my life is and how they heard I have a whole driveway full of cars in my new house. Where they got those lies from I don't know, but I can't bring myself to correct them. Not everyone deserves to know you like that.

"I know her. She teaches undergrad in our Department", one of my friends now working at the university points to the girl all over Elik.

"Her? She doesn't look old enough. Don't you like need a Masters or something to lecture?", it can't be.

"She has a PhD!".

"Nah, can't be. She's a slay queen, you can just tell", I refuse to believe blatant lies. All of us agree that there's no brains behind that beauty. She's living off that man and is probably the side chick anyway. I deliberately forget how Elik went on and on about his 'baby' when I first met him.

"Oksalayo she is a lecturer and has a PhD!", my friend says in defeat. Whatever! We leave gossip for later and I have to move on and say hi to the rest of my guests.

I almost have a heart attack when I see someone who looks like Dalu but phew! False alarm. I greet Hulk and his two friends. He asks if I've seen Chelsea and I say no and move on. I don't know anyone on this one but I say hi anyway and maintain a smile.

Then to the table that makes me nervous. I've never been shown such gentlemanly treatment in my life before! Me and this guy Kofi would make a great couple yazini. We would be #CoupleGoals, #BlackAndYellow, #BeardGang #LotusCoffee. We would be a brand and start an empire just by being together. He's fine. He stands to give me a hug...Tall check, smell nice check, voice check, look good in a suit check.

"Kofi you might wanna let that hug go. This is Lemon's girlfriend", Elik formally introduces me. He lets me go faster than lightning and sits back down. He even says "I'm so sorry". Don! Even his own friends are scared of him?

"Lemon's girlfriend?", the one who said his name is Lumka looks shocked. I flash him my best smile.

"I know. Don also can't believe he has me and no, he didn't ask me out at gunpoint", I make it light for them. That does the trick and we laugh and

exchange pleasantries. I talk to Elik more because I've met him before so it's easier.

"I'm Lotus by the way. Thank you for coming. I hope you guys will have a good time".

"It's a pleasure to meet you Lotus. I'm Fierce".

She sounds nice and I regret judging her earlier. They all look like good peoples.

I hate to use strong words like envy but I envy this girl. I wish Don could be all over me like this in public. I also don't like how she dressed up almost like she meant to steal the show. But breathe Lotus, you're overthinking it, good vibes only.

"You don't have to sit with these boys all night you know. You can come and sit with me. My bestie keeps disappearing on me so come and keep me company so long".

She says no but I insist until she says ok. She looks a lot like me and Chelsea and so she should be on my team. I mean, not look alike, but you know what I mean. She kisses Elik and he holds her like she's leaving the country or something. I roll my eyes subtly. I think I'm jealous.

It doesn't take long to warm up to her. Although I get a sense that she's deeply spoiled and used to princess treatment, I appreciate her sense of genuity and her love for wine. She's probably another rich girl turned slay queen who has no idea which side of town the townships are at or how to spell poverty. But I've been with Chelsea for years and Dalu for a second so maybe money loves me yazi and it's a sign I should be rich.

She really has a PhD, believe it or not, in Chemical Engineering nogal. No proof though, just her word is all I have. Maybe she bought the degree? No shade but I can't for the life of me picture her doing whatever Engineers do. And do nerds look like this? Nah, stop insulting our intelligence.

She's playful though and in no time I'm laughing with her. She has the funniest stories to tell about her job. And I was right, spoiled is her middle name. She took her boyfriend to class and had him teach for her while she made a fool of herself on the side. I think she's exaggerating but she's making my night.

"So where's Lemon?", she asks.

"He's not here yet...why do you guys call him Lemon?".

"That's his name, isn't it?", she sips on her wine.

"No. His name is Donovan, we call him Don. Many people call him Alpha".

She shrugs her exposed shoulders.

"I didn't know he had such a nice name. For as long as I've known him, he's been Lemon".

She just had to point out that she's known my boyfriend longer than me, didn't she?

We talk about work and I fill her in on what I do and my future plans etcetera. I don't know why I just told her I'm considering doing a Masters next year, because I'm really not. It never even crossed my mind once. She immediately says I must go for it and if I want, she can get me the application forms since the online system is deurmekaar. I thank her for the offer and tell her she can bring the forms on Thursday when we do a girls night out. I've already decided we'll do drinks with her and Chelsea on Thursday. She says that's fine. She's a good listener and a hyper of note. She keeps saying I should go for it and stop making excuses.

Wait, why am I going out of my way to sell myself to this girl again? It's unlike me.

"So Don gave you this club?", she asks.

"No, he didn't give it to me. Just named it after me", I don't know why I'm telling her the truth. Agghhh!

"Oh ok, it's still a good gesture. Who would have guessed that Lemon would be this sweet".

I blush at that, feeling like I have superpowers or something. I made a man do things no one imagined he could do.

"And this party? Wow! You know how to throw them. This is it. It's amazing", she says. I smile again. It means a lot coming from her and I don't know why.

"So, how is dating Lemon?". Weird question but ok.

"Dating Donovan is umm complicated...I love him though", I quickly add.

"And that's all that matters. We have to love who we love. And if he loves you and does all this for you, keep him".

Gosh, I love her!

"I hope you're saving up though Lotus", she looks at me with a serious face. And I'm supposed to believe this person is older than me? No ways.

"Save up what now?", I frown a little.

"Money. Whatever you get from Don, put some away for yourself. Our men have money, loads of it, but it's theirs. Should they decide to up and go, we should have something to fall back on", she says. I just look at her amazed. I want some of her spirit.

"Sorry if I'm crossing lines, must be the wine getting to my head already. All I'm saying sis is, money is nice to spend but stash some away. Don't even tell him about it. Keep it safe for a rainy day. And importantly, make sure whatever he gifts you with, be it a car or a house or whatever, make sure he transfers ownership to you. Don't let love blind you, I once spent a day washing dishes in Waterfront, broke and out".

I make her tell me the story and I'm in stitches. I can't believe he kicked her out and cut her off financially. That's brutal. I have no doubt Don's brutality would be ten times worse. I'm taking notes, I'll start saving from now on. I ask for tips on

how to get my way and to get more money. She leans in and whispers, "Ask after sex, their brains don't work then". We giggle and I don't know why but I fling my arms around her and hold her there. Ok fine, I like her.

Chelsea shows up, gives us that up and down look and leaves again. I think she hates the idea of Fierce being here with me. Oh shucks! Chelsea and Fierce's man have history! Shucks. I can't avoid her though, she's nice and our men are close friends so we have to get acquainted. Chelsea has to deal. Positive vibes only.

Then my boyfriend dearest decides to show up to my black tie event in jeans and a hoodie! He comes up the steps with his entourage right behind him. All of them are in hoodies and jeans, with hoods over their heads. I have no words. They look like a cult of some sort and no man, no! I have a theme for crying out loud. I'm fuming but trying my best to stay calm.

Don greets Fierce before me and they share a joke I don't get before he dismisses her, saying he wants to talk to me alone. I hope she's not offended! He told her "go and sit with Elik so I can prat to Lotus". I think she's used to his lack of manners because she said her "later" and strutted away.

"But bae! I told you suit and tie!"

"Have you ever seen a suit and tie in my house?", he smiles at me. Why can't he take anything serious.

"You could have bought one Donovan!", through gritted teeth.

"You didn't tell me", he has this amused look on his face.

"Come here. You look amazing! Stop talking so I can look at you".

I blush a little and stand for him. I feel like magic in this figure flattering, golden dress. It's cut generously showing off a healthy cleavage and the golden sequins have me leaving a sparkle wherever I go. I have a matching golden crown on my head because well, I'm the queen. The upper half of my dress was inspired by Bonang's dress, the gold one. The makeup artist dusted my eyes with gold glitter. I'm gold baby, solid gold.

I look up at him and the way he's looking at me like he's before an angel has me feeling good.

"How long does it take to get that dress off you?". His voice is husky and I know he means it.

"It has a zip at the back. It isn't hard to take off", I look down at my strappy gold heels.

"Then come", he takes my hand before I can say anything and he leads me to his office.

I was right, the zip opens easily and bending over his desk in nothing but my high heels on has me feeling sultry. And the way he's having me has got to be the best gift I'm getting tonight.

At least my bags are here and wet wipes always have been a girl's best friend. When he zips me up and I fix my crown, I pull him in for a soft kiss. No smudging my lipstick please.

"I'm sorry, I couldn't help myself", he says.

"I'm glad you couldn't help yourself. You're the best thing that ever happened to me baby". I pull his hood over his head.

"I love seeing you happy. You're beautiful and tonight I want you in my arms for all to see. I feel like I won me a trophy".

Blushing overload.

"About my offer, have you thought about it?", I wish he could have more faith in me. I can do it.

"I told you there's nothing to think about. You can't. I won't make you a murderer. You're my innocent flower, I don't want a single drop of blood on your hands".

"But Don...".

"But nothing angel. Let's go before the party ends without us".

Sigh.

He's gone and I text Chelsea to come and help fix me up. She calls me a sex addict and leads me back to the people when she's content that I look good. I'm in the best mood, with rivulets of gold fabric cascading down my body as I do the dance.

"Did your brothers really have to wear hoodies though! Now my pictures are going to look dodge!"

"Dodgy you mean! And they won't be in your pictures", he taps my nose with his index finger.

"Mxm. Still. Hoodies and jeans though, liyadika!".

"Let's make this easy. There's Hilton there, go and yell at him for not wearing a suit", it's all a joke to him. He knows I'm terrified of Hilton.

"But you love me still?", he asks with that 'I'm the man' look.

"Of course I do, unfortunately for me".

The photographer comes around and we pose. Well I pose and he just stands. He's my world. This man will be my husband, he just doesn't know it yet.

There's food, champagne, wine, cocktails, whatever poison you want. Some girls showed up dressed like they are selling themselves or something but I was told not to ask. They're sitting with the wolves and no comment from me. It's a vibe and I'm emotional. It's too beautiful. I'm glad I got a professional photographer to capture all these moments.

I'm a little tipsy and I have to stop drinking. It's time to cut the cake and I have Chelsea and Fierce on either side, equally tipsy so we're just laughing carelessly. I make a young speech, "First of all, I want to thank you all for coming through and for supporting me. I hope you had a good time. I want to thank my mother for giving birth to me, without her we wouldn't be here today. Thanks babes, you look gorg", I wave at her. She's sitting too close to Dr Dirk.

"Thank you to my boss for coming through and not bringing up work. Thank you Elik for giving me Fierce. Thank you mum and dad (Chelsea's parents) for everything you've ever done for us and especially for giving me my Chelsea bun. Thank you ...", I go through all the names I know. I even thank Hilton for being awesome. Yeah I'm drunk.

"Last but not least, thank you to my amazing boyfriend for making this party happen. I would rather die than lose you and I can't wait to have babies that have your eyes. I love you so much Don and you mean everything to me. I remember the first time I met you right here and you kidnapped me. That was scary and for weeks I'd wake up in your bed and I had no idea what your name was. That was so scary but sexy AF....", gosh why did I say all that?.

"Okay, I guess the birthday girl should cut the cake now. We love you too Lotus". She starts the 'Happy birthday to you...' song to shut me up. Fierce helps me cut the cake. I wish I didn't have to cut it. It's too beautiful. It's coated with white chocolate and shaped like a Lotus. Cake makers do the most out here. This is divinity incarnate. I didn't get a live band as I wished but I'm content.

"Here, have some water", Chelsea gives me a bottle. I think I drank too much. No more alcohol for me tonight.

People are leaving and some are giving me envelopes, some cash as it is and some are swiping at the speed point. I wasn't joking about gifts in the form of money. I leave Chelsea to oversee the money handlings and I walk Fierce outside to get her changing clothes in the car. The real party is about to begin.

I whine about how I embarrassed myself with the things I said and she laughs it off with "you don't know embarrassment sweetheart. My mother walked in on Elik and I doing the nasty. Now that's embarrassment!". Yhoooh! I can't imagine.

She's so nice. I walk with my hand on her shoulder, both for support and endearment alike. She stops at a black Jeep and opens the back and gets a Louis Vuitton sports bag.

"Elik's car, right?".

"No, it's mine".

"Yours? How?", that envy creeping in again.

"Elik got it for me a while back after I crashed my other one".

How does she do it? She must teach me her ways.

"Go on ahead Fierce and tell Don to come down now", I stop. I'm glad when she does as I ask with no questions asked. What the hell is the General doing here. He's standing near the entrance with two of his goons.

"Mrs Alpha! Finally we meet", he stands in my way and my heart gallops in my chest. How does he know me?

"What do you want from me?", I fake courage.

"We came to the party? Can't I come to my alpha's girlfriend's party? After all it's the pack's money paying for it", he sniggers.

"You're not invited", I cross my arms and balance my feet more. It's giving me joy to have him see me here dressed in gold and my face looking its best. Like 'yes old man, Don got all this, while you shrivel alone in loneliness!'.
"I don't need an invitation.... I see we renamed the club after you. Nc Nc Nc, young love. So stupid".

I look up at him and he looks back at me but I don't flinch. I swear he looks familiar, I suppose I've seen him enough times in my nightmares to have his face imprinted in my mind.

"Where are you from? Where are your parents?", he squints, looking at me.

"So you can track them down and kill them too? I don't think so!".

"I'm serious little girl. Where are you from?", he says, almost nicely but I won't fall for it. He wants to play nice so I can let my guard down and start telling him everything? Sorry, no can do.

"They are dead. Next question".

"Lotus, get inside", Don appears and I don't need to be told twice. I go to his office to breathe and get it together. A glass of champagne helps me. I hope there won't be any trouble please. I hate that man with everything in me.

Don finds me in a calmer state.

"What did he want?".

"Nothing. He was asking me weird questions about you. Like where you are from and if I know your mother and stuff".

"And?".

"And I told him you're from here and both your parents are dead. That way he can't go after them".

"I need him dead Don. I can't live like this, wondering when next he will pop up or if he will kill me next time. I need him gone".

"Soon my angel. I'll take care of it".

He holds me and I take deep breaths until I'm better. Don said not to worry so I won't worry. Positive vibes only.

When he leaves, I tell him to call Chelsea and Fierce so we can change into party clothes. With the adults gone, it's now time to unleash the freaks. I picked this little white dress to stand out and boy am I standing out. I know I was

complaining about the weight gain but I've never been more glad. My hips are bigger and I feel sexy as hell. #TeamThick I'm here to stay.

I'm twerking and grinding on Don and he's not complaining. If you didn't know any better you would think I'm competing with Fierce over there as she shakes her booty for Elik. Chelsea grabs my hand and pulls me away.

"So now that you have a new bff, I don't matter anymore", she snaps at me

"What' you mean?"

"Her *points at Fierce*! You acting like you're her groupie. You don't even know her".

"Mxm. Don't be so dramatic. You know I love you. Come, let me take you to Hulk so you can also be loved".

I sit with her and Hulk and I do my best to reassure her that there's only one bff.

I want to take my mother home but Dr Dirk insists. Since his little sister left earlier because "I can't stay long, my cat is sick". So that left my boss and my mum talking and stuff. I won't even think of it. I'm not worried about the General being outside, for all he knows my mother is dead wherever she is so she's safe. Even if he sees her it's no big deal.

I pity all who got the invitation but didn't show up because this my friends will go down in the annals of time as THE party. The girls partying with the wolves are really shutting it down. They have mad dancing skills I tell you. I can't be sure but I think the guys are doing cocaine in that corner. How Don is letting all that happen beats me. Unless of course he supplied it.

I'm drinking water now because I was getting too drunk too fast. The Elik gang say their byes and Fierce promises to give me a call tomorrow. They say they have a trip tomorrow morning so they can't party all night. The life! Trips and all.

Then this happens. I've never seen such. It's past 2 am and I'm sitting with Chelsea and Hulk, they are cosying up and I'm just talking. Caleb walks up to us and says a polite hi. I jump and give him a big hug and a big thank you for coming through. At least he hugs me back. Could have been embarrassing. He has to gentle push me away from him and I laugh my way down to my seat.

"Dude what's up", Caleb says to Hulk. He doesn't know the name Hulk, only Don does because I told him.

"Caleb, sup".

"I'm good, I need a favour. I need to ask you something", Caleb says, ever so calm.

"Sure, shoot".

"I want Chelsea. Actually, I'm here to take her. I didn't want to just disappear with her and leave you wondering where she went to. So if you don't mind".

I burst out laughing. Is he for real? He's asking for Chelsea from her boyfriend?

The balls on Caleb, I stan. Chelsea looks stunned and Hulk's shock is amusing.

"I'm leaving. If you're coming, let's go", he turns around and walks away. I'm dead! WTF! I can't stop laughing. I only stop when Chelsea gets up, straightens her dress and walks after Caleb. He turns around and wraps his arm around her tiny waist and they go. I didn't think she would. Now I have seen it all. What just happened! I leave Hulk to lick his wounds and run to update Don. But of course he's a spoilsport and doesn't engage with the story.

It's 3 am and I need fresh air. Don agrees to walk with me down Longstreet. It's still alive and people are walking around aimlessly. We pass a tattoo parlour and I look through the large glass windows. They are open and the guy is drawing something on a lady's back.

"I want to see how they do it". I've never had a tattoo before or seen how it's done.

"Not here. Let me check if my guy is still open".

Apparently these tattoo shops open all night on weekends because drunk people often feel the need to spend money on tattoos.

"He's still open. Let's go and get the car, it's quite a distance".

He has a new car? He says I must drive and I do. It's so smooth and that smell of new leather seats has me dreaming of owning a car.

"This car is brand new. Whose is it?"

"Yours", he says casually.

I slam the brakes harder than I meant to.

"What do you mean it's mine?"

"You said you wanted a car and I'm giving you a car for your birthday".

Can he even see how excited I am? How is this not a big deal to him? You know what, let's get to the tattoo shop, I'll process this later.

We get to a tattoo shop at the end of the street. I do a walk around the car and I'm jumping in my heels. Forget process later, I'm processing now. OMG! Donavan!!! He got me this car! All I wanted was a humble Captur not this beast. I don't even care how carelessly he presented it, with no ceremony whatsoever.

"You deserve whatever you want", he kisses me. "But now come on in, my guy needs to close shop".

The guy obviously knows Don. They catch up and he introduces me as his girl. I'm on a winning streak today.

"I want a tattoo", I blurt out. It wasn't premeditated.

"What? Why? I thought you just want to see how it's done", Don says.

"Just one. A small one", I plead. He says no and we have a back and forth of me downright begging him to allow me to have a tattoo. He finally says yes and only one. Yay!

"I want the wolf on Don's neck on my hip".

Don's eyes widen and he gives me a look I can't interpret.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER FORTY SIX...1/3

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SUNDAY

Can I rewind the calendar to Friday please. I want to replay my party over and over again. I want to turn into gold and dance. I want all those happy people cheering for me back in my Club. I want to see the pride in my mother's eyes, the excitement in Chelsea's, the envy in my varsity friends', the approval in Merishka's and the love (I think) in Don's. I want to go back and freeze that moment.

I have a few corrections I want to make. If a genie granted me my three wishes:
1. I would re-speak my speech, careful not to tell people how Don had me on a one night stand and I didn't even know his name. They didn't have to know how he kept smashing for weeks without telling me his name. I said that in front of my mother and Chelsea's parents and my boss. Why didn't anyone stop me? I want to hide everytime I think about it. Don says it's no biggie because it's the truth. This guy lives by the truth so much, it's scary.

2. I would have to decide whether to stop my mother from leaving with Dr Dirk or stop Chelsea from treating Hulk the way she did. Ok maybe the latter. My mother and my boss, ewww is all I can say. As for Chels, I have no words for mogherl. I love Caleb and I admire her for going for what she wants every single time. But there's a thin line between empowerment and trashy. She had no right to disrespect Hulk like that. I laughed I know but I'm 2 days sober now and I know he didn't deserve that. He was there for her during her worst. He saved her from herself and this is the thanks he gets? Anyhoo, Don said Caleb already 'hit that' so bye Hulk. Chelsea went home yesterday morning to get a weekend bag and she went back to Caleb's, I'll assume whatever she got was good. She's not the type to fxck a guy with bad sex more than once. She doesn't cradle anyone's feelings like that. I tried getting the deets out of her but she kept sending me that monkey with hands over its eyes emoji. I tried calling Hulk, I don't know why. He didn't answer though, so ya.

3. I'd rethink this tattoo on my hip. It's so flippen sore. I'm red and swollen and that tattoo guy said I shouldn't wear jeans for 3 weeks! What will I wear to work? It's winter. Don is still laughing at me because I keep complaining about the pain. To be honest, I thought they just draw the tattoo, then it itches a bit, then you put vaseline on it, then you're good to go. Well, Don had to remind me that it's an open wound. That I punctured my skin thousands of times, filling it up with ink

and stressing my body in the process. I can't believe he has all those tattoos. So he went through all this pain? Damn, he's boss!

I don't regret getting the tattoos though. I can tell they will be #TattooGoals when they heal. This little one on my wrist is my fave. I will never forget Don's face when he saw it. I think those were tears welling in his eyes. I was quite tipsy so I can't be sure. Long story short, when the guy was done imprinting the wolf on my hip, I asked Don to go back to the club to make sure everything was fine and to get my bag. The guy cleaned me up and wrapped the tattoo and told me we were good to go. Don still wasn't back so a brilliant idea came to mind. Since he had done so much for me and turned my birthday into a fairytale style Ball, I thought to surprise him. So I asked the guy to write DON on my inner wrist. It hurt like a mother but I thugged it out. Don got back just as the guy was cleaning it.

"The f*ck Lotus! I said only one!...Wait. Don? My name?", he said. He went from quarter to pissed to emotional in a heart beat.

"Of course. You are mine forever. This name of yours here is a covenant I'm making with you, till death do us apart baby. It's me and you till the second coming".

He just smiled and didn't reassure me back but whatever, I was not about to let his cranky ass cripple my vibe. He kissed me, right in front of that guy and whispered, "Let's get you home so we can get this dress off you". That was all the 'I love you Lotus and I would be lost without you. You're my life, my heartbeat, my future wife' I needed to hear. Like, would he die if he opened up and told me how he feels about me? Nigga is clearly as smitten as hard as I am! I mean did you see that car? I'm feeling like the girl over here!

We did the things when we got to his place. Right on the couch, upstairs was suddenly too far. I wanted him badly after the party. You know money makes me wet. And gifts are the best foreplay ever. He kept stopping me from rolling on the new tattoo. I didn't mind then. But now...!

Now I'm on fire and not like Alicia Keys no. I'm burning up. Why didn't anyone tell me that new tattoos hurt?

"Come, I've run the bath", Don disturbs my thoughts.

I get up like I'm dying and walk my naked self to the bathroom. He's been my personal nurse since yesterday, keeping me high on the good stuff and cleaning up my tat. He says I need to keep it clean so that it doesn't scab too badly. It was oozing a goo of blood and ink and whatever that was last night. I was panicking thinking I'm rotting but Don said it's completely normal.

"This shit hurts. You should have warned me at least!", I whine for the fifth time today.

"What did you think a tattoo is? A sticker?", he mocks me.

"Actually yes!", I roll my eyes.

"Is it? Makes sense I guess. You get a needle piercing your skin a thousand times and it really shouldn't hurt. Perfect sense".

I hate him sometimes. He just suggested that I'm stupid, didn't he?

He takes his time cleaning the ooze off my hip and spends even more time on his name. He gently rubs it with his fingers, rinsing it with warm water and white soap. Strange in a way but the pain is nice when he does that. I don't know what's getting him emotional. I wish people could see this soft side of him maybe they wouldn't judge him too harshly.

"You really got my name on you! Still can't believe it. You know it's permanent right? Why?".

He's been asking me this question since he found me in that tattoo shop.

"Because I love you. Which part of me loving you don't you understand? You wait and see how pretty this will look when it heals". I like the font used, it's arty and stylish. I totally love it minus the pain of course.

"Look at me angel. I'm a....".

"No you're not a monster and fuck no, you're not scary. But you're a monster in the sack though", silly grin. I swear I can't think of him in a sexual way without grinning. He's so naughty! He smiles without looking up and doesn't say anything further.

"It's worth it though. At least now I'm part of the pack", sigh, lying on my good side while he applies the ointment on my wolf.

"Are you now? What are you in the family?", focusing on what he's doing.

"I'm the alpha's girl of course. So I'm like a first lady-nyana so wabona", so dreamy.

"Is it? So what's your role?".

"I don't know. To like, you know support the alpha, help him make major decisions, be the Michelle to his Obama. Kill anyone who threatens our pack. Be like the matriarch of the wolves you know".

"Nice, Miss Wolf. Matriarch *chuckles like it's the funniest thing he's heard vandag*....right, we good now. Put some clothes on before I take mine off", he throws me a loose dress.

"Don wait. I want to be part of the pack. I already have the tattoo", I'm dead serious.

"Great! You're a wolf now. I'm also going to get a cross inked on me today and wear a robe then instantly become the Pope. It's that easy". His sarcasm sucks.

"I'm serious! I think I'm ready".

He stops and looks at me and I'm looking straight at him. I've been thinking about it and I think I can join, should join in fact. They need me.

"Are you serious?". I nod vigorously.

"Well if you really want it, you're welcome. Just do three small things for me and you're in", he cups my cheek with his hand.

"Anything", I sit up excitedly.

"Do a sex change, we don't run with girls. Kill a member of our biggest rivalry in close range. Bring me back his body so I can believe you. And reach into your chest, pull out your heart and throw it in the bin, you won't be needing it anymore. Do that and you're in".

Tjo! Was that necessary? He could have just said no if he didn't want.

"Dress up, let's go. We need to be back early".

I find him downstairs, talking on the phone. I don't ask. I learned 'Ask no questions - Hear no truth - Have no nightmares'.

We drive all the way to Stellenbosch. I still have the address from his birthday party. Google Maps never forgets.

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER FORTY SIX 2/3

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It's a Sunday so a young food market is going on in this farm. We drive past and down to the farm house. I think this means I have a photographic memory. I still remember the route!

Dr Dirk ushers us in and insists that we should have tea. White people! Tea in the afternoon? His sister from Friday says hi but doesn't stay. Apparently she's very stressed because her cat is getting worse. I can't relate so a sorry is the best I can do. I want to ask if they will have a funeral for the cat after it dies or what, but I don't think it's appropriate to ask right now.

I guess I need to get used to this. People are uncomfortable around Don and they try too hard and they act all scared like he will kill them or something! That's Dr Dirk right now, visibly uncomfortable and over smiling. Don doesn't care though, sometimes I think he feeds off people's fears. I think he enjoys it when people squirm and become bothered before him. I don't know why. He's not that scary come on, ok maybe a little.

We make small talk about how banging my party was and my boss says maybe he should put me in charge of organizing the year end staff party at work. Fxck I look like? A free party planner? Cause I know he won't pay me for it. Nah, won't work but I don't voice it.

"So where is she?", Don asks.

He asked for a beer. He said tea is for grannies (I'm drinking tea!) and wine is for sissies (Dr Dirk is drinking wine!).

Let me backtrack a bit and tell you how we ended up here with my boyfriend interrogating my boss on a Sunday afternoon. So after the party ne, my boss left with my mother. She had my set of keys to the flat, so he was supposed to drop her off. Easy task right? Well, she wasn't dropped off. She ended up somewhere in this house and I'm cringing hard looking at my boss right now. Eeewww. I know my mother. She's quite ummm, how do I say this without being disrespectful? Liberal? I can't find a polite word for it so let's just say she's living her best life and leave it at that.

Of course I have a problem with my boss shagging my mother but that's not why we're here. She's MIA. Disappeared into thin air and we have no idea where to. Her phone is off, WhatsApp gets one tick and her friends back home haven't heard from her since the party. She wasn't kidnapped though because her bag is gone from my place, together with some of my make up, a bag I really like and a pair of brand new sneakers. Which means she packed up and left. No word, no note, nothing. She just up and left. I thought we were good so I don't understand.

She was last seen leaving the club with my boss so he's the only person who can help us find her. He swears he has no clue where she went to and I believe him but Don is not satisfied with that answer.

"Was it that bad?", Don asks.

"Was what bad?"

"Whatever you did to her. Was it so bad she decided to disappear altogether?".
Poor John! I kick my unruly boyfriend under the table but he doesn't flinch.

"Tell me everything that happened from the time you left the club to the time she left your place".

"Everything?"

"Yeah, we not rushing anywhere

Take your time and tell us everything".

"Well...", Dr Dirk looks at me for help. I look down and drink my tea. Let the men handle this one.

"We left the club. She was a bit drunk but she's a lady so she handled her alcohol well. We stopped for fresh air outside and for her to catch her breath. That's when this gentleman approached us".

"What gentleman?"

"I don't know him. Older than you a little but like you, you know. Scars and tattoos and you know. He greeted her by name. He caught us off guard so it gave her a fright, naturally. She panicked and ran. I found her and brought her home. I wouldn't let her be alone like that. She was pretty worked up".

"What exactly did this man say to her?", Don frowns a little.

"Nothing much. He just said something like 'you came back I see'. He was also shocked to see her judging by his face".

OMG!

We need to find her. My hands are shaking and I can't focus. How did he know her? This can't be happening. Was he inside the club maybe, spying on me?

"Is this the man?", Don shows him a picture on his phone. Dr Dirk nods and looks at us suspiciously.

"Ok Johnnie thank you for your time".

"Is she ok?", he sounds concerned.

"How are we supposed to know?". Don! He's being unnecessary now but I'm concentrating hard on stopping myself from getting an asthma attack. I don't have asthma but you know what I mean.

"We'll find her. Don't cry", Don tries to comfort me as we drive off.

Maybe she went back home. I can't call my grandmother to ask in case she didn't and she gets worried.

What a difficult!

We pull over in front of a house with high walls and a dark gate. The General's house? I doubt, it's in a shabby part of town and I doubt the boss of amagintsa would live here.

"What's this place?", I whisper my question.

"A trap house. Come on".

"Who stays there? What are we going to do in there?"

"To ask a few questions. Come on".

He gets out of the car and doesn't wait for me. This is getting tiring seriously. He needs to learn how to open my door!

The guys at the door let Don in and I stay close to him. I ask who they are when they are out of earshot and he just says my guys.

"Stay here", he leaves me in the passage. It's got that haunted house feel but it's fine, I'll complain later when we get home. What is this place! It's so stuffy and I wonder what's behind those doors.

"Done. I found someone for the job".

I won't be relieved yet. I'll only relax when that son of a bxtch is six feet under.

MONDAY

I'm at work but I may as well be home. My mind is not functioning at all. I'm still worried about my mother. Don said he asked around and there's no way the General took her. So where is she? I'm sitting on my desk staring into the space I sat on the day of the audit.

I'd flirted with Dalu to get a pass and to forget Donovan. But if I'm being true to myself, I liked him and a part of me still does. He's a safe choice and he's calm. I hate that I never gave him a chance. I feel like I played him dirty and he didn't deserve it at all. I'm tempted to call him and apologise but maybe leaving him alone is for the best.

I had a weird dream again last night. I was running into the General's arms. He picked me up and twirled me round and round, laughing and happy. Then he put me down and walked away, waving goodbye all the time. I woke up with a smile on my face then panicked when I realised he was back inside my dreams. I told Don the dream and he said something absurd.

"What if he knows you baby? I mean, he recognized your mummy and come to think of it, you have his eyes! What if he's your..."

Trust Don to mock me at the most inappropriate time. I stopped him before he could suggest that creature is my father. Seriously? Paternity tests are done through dreams now?

"Let's hold off the hit and find out why he wanted to know about you and how he knows your mummy. Please angel", he said.

"No Donovan! It's already hard enough for me as it is. I live in anxiety and panic. Get rid of him already. And fxxk you for saying he's my father! How dare you!"

I worked myself into a fit and he tried to say fine but I wasn't having it. I took a blanket and went and slept in the other room. How dare he! My mother is many things and she likes dodgy men but even she wouldn't settle for that heartless piece of man.

My phone rings and it's a private number.

"Lotus", Don's voice comes after my hello.

"Yes baby".

"Swear to me that you won't repeat this to anyone. I have everything to lose for doing this but you know I'm doing it for you".

"I swear. I'll take it to my grave. Do it for us baby".

"Are you sure you don't want to talk to him first. To make sure..."

"Don please. Just get it done".

"Your wish is my command"

Rest in eternal peace General. I put my hands together and explain myself to the Lord. Demons and devils have no place among us. By getting rid of that vile man, I'll be doing earth a service. I am sorry anyway and may my conscience not be bothered by this.

I'm trying to get some work done to pass the time but I'm not productive at all. And to think it's only 1 pm! Gosh time is walking at tortoise speed today. Can't I fake being sick and go home already?

My phone rings again and I'm expecting it to be Don telling me the words I long to hear - 'IT IS DONE'. My heart leaps in my throat, both in excitement and anxiety.

"Ha a sisi. Where the hell have you been?". I didn't mean to yell. At least there's no one nearby.

"Lotus, how could you? After everything I did to protect you, you invite that man back into our lives? Do you even know who you're dealing with?". She's upset and I'm confused now. What is she smoking?

"Where are you?".

"I'm back home. Cing'ba I was going to stick around to find out what he would do to me? Am I written 'SBHANXA' (Stupid/Idiot) on my forehead?".

"Please stop! What are you talking about?".

"Him! Your father. Why are you hanging out with him? How did you know?".

I get she's upset but she's crazy. Don is not my father. WTF!

"Not your ugly boyfriend. I mean Ryan!".

"Calm down, will you? Who's Ryan? What are you talking about?".

She stops. Finally she understands that I'm lost.

"You don't know him? He was outside the club that night. He saw me. I thought....".

"My father was outside on my birthday? Who is he? THETHA!", my turn to yell. I waited all my life to hear this.

"Ryan...he is a bad man Lotty. I ran away from Cape Town to protect you...".

"I hear the sob story sisi but who is he?".

She describes him and when she says he was an alpha of a gang at the time I know it's him.

My phone slides off my hand and goes crashing on the floor. I slowly sit down and it's like the world came to a standstill. I'm frozen in shock and at the realization of what I've done.

I pick up my phone and I'm glad when it works. I try Don's number as I run down the steps. Voicemail. I've never left a message after the tone but today I do. "Don't kill him Don please. He's my father. The General is my father".

I can't believe he was right. Had I just listened to him. What have I done.

I keep redialling as I drive, trying my best to keep focused on the road. Voicemail over and over. I turn on the radio so I can drown the voices screaming in my head.

I hope and pray that Donavan is home. The news come on as I turn around the corner and approach Don's house.

"Headlines at 3 pm: Cape Town gang lord gunned down. A suspected gang leader was shot in front of his house in what is suspected to be an assassination attempt. Ryan (55) is said to be the leader of The Wolves, one of the most notorious gangs in Cape Town. He was rushed to Groote Schuur Hospital where he's currently battling for his life. The shooter is still on the loose. With rising gang wars, it's suspected that a member of the rival gang is responsible. Details to follow at 6:30...."

I didn't realise that I was still driving. I hit the pavement and only then do I slam my brakes.

I kill the engine and leave the car stuck to the pavement. The door is open and I find Don, Hilton and Caleb in the living room.

"Skat?", Don looks shocked to see me.

"He is my father Donovan! The General is my father! Why didn't you pick up your phone?"

"What?", the three of them say at once.

"Lotus!", he opens his arms and I run into them.

Hilton pulls me back and I yelp. He's holding me by the wrist with the tattoo.

"What did you say?"

I'm crying now and my heart is falling apart. I spent most of my life praying to know my father, then when the universe brought him to me, I killed him.

"The General is my father. His name is Ryan".

"How do you know that? So you lied to us? You were playing us this whole time?", Hilton gives me a deathly stare.

"No. My mother just told me. I tried calling you Don but your phone is off. She said he's my father".

"Please cuz, give her here", Don reaches for me.

"You're hurting her. Let her go".

Hilton holds on to me, crushing the tattoo with Don's name on and letting me squirm.

"You trust this piece of ass? You believe that she didn't know he was her father? She set you up alpha but you're too busy thinking with your penis to see. I bet you, she's been working with her daddy all this time".

I try to say something but I can't find the words.

"I'll be damned if you go down for her! I should break her pretty little neck right here, right now".

"Hilton, if you don't get your hands off her right now, it won't be her neck that will be broken!"

Hilton lets me go and laughs, a provoking type of laugh that makes my skin crawl.

"She has you where she wants you. Don't call me when she destroys you. You've made your choice, cuz".

"Hilton wait", Caleb runs after him.
I look up at Don and he swallows hard. Hilton means everything to him I know that.

It's such a mess. What have we done?

HEART IN TWO: CHAPTER FORTY SIX Part 3/3

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"Hilton is right", he says looking over me. He's avoiding eye contact. I want to say 'What?' but instead I let out a gurgling sound. Hilton did me wrong! He threatened to kill me! How was he right?

"At this rate, you'll be my downfall and if I'm not careful you'll bring the pack to the ground. Everything I've worked for is about to disappear because you couldn't shut up! How the fxck you gonna talk like that in front of Hilton? You know how he feels about you and you know what he means to me. Hilton is more than my brother. He's my blood Lotus!"

I'm stunned, still searching for my voice so I can explain myself.

"Did you consider that maybe I don't want my brothers knowing that I let you in on our secrets? Do you ever stop and think before you run your mouth? If Hilton tells the pack that I ordered a hit on our General and that I was instructed by a girl to do so, how do you think that will look on my part?"

"Whose side are you on?", I eventually find my voice.

"That's a good question. Whose side am I on? Which head am I thinking with? Am I still the leader of the pack? Good question. What do you think?"

No comment.

"You're selfish, reckless and all this is a game to you! You swore to take it to your grave and then you walk in here and betray me like that? Lotus, this is my life. It's not a game, it's my life! I worked hard to climb the ranks. Do you even know half the things I had to do to rank up? You think I woke up one morning and miraculously had these stars on my shoulder?...And now I'm going to fall off just because you couldn't keep your mouth shut. Do you even care to know how they are going to demote me? How they will remove the tattoos that come with being alpha? Do you?"

How would I know?

"You realize that Hilton will kill me himself, right? He will kill me to save me the humiliation of deranking. And he has every right to. I've made you the leader of the pack. Put you high on that pedestal and did whatever you wanted me to. Then you turn around and do me like this?"

I didn't think he would mind Caleb and Hilton. I didn't do this on purpose.

"You see this tattoo here?", he lifts up his hoodie and shows me three Arabic letters.

"It says 'Bros Before Broads'. How many times have I broken that rule for you?".
I don't know. What are Broads? I need to look that up later.

"This teardrop *points under his eye* means I'm a killer. Yep. I know I told you what it means to me before but straight up it means I've taken lives. I kill, I protect, I dalla what I must".

I'm in shock. He's upset I get it but I didn't mean it. Can he calm down so we talk? Can he stop yelling at me! I sink down onto the couch and bite my lip to stop from crying.

"See this", he turns around and the words 'Candice' stare me in the face.

"Candice. I put that name there not as a reminder that she was my love but as a reminder of what happens when you open your heart to a girl. Someone ends up dead! They always say relationships make you weak and I didn't listen. Look at me now, weak and unable to control a girl".

"I'm sorry Don", is all I can muster.

"I know you are. I'm sorry too. I thought I would find a way to split my HEART IN TWO, for you and for my brothers. But you're taking it all and I can't have that".

"Don, what are you saying?".

He cracks his fingers and looks away.

"Go and get your stuff upstairs. Take everything and go. If anyone comes asking you about the General. Police, strangers, anyone, remember you've never met the man in your life!".

"Are you breaking up with me? He's my father! What was I supposed to do?", I stand to square with him.

He raises his hands in surrender.

"Actually right now that's not a bad idea. Get your stuff and go, for good. Let me try and salvage what's left of my life, if I have any life left". He sounds so cold and gone.

Tears fall out of my eyes and when I rub them off, my eye catches his for a second. Their blue dancing with ice looking back at me with a mixture of anger and pain. It was never meant to come to this. This was never supposed to happen. I never meant to hurt him.

"Alpha, let's go", Caleb walks in and acts like I don't exist.

Don looks at me and I look back at him. I feel like I'll burst into tears at any moment now.

"Goodbye Lotus....Take the ointment with you. Keep those tattoos clean until they heal".

I'm sitting here wondering what just happened. I honestly didn't think Hilton would react like that. I thought he already knew. Don tells them everything so how would I have known he left this out? And did he just break up with me? Just

like that? I know I'm not perfect but I didn't deserve that. Mum and Dad, I hope you're proud of yourselves. It's because of you that I've lost the love of my life.

Had she just told me and allowed me to make my own decision. And had the General not have been so cruel, all this wouldn't have happened. Everything is happening so fast it's like I'm in a trance.

I wonder if it's too soon to change this 'Don' tattoo to 'Don't stress'. Ok definitely too soon, I love him. I'm having a hard time believing he would dump me that easily. He chose Hilton over me! He chose a man, over me. Yes it's his cousin, brother, father figure, whatever but over me? I thought I meant something to him.

A part of me wants to get up and run after him but my feet are numb. I need to get home and sleep. He can keep my clothes or throw them out, I couldn't care less.

Chelsea is still not home and I'm huddled in front of the TV with the news channel on. Gangs are a big deal in Cape Town so if anything happens to my father, they will mention it. I hope he pulls through. I almost drove to the hospital when I left Don's place but I figured I had done enough damage. So I came here and I've been sitting here, transferring the contents of this bottle of wine to my stomach.

I'm alone so I can feel without any shame. I hug a pillow and bite it hard to stop from screaming. Donovan! I can't lose him like this. My heart is torn into shreds and I'm confused. I didn't mean to hurt him. I was on his team, I'm not the enemy here. If only he could give me a chance. His phone is still off and I've had to turn mine off too because my mother keeps calling. She did this and I doubt I'll ever forgive her. I've lost everything and it's on her.

"Hey sweetheart, Don is here to see you", Chelsea wakes me up. How much did I drink really? My head is throbbing like it has a pulse of its own. I pull myself up and sink back onto the couch. My head!

"What time is it?"

"Quarter past 9", she says.

"It was 6 pm not so long ago....Where's he?". First I'm excited because - my boyfriend. Then it dawns on me that he broke up with me.

"He said he's not coming in. But it's fine, you stay put I'll call him in".

I keep my eyes closed, my head hurts better that way.

I can hear his voice but I'm not sure what he's saying. I cover my ears with my hands. Why is he yelling? I hear him sigh before he picks me up and takes me to

my bedroom. He pulls my little shorts further up my thigh and I'm squinting just to see him. He doesn't look me in the face, not once. He walks out of the door and I want to ask him to stay but I have no voice so I say a silent goodbye lover. He comes back and I keep my eyes closed this time. I feel warmth on my hip as he dabs a face cloth. He came to check up on my tattoo? He walks back out and comes back and does the same to my wrist.

When he's done anointing me, he puts me under the cover and switches off the light.

"Stay the night, please", my voice comes out croaky.

"I came to give you the ointment. Sleep tight". And he's gone.

Chelsea comes to check up on me and is feeling my forehead with the back of her hand. I pretend to be asleep. I have no willpower to have a conversation.

Nothing a hangover concoction can't fix. I think I should be at work but it's already past ten so they will have to deal without me. I pick up my phone and missed calls from Dr Dirk. I call back and tell him my mother is still missing so I had to file a missing person's report at the police station. I quickly add how the policeman said I should stay at home in case she shows up. I doubt he buys that last part but he says it's alright, I can take the day off.

Don's phone is still off. Caleb's goes unanswered and I have no option but to give up. I want to see my father, just once and Don is the only person that can make it happen. I curl in bed, play Chris Brown's Cry No More on repeat and bury my face in a pillow. I'm so sorry baby.

I know I have to follow my heart to avoid further regrets. I open my chat and my heart breaks all over again when I see Don's name with the three hearts, just how I saved it. I miss him so much. We had our ups and downs but it was mostly ups. We vibe so good me and him and I feel like laughing thinking of his corny jokes and stupid sarcasm. I meant so much to him. He never said it but I just knew it. I knew his love for me wasn't guaranteed but I was very hopeful. He gave me the world. I miss meaning that much to someone.

I wipe my tears and go back to doing what I intended to do in the first place. The General's number, I saved him as Cruella, with a black heart next to it. I double check if my phone is on private and yes it is. He's that love that I wished for all my life but that I can never have. My heart thumps painfully as the phone rings. I got his number from Don when we were still good. I needed it so I could block it. I had no idea I would be dialling it and holding my breath like this. Don will never forgive me when he finds out I did this but for my own sanity I have to. Deep down I'm hoping he doesn't answer. He's probably in a coma anyway.

"Hello"....I freeze. My palm is sweaty and my heart is beating so loud I'm sure he can hear it on the other end. I hang up quickly and take deep breaths. It's now or never. Let's try again.

"Hello. Who's there?", he answers. His voice speaks nothing of cruelty. It's calm and fatherly, like it should ask me how I'm holding up and how I'm doing at work. It's my dad's voice. I've been having a hard time deciding whether I hate him or I'm ok with him.

"It's me, Donavan's, I mean Alpha's girlfriend".

He stays silent on his end and I regret saying any of that.

"What do you want? Alpha has his bxtch playing his personal assistant now? Where is he? Tell him I want to see him within the hour or he should give his mother a call and tell her he's coming home".

Wow!

"He doesn't know I'm calling you. Please don't tell him", I sound like a terrified mouse.

"Interesting. What could you possibly want from me?", sounding suspicious. Deep breath, eyes closed, now or never.

"You're my father". Pause.

He stays silent for a moment before bursting out in a cough. The coughing gets worse and it has a wizz now. I think he dropped the phone. I find myself calling for a nurse even though I'm on this side of the phone. The line goes dead and I'm left staring at the screen with teardrops falling on it.

I should have never made that call. Did he hear what I said? How did it make him feel? Why me! I throw my phone hard against the wall and hear the screen crack. There's no way it survived that impact. I hope we still have wine.

I turn the news channel on and drink wine like my sanity depends on it, maybe because right now it does. I'm topping up my third glass when I see the headline. 'Gang Boss Dies in Groote Schuur'.

The bottle in my hand falls, splashing red on the Persian Rug. The glass in my left hand follows shortly, falling on its side.

I think I went deaf, I can't hear anything even though the TV is still on. How can he be dead? I spoke to him a few hours ago and he sounded better. I meant to call him later when Chelsea gets back from work. How could he die without giving me answers? Even if he hated me and wanted me dead, I would have loved to hear it. Maybe it would ease my guilt.

Where do I begin to grieve a father I never knew? I'm mad at my mother for doing this. She robbed Ryan and I a chance of making our own decisions. She should have kept her secret instead of telling me. Now I have all this information and I don't know what to do, where to go, how to feel. I don't even know what I don't know.

They say after losing someone you go through different stages before you find healing. I don't know all the stages or their order but I know there's denial, guilt, pain and grief. My reality doesn't seem to conform to order and I'm experiencing all the stages at once. My little body can't take it. I feel like a miner has moved into my brain and is digging up all the things I had forgotten and burying those I so desperately want to remember. Maybe I'm going mad?

It hurts so bad I can't feel the pain. I'm numb. Yet I'm crying so hard the tears don't fall. So I just sit here, in child pose, on the floor of the living room. With wine stains on my romper, my weave a pulled and ruffled mess and hands shaking. Just listening to my heart struggling to beat.

What kind of father would he have been? Don's father was a General but he loved Don so much he even sacrificed himself for him. So they do have hearts somewhere behind those masks.

I have so many regrets and my biggest is not taking that job Dalu offered me. Don and I would never gone far and everything that came with that affair would have never happened. But again I would have never known who my father was so he would still be alive and my hands would be clean. I want to blame Don but I can't, I can't find anything to fault him on. My whole being loves him.

I think I have a joint in my room. Since there's no more wine, that should do...

HEART IN TWO: FOURTY SEVEN

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I don't know how long I've been sitting here, it could be 5 minutes it could be a year, I wouldn't know. I've just been sitting here holding this joint in my hand. I couldn't find the lighter so I've just been staring at it as if it will feel guilty and come alight if I look at it long enough. I can't tell you how I feel, all I can tell you is I need to sit still because I'm afraid that if I move, all these emotions I'm suppressing will erupt.

I hear knocking on the main door. Can't be Chelsea, she doesn't have to knock. I'm sure whoever it is will go away eventually. The knocking persists and I persist in ignoring it. It opens and I don't care who it is. It could be Queen Elizabeth or a serial killer and I still wouldn't give a two cents.

I'm sitting with my knees to my chest and a blank stare on my face. I let that blunt drop on the floor after I lost the staring contest. My bum is frozen but I needed to feel the coldness of the floor to keep reminding me that I'm alive.

The intruder stands over me and I pretend like he's not there. He walks away and I want to beg him to come back but I let him go. Everyone leaves me anyway and all the men in my life were just passing by. He returns and joins me on the floor. Sitting so close we are joined at the hip, literally. We sit there for a long while. The silence so loud as if it isn't silent at all, almost as if we are listening to a song in some ancient inaudible notes.

He moves, disturbing my peace. My eyes follow his hand to the floor and watch as he picks up the joint. He reaches into his pocket for a lighter and lights it up. He takes a puff and passes it to me. I take it and draw in a long inhale. It flows through my body like holy water. I needed this. For every one puff he takes, I take two. I want to cry when it's finished. Only now do I turn and look at him. He looks like the way he usually looks like. Unbothered.

"I have another one, shall I?"

I nod and we get back to smoking. I'm getting really stoned now.

"Do you know why it's called Mary Jane?", I break the silence.

"Why?", he says.

"Because in Spanish, Mary Jane is Maria Juana ... get it?"

"Shouldn't have let you smoke this one", he says in a low voice.

We go back to our silent gathering. I feel free and liberated, like I can tell the world I'm good and actually mean it.

"Why are you here?", I have the balls to ask now.

"For you", he says.

"Yeah but why?"

"You think I'd let you be alone?"

"You said awful things to me!", I can feel the pain trying to break through my freedom

"I told no lies. But I'm not going to discuss that right now". He shuts me down and I have no option but to return to silence.

"I called the General before he ... he..."

"I know", he says. Definitely not the response I was expecting.

"You know?", I'm shocked beyond words and my gaped mouth shows it.

"Ja".

"How?", can he talk already!

"Don't worry about it".

"Don...", he gets up before I can finish my sentence and gives me a hand. Sigh. Some things never change. I take his hand anyway because inside I'm actually

happy he's here. I'm scared to ask him if it means we are back together, in case he says no. I don't think my heart can take anymore stabs today.

"Let's go home, get a bag, you won't be coming back anytime soon".

I look at him like he's lost his mind.

"You'll be back next week. I can't drive here every time so how will I know you're okay?".

That actually sounded sweet.

"But Chelsea...".

"Chelsea is grown, she'll deal. You can't tell her about this though. I'm serious". I nod and he follows me to the bedroom.

He picks up my ex-phone and looks at me but I refuse to explain.

"Hilton?", I ask when we drive off.

"Don't worry about it", he says it in a close ended way. He's shutting me out of his world now, isn't he? He thinks he can't trust me anymore. I don't blame him but that doesn't stop it from hurting.

We have to drive through KFC because munchies got me bad. I'm glad when we find no one at his house. I don't ever want to see Hilton again. He scares me.

"I never got to know him. What if he was a good guy? I'll never forgive her (my mother) Don". He finally let me vent about losing the General and how I'm blaming my mother for everything.

"Good is relative. For what it's worth I'll tell you this. If roles were reversed, he wouldn't have hesitated to blow your brains out. That's who he is...Now cut your mother some slack. We did this not her. I get that it hurts and you're regretting everything but it's done. You need to stop being self centered for once my angel. Think of other people as well, please mann".

"Wow! So you brought me here to make me feel bad? You should have just left me alone!". I snap.

"You know what, I don't have time for this. So let me give it to you straight. You wanted him shot. I tried to make you see reason and what did you do? Stormed out and slept in the other room and you wouldn't talk to me. So I did it, for you! You wanted it, not your mummy but you! So here's the deal. You're going to be mad at me about it? Then I'm sorry I brought you here. Get your stuff I'll take you back". I feel a lump in my throat and look down at my hands.

"Come on Lotus. Please grow up, please mann. Be strong for me skat..... And this once, don't tell anyone about this, asseblief....Don't worry about the General, leave everything to me".

I'm not going to cry.

"Ok. Can I at least attend his funeral? Please, so I can say my goodbye".

"What funeral?".

What does he mean what funeral? Dead people get funerals!

"Look, I gotta run. Think you'll be alright by yourself? I'll be back as soon as I can and we can do whatever you want us to do".

I actually smile, for the first time today I genuinely smile. I still have him. He kisses me on the forehead and says bye again.

So much knocking today! "Come in", I rub my eyes and lift my head to understand why Don is knocking on his own bedroom door. Caleb walks in and apologizes for intruding. I tell him it's fine he can come in.

"How are you holding up?", he stands against the wall and I sit up.

"As good as anyone going through what I'm going through would be".

"Ok then, you look alright. Alpha asked me to come and check up on you. He's worried about you but there's so much he can do. You have to understand Lotus...", he pulls the ottoman and sits.

"Don is an alpha. He lives and dies for the pack. He shouldn't be with you in the first place. But he broke every rule in the Creed for a chance to be with you. Do you know why he followed you around for that long before approaching you?...Because he wanted you but he couldn't. What he is, who he is, leaves no space for a girl. Then he took a leap of faith and got with you anyway. And you've made him happier than I've ever seen him. But you have to understand what dating an alpha means. First off we don't date. So you and Don are breaking the rules and not everyone will be happy about it. So protect him Lotus, love him and support him. He's done things for you he would never do for anyone. That guy of yours in the prison cost us a taxi route, his club has your name on it, the car in the garage is yours, I can go on. He would give you the world if he could so just listen to him please".

I think I will cry.

"He told me you got a tattoo of his name on your hand. Let's see". Phew! I'm glad for change of topic. It was getting heavy.

"That's nice. He still can't believe you did that for him....Don has never let any girl in, after Candice. So I think sometimes he's scared that he's not getting it right with you".

"He's getting it right. I love him, as he is. I wouldn't ask him to change. I know I messed up but I swear I thought you and Hilton already knew".

"That's the thing. Whether we know or we don't, you don't say anything. You're not a part of us so you shouldn't be involved in our plans...Because how can he trust you if you can't keep quiet? Next thing you'll be talking to the cops and to journalists...then he will kill you".

Ok, stop! I get it.

He says he has to run and I thank him for stopping by. He doesn't tell me where Don is.

"Caleb, one question".

"Yes".

"Has he forgiven me?".

He flashes me that friendly smile of his.

"You're alive and you're in his bed right now. There's your answer".

Tjo! These men! Can't they give straight answers?

Don is still not back. I have this pain in my heart as I take myself to the shower. I kinda didn't bath today but no one ever died from that. No matter how hard I remind myself that he was a bad man, the tears won't stop coming. I wish I'd had the chance to speak to him, to understand why he never wanted me. And maybe just tiny tinny bit maybe we would have had some sort of relationship.

I must have been standing under this water forever now. I scream to let it out and quickly remember I need to keep it together. 'He was a monster Lotus. You wanted him dead!', I repeat to myself. I shouldn't forget that. He's probably sitting at the high table in hell right now looking at me with zero remorse.

"You alright? I think I heard you shouting. I just got back".

"I'm fine. I stubbed my toe", I reach for the towel and wrap it around myself.

"You don't have to pretend with me skat. I'm here now".

He's confusing me. Didn't he say I must deal with it? I walk past him and he follows me.

"Baby, wait", he takes my hand and I stand against the wall. He steps closer, lifts my chin up and I blink down a torrent of tears. His lips close on mine and I feel his tongue in my mouth. I hold him and kiss him back, drinking that Barcadi right off his tongue. Messy, clumsy, wet, our lips wrestle. Letting go of all my emotions onto him. His hands peel off the towel and I shrug it off letting it drop to the floor. His hand rides up my back, pulling me closer. My nipples are aching and when his fingers close around one I break the kiss and moan, with my eyes closed and my head thrown back. His body is so taut and his arms will be the death of me.

"I'm sorry my angel". His voice has spasms vibrating through my spine. His hands are all over me and mine are all over him. It's urgent and it really can't wait. He lifts me up and I lock my legs around his waist. My back plastered on the wall, he guides himself into me and lowers me down until he's buried to the hilt.

"Donavan", I moan out. "Yes my angel". I tighten my thighs as he pulls out and drills his whole length into me.

"Don't baby, don't close your legs". I relax and the first thrusts are hard but they get my nunuberry dripping wet. It takes me right back to the first night he owned my body and left a mark I'll never be able to erase.

He carries me to the bedroom and we Marvin Gaye it on the bed. I want it to last forever.

"I love you", I snuggle closer to him.

"I know".

We cuddle for a moment, catching our breaths and enjoying the safety his arms around me give.

"I need you to take time off Cape Town and go home. I need you far away from here while I fix this", he says. That takes me by surprise and I roll over to look at him.

"I can't be away from you. I need you Don".

"I know skat, I know and I need you too. I want to be there for you but I'm afraid I can't protect you and fight this at the same time. I need to know you are safe".

"I have a job Don. I have a life here! I can't just up and go!".

"You shouldn't have made that phone call my skat".

"But...", I try to reason with him.

"But nothing. They know you're my weakness and they will get to you to get to me. Even my own brothers want you gone because they think you've made me weak. So please listen to me, you have to go. When it's all over, I'll come for you". I don't know where the tears came from but I'm sobbing. My whole life is here. I don't wanna go but if it's either that or I die then dying is not an option.

"Promise you'll come for me", my voice tearing up.

"You have my word", he says.

"Don't cry. This was never meant to happen. But I promise, we'll be alright".

That's what he's saying but there's so much doubt and uncertainty in his voice.

FINALE

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Be like the Lotus flower.

Trust in the light.

Grow through the dirt

Believe in new beginnings

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SATURDAY

The past few days have been confusing. I can't explain how I feel. I mean, I lost a father who was never a father to me and I've been going through a lot of emotions and what ifs. My mother says he didn't want me and she had to flee

from him. But there are two sides to every story. When I told her he died she was so happy she couldn't even pretend to be hurt. She must have really hated him.

In this week alone, I've made so many life changing decisions I might have a new life altogether. But Don has come through for me shame. For once he's put his rawness and roughness on pause and is there for me. It's so cute watching him dote on me. Sometimes I pretend not to be ok so he can give me that worried look and carry me to bed. The kisses that follow that are worth all the pretense and you already know what those sessions lead to.

Speaking of Don, let me make sure my phone is back on. He gets worried when he can't get a hold of me and the last thing I need is him having his brothers watching over me like I'm suicidal or something. Suicide? I'll pass, can never be me. It would be funny though if I killed myself because the General who wanted to kill me got killed on my command. Lol, how would that story be written? Girl kills man, discovers he's her father, kills herself. The end?

I'm leaving on Sunday, shucks that's tomorrow! Chelsea thinks I'm making a big mistake. No matter how much I tell her that my mind is made up, she says I must just break up with Don since there's no guarantee he'll come for me. She actually says she has a bad feeling that Don will die which means I'm giving up my life for nothing. She doesn't know about my blood ties to the General so she doesn't get it and for the first time, my lips are sealed. It's hard not telling her. We tell each other everything. She even suggested that I try and salvage what's left of my almost-relationship with Dalu.

Eeish Dalu. You thought I stopped talking to him? I like to think that too and I usually omit him on purpose when I'm telling my story. Dalu is the definition of resilient or stupid, I can't decide. Caleb beat him up, then threw him on top of the bonnet of his car, made him slap himself several times, then pointed a gun to his head and told him he'll cut off his fingers if he ever texted me again. That's what Dalu told me so I don't know how much is true and how much is exaggerated. Caleb is nice, I doubt he'll have made Dalu slap himself. That's funny though, I laughed at him when he told me that, I'm sorry.

Ok so now that the cat was out of the bag and Dalu had been roughed up, I had to come clean. I told him I would have loved to be his girl had circumstances been different but I'm currently in love with the leader of a 'hard core' gang, who 'brutally' kills people whenever he's bored and occasionally holidays in prison. So for his own safety he had to leave me alone. Did that boy not laugh at me! He said he had heard many excuses from girls running away from love but mine took the trophy. He blatantly refused to believe me. Even after the Caleb encounter Dalu still wanted me. So ya, I got tired of explaining myself.

These days I blue tick him everytime, hoping my 'relationship' with him will die a natural death. Surely, he can't keep having monologues forever. It's unfair I know but since when has life been fair? I probably should block him but I don't know, maybe tomorrow.

Good, my battery is at 7% now so I can use my phone. Two unread messages from DM, that's Dalu to you. Fine! I'm putting this madness to an end once and for all. Don doesn't deserve my nonsense.

"Hey", I send that then start typing my real message. I know he can see I'm typing so why the hell is he also typing? Can't he wait for his turn? Mxm.

'Lotus! Baby where are you?', his message comes through. Then before I can respond, he's calling! WTF guy, chill! I hang up and quickly type a 'Please don't call'. I won't be able to finish off his heart over a phone call. He has this needy voice that makes me feel bad.

'Are you ok? Send me your location, let me come to you', he texts.

'I can't see you Dalu. Me and you can....'.

'I know you're scared baby. I don't know what's gotten you so scared but please let me come and be with you. Let me come and fetch you. I haven't seen you in forever my baby'.

Guys uDalu! I'm just looking at my phone and wondering why he's this person. And he's adamant that I'm his baby hey! He's still typing so let him finish before I say my piece.

'Chelsea told me that those gangsters are forcing you to leave Cape Town and you need me. Where are you? I'll come and fetch you and bring you home. You shouldn't be alone at this time. We don't even have to talk, we can just sit. I just need to watch over you and make sure you are alright. Please my love'.

Chelsea? That bxtch! Where does she get off calling Dalu and telling him my stuff? I've had it with her! She'll get Dalu killed with her loud mouth.

I type, delete, type, delete.

He's confusing me now. I know what I wanted to say to him but he's making it so hard.

'Don't shut me out Lotus, please. I love you. I don't know what happened between you and the gangster guy but it's okay. Chelsea says you had no idea who he was and things happened. I forgive you and you don't even have to tell me about it. Come to me, let's start over', he types.

There goes my courage. Now I can't 'break up' with him!

'I travelled D. I'm in Eastern Cape with my grandmother. I just need a bit of time then I'll call you. I'm sorry for shutting you out it's just too much is happening and I can't think right", I type.

'Come back Lotus. Move in with me baby, you don't have to pay anything. I'll give you that job we spoke about. I'll take care of you. Let's move to Joburg and start over'.

A tear rolls out of my eye when I read that. They still make guys like this?

'D, can we talk later?'

'I'm worried sick about you. Please call me as soon as you can. I love you Lotus. Whenever you're ready send me your location, I'll come down there to Eastern Cape. I have to see you baby'.

I'm so glad he doesn't know where exactly in EC I live because I'm sure he would show up and shock my grandmother! Although my mother and grandmother will love him no doubt. Damn you Dalu! I wanted to, no I needed to break connection with you but you had to go and be Prince Charming, Super Man and Sir Lancelot all wrapped in one. Damn you!

But first Chelsea!

I slept at home last night because I had to pack. Home as in my apartment in Retreat. Chelsea went out last night without me and I don't know if she ended up with Caleb or not. I don't think so though. We exchanged words before she left so I don't know where she is. She's being inconsiderate. I know she means well and wants the best for me but I need her support here not her judgement and unsolicited interventions! And to take my phone and steal Dalu's number and tell him all the nonsense she told him? She crossed the line this time.

Chelsea is not home yet. She's lucky because I'm fuming and I can't promise that I wouldn't have klapped her. That coloured child, Lawd! Help me not kill her.

I hate packing. Especially so when I'm angry. Things refuse to be folded properly when the folder is angry. You know that obviously.

Ok I think I'm done packing. I suppose I packed all of my anger in there too because now I just want to make things right with Chelsea. I can't wait any longer though, I have a brunch date.

"So you're leaving?", Chelsea greets me and my suitcase in the kitchen.

"Good morning to you too Chels". I don't want to fight anymore, I just want my best friend to have my back. I didn't even know she was back. She continues mixing her hangover concoction while I just stand there feeling like I did her wrong.

"Look Chels, we already spoke about this. I'm leaving tomorrow and I don't wanna leave like this. I love you come on".

"I love you too that's why I'm telling you you're making the biggest mistake of your life. While you're out there in the rurals Don will be fxcking other girls and partying it up in the city. When he's not busy stealing and shooting people of course".

She sounds so mean.

"I'm not discussing that anymore. I'm leaving so goodbye I guess".

I think I'm going to cry. I need her, why can't she see that? I'm scared. Terrified that I'm making a mistake and I need her on my side.

"Bye Lotus", she says without even looking at me. I'm gutted.

"You know what, you had no right to tell Dalu about Don and my leaving!", I just had to address it.

She laughs and turns around to face me.

"I was saving you! Forget Don, Dalu is where it's at. Donavan is a fly by night but Dalu is your future. I was doing you a solid by telling him that. I had to make shit up so he can see you as a victim and take your ass back!".

She doesn't expect a thank you from me, does she?

"Oksalayo, it wasn't your place!", I'm trying to keep my emotions in check.

She shrugs her shoulders and gives me a look I hate.

"You'll regret this, mark my words", she says and turns around.

"You know if you want to add Dalu to your harem you can do that without using my name".

She freezes and for a second I feel bad for having said that. But for real though, she can have him. She would have done me a favour in fact.

"Babes, I'll pretend you didn't just say that. You know what, let's make this very easy. Me or your criminal?".

I don't get the question so I just look at her. When did she become like this? She used to be the sweetest girl ever.

"Choose between me and Donavan. You choose me and you stay and we get your life back together. You choose him and you throw away your dreams and go and sit at home, waiting on a man to come and decide when he's ready to further mess up your life".

Is she serious right now?

"You're being unnecessary chommy! Really? Pick? And we're back at calling Don a criminal now?".

"Isn't he a criminal? Doesn't he have a criminal record? Doesn't he terrorise people?".

Wow!

"No actually no, he doesn't terrorize people. He has Caleb and the likes to do that for him". How can she forget that Caleb is as bad as Don? Her double standards shock me sometimes. She gives me a dumb stare.

"I'm sure your grandmother will be very proud of you. Go on babes. Go ahead and give up your dreams for a man who doesn't even love you".

"Chels, I'm not doing this with you right now. I'll call you later".

"Even if you don't beyps. I'm good", she walks away to her bedroom.

My heart breaks as I pull my suitcase out of the door. Goodbye Chelsea, I guess.

There's no turning back now. I'm going home. The break will do me well I know. My grandmother's vetkoek will mend my heart every morning. I'll be back soon, as soon as Don comes for me, I'll be back and I'll get another job and all will be good. Positive vibes only. Don took care of the rent for the entire duration of the lease, Chelsea's portion included so no headaches there. Funny how Chelsea didn't refuse a criminal paying off her rent.

I'm loving this car and I'm sad that I'll be leaving it behind. It's my baby and it's still a newborn and needs its mummy. My heart cries nje when I remember that tomorrow I'm going back to being a pedestrian. Don promised to send it to me so I guess I'll have to survive.

I remember the drama between Chelsea and Caleb last night and I find myself laughing. Hehehe Chelsea used to laugh at me when Don was ghosting me. Now she's in the same boat. Caleb is showing her flames and now Hulk won't speak to her.

I'm kinda hurt that I wasn't invited to the General's funeral. Actually, I know nothing about it and Don won't let me in. I've been searching the internet for any news about it hoping to accidentally find myself at the cemetery in the day of the burial, but nothing. All I wanted was to say goodbye and get some closure. But whatever, he'll be fine without me. He was fine for 23 years so what's a little eternity?

As for my mother and I, we're not on speaking terms. She's mad at me for betraying her. She thinks I knew who the General was and I was hanging around him after all he put her through. Yaz my mother doesn't think. How would I have known who he was? Do I look like a prophet to her? Hay suka! I'm equally mad at her so she can kiss my ass for all I care. Except, I'm going home tomorrow so Monday I'll be under the same roof with her. I'm not looking forward to it. I'm tired of fighting with everyone, I need peace bethunana. My grandmother yena is still sweet old her, not knowing any better. I call her everyday now because I need those I love yous she gives me.

I quit my job, I'm sure you already guessed. I quit like a boss! Walked in late, he yelled at me and said something about deducting money from my salary then I looked at him and said "I quit. Keep your company Meneer" as if it was an impulsive decision. Quitting was the only way. There was no way Dr Dirk the dick would have given me indefinite leave and I wasn't about to beg. That man is exactly who Katy Perry meant when she said "You're hot and you're cold...etc". The same man who appreciated me and blessed me with wine is the same man who underpaid me and treated me like a subhuman in the workplace. He only started appreciating me when we had that Salmonella problem.

He was upset but I didn't give him a chance to make me feel bad for it. I zoned out as he went off at me in Afrikaans. He called me incompetent, unreliable and ungrateful. Me? What exactly should I be grateful for by the way? For the meetings we had and they would speak in Afrikaans, leaving me sitting there lost? Or for the fact that I got paid peanuts but worked like a slave? I told him I would call Food Control in the Department of Health and report all the non conformances in his company. That shut him up because he's stupid. Of course I wouldn't do that and risk Dalu and I being implicated! But it worked because he remembered English after I said that and started talking to me like I'm a human being not a thing nje that works for him. I told him to call me if there's anything serious. I hope he doesn't.

Towards the end of our conversation, he was soft again. He was relieved to know that my mother was found. He asked me to give her his number. I still can't believe my mother did a hit and run on him. I think he caught feelings. Uzobastrong. I will give her his number and sit back and watch her nyising him. He doesn't know my mother I can see.

The Lotus could be thought of as an awakened mind, which grows naturally toward the warmth and light of truth, love and compassion. The lotus may appear fragile on the surface, but it is flexible and strong, securely anchored under the surface of the water.

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I should do this more often. Drive and think at the same time. I think I'm not too far if I park here opposite the Aquarium. Shucks, missed it. Ok Ulundi Parking, let me get in here. I'll just walk across and into the Mall.

'I'm sitting outside. The sun came out to play today *three dancing woman emojis*. A text from Fierce comes through.

'I'm coming through. Just parked *kissing emoji*', I respond.

I'm meeting Fierce for brunch at Tashas. You remember Fierce, right? Elik's girlfriend? From my party? The girl I made friends with at my party? Yes, that one! So you do remember her. Perfect.

She makes me self conscious, I won't lie. I was meant to meet up with her last Thursday but then life happened and so ya, we're meeting today. I texted her last night and asked that we meet and she said I could come over to her house. I didn't want to be drooling over her man so I suggested we meet at a restaurant somewhere and she picked Tashas. Of course I didn't tell her the part about drooling over her man. Haha!

I was a bit shocked that she picked Tashas because Tashas is cheap. I expected her to go four stars and up. Did you see how she looked at my birthday? The hunn was dripping in finesse and looking all Kardashian. But Tashas it is, probably another rich person trying too hard to be humble.

I hope I look good enough. She makes me very self conscious, we're worlds apart and I'm new to this money world so I don't have the memo yet. Not all of us were born with a silver spoon in our mouths ok.

Initially I'd put on my favourite jeans, boots and a shirt. I looked good I know but I felt underdressed. I remember the divas in Ugly Betty used to say jeans are a no no unless you're working in the garden. So now I'm walking into the V&A Waterfront in my body hugging dress and my black Jimmy Choos. I'm loving this thickness, my ass is popping and I feel divine. My hair, nails and make up are on fleek I know and I'm glowing these days, the rewards of getting the D in full.

I stop at a mirror to take myself in. I look good enough to put in a fashion magazine. A few men walking with their girlfriends turn and look at me longer than they should. I know right. If I was a man I would want me too, look at that booty! I guess I'm a bit vain ne? But that girl Fierce made me want to look classy and expensive, and now I have to prepare my English. Yerrr.

I parked far yhooh! I've been walking! I take a few deep breaths before I walk in and a waiter offers me a 'table for one ma'am?'. I tell him I'm meeting a friend and she's sitting outside. He ushers me there. Why am I so nervous? Don said she's cool peoples and he approved of my desire to be friends with her, in fact he encouraged me meeting up with her.

Chelsea, well she doesn't know I'm here. I told you it's been World War III between us this week so telling her about this would have started yet another war. The gag is, Chels was sleeping with Fierce's man and now she hates Fierce for it. Lol. Don't ask me how, I have no clue. All I know is I couldn't tell her and make it look like I'm betraying her. I love Chelsea, a lot, although we might have broken up earlier today. That thought makes me sad. Begone negative vibes! Enter good vibes.

This Tashas is really pretty. I love the whole boutique café Spanish ambience. Wait, are those pots of pot plants hanging upside down on the roof? Weird much? But I've never been to Spain so who am I to judge.

Oh there she is! You gotta be kidding me! She gets up with a big smile and gives me a hug. The floral-citrus-soapy scent of her Chanel no. 5 has her smelling like heaven. I must remember to buy myself one now that I can afford it. I've been obsessed with Inuka for so long, I haven't thought of going for brands.

She looks unbothered in ripped boyfriend jeans, a cute jersey and plain sneakers! WTF! I'm dressed like I'm ready to walk the red carpet and sis here is dressed like she's chilling at home. Now I feel overdressed. I shouldn't have changed into this dress, yikes.

"You look beautiful Lotus. That's a beautiful dress", she says.

"Thank you". Although I don't feel so good anymore.

"Nice jersey. Where did you get it?". It's cute, I want one exactly like that.

"Mr Price. We can go and get you one when we're done here".

No! She's joking right? But she's so rich so why is she shopping at Mr Price? I'm confused.

A waiter comes for our orders and I go first and order for both of us every girl's choice, "Give us a bottle of Moet, please". Obvious, champagne darling.

Champompo. Bubbles.

"Mmmm, no champagne for me. I'll have Coke Zero please. Ice and Lemon", she says. I blink hard.

"Are you allergic to champagne?", I have to get to the bottom of her odd behaviour.

"No I'm not. It tastes like urine", she giggles.

"How do you know what urine tastes like?".

"I don't know but if I had to guess I'd say it tastes like champagne".

"I don't like it either", I find myself confessing.

"What would you want to drink?"

"Passion fruit and Lemonade", I look down. I just thought champagne is IT you know.

She waves to a waiter and he comes through.

"Please find our waiter, Simba. Tell him to cancel the Moet and give us a glass of passion fruit and lemonade instead".

I look at her amazed and confused. She's so relaxed.

"Thanks" and I mean it.

"You should eat what you want Lotus and do what you want, middle finger to what people think".

She says she highly suspects that champagne is only meant for popping, toasting and sipping and not for drinking and we're abusing it. I'm laughing at how she said it. Chelsea would kill her, she loves her Veuve Clicquot Rich Rose with strawberries.

As we wait for our drinks, we take selfies for the Gram and #SunKissed #BFFs #BrunchAtTheWaterfront #FierceAndLotus . We follow each other on Insta. I send her a friend request on Facebook although she says she barely uses it because she's tired of Indian men sending random dick pics and abo 'Hi beautiful' from Zulu boys.

I teach her how to do the Boomerang for Insta stories and show her my favourite filters. We would make the best of friends, except I already have a best friend. Can I have two best friends who are enemies? Naturally Fierce will hate Chelsea after knowing that she cheated with her man. I hope she never finds out in case she hates me too for knowing and not saying anything. But it was a while back wethu. Let's leave it.

I order their Sao Paulo Quesadilla and sweet potatoes. I'm glad she made me comfortable or else I would have ordered the Ninetta's Napoletana all in the name of sounding sophisticated. She's different. Unlike Chelsea, she's not too assertive and she doesn't impose, you know what I mean. Chels gives me too many ultimatums, I can't win with her sometimes.

"So Fierce, I need your advice".

"Shoot", she drinks up her Coke Zero. She's on her second glass! This child. Who drinks sugarless black water?

"It's about Donavan, Alpha...I mean Lemon you call him".

She keeps sipping but her eyes look at me so she's listening I think. Before I know it, I'm pouring out my life story and telling her how I met Don, how he doesn't tell me he loves me, how he's mixed up with gangs and how now he wants me out of the way. I'm telling her about my love-hate relationship with my mother, how I feel misunderstood, how she disapproves of my relationship with Don. How everyone disapproves and how I'm tired of defending myself to the masses. I'm almost in tears when I'm done talking. I'm afraid I overshared. It just came out.

"I'm sorry I offloaded all that on you". My mouth just kept running.

"Oh no sweetie. I'm here, you can talk to me". I think I'm going to cry. She'll think I'm weak. She reaches over the table and takes my hands in hers.

"Do you love him?"

"More than anything", that's an easy question.

"Lotus, Lemon loves you. He doesn't have to say it for it to be true. Look how he treats you, listen to everything he says, see how he brightens up around you. That should tell you everything. He would take a bullet for you, and I mean that literally".

I smile. That's so nice to hear.

"Everyone speaks a different love language, you just have to learn your partner and understand their language. I'm sure deep in your heart you know he loves you. Forget what everyone says about your relationship. It's none of their business and their opinions shouldn't bother you at all....But for the record, I'm rooting for you and Lemon. You guys make a great couple and I'm cheering for you". She should stop because I'm this close to crying now.

"You're a pretty girl and I have no doubt you intimidate the hell out of him. He always sounds so amazed when he talks about you. Like he doesn't believe he has you and who can blame him. Have you looked in the mirror. Guuurr!!"

Oh mann. I'm turning red. Blush blush.

"My advice is go to Eastern Cape and lie low. Your man is asking you to do this for the both of you, so do it. You may not understand why right now but you have to believe he has your best interest at heart. Love is not easy, it comes with sacrifices. So you do this for him and he will know exactly where you stand with him. Love is not easy sweets, it's trial and error. So give him a chance. Listen to him and do what he's asking you to do".

"But my whole life is here! What if he doesn't come for me?"

"True that but he has a good reason why he's asking you to leave. It's not like he woke up one morning and decided he didn't want you around anymore. Trust your man, do what he's asking of you. If he doesn't come for you then at least you won't live with any regrets. You'll have played your part. You'll come back and your life will still be here".

I nod and dab off a wayward tear.

"I overheard him talking to Elik about this the other day. He doesn't want you to leave. He can't live without you Lotus. But he has no option right now. You being far away from Cape Town is the only way to keep you safe. Trust me, he loves you more than he loves himself even".

Ok she just had to go and make me cry! Now people are looking at me. She gets up and embraces me.

"Let's go to the bathroom", she whispers. She gets my bag and hers and we go.

I'm dusting my face and re-applying mascara. I broke down hey, the black and brown stains on her white jersey are all me.

"Am I wrong for loving someone like Don? It's just that sometimes people make me feel like I'm doing something wrong for being with a guy who does what he does". "Wrong? Wrong how? You love who you love, forget what people say. Half of them will tell you to leave him but will be under him in a heartbeat if they had the chance. Do you, forget everyone else. Lemon loves you! Don't allow anyone to rob you of that".

She takes my Mac lipstick and says it's a pretty color. It looks beautiful on her so I tell her to keep it. She's so excited she kisses me on the cheek, leaving pink lip prints on my face. We giggle about it as she finds wet wipes in her bag and fixes me up. Gosh, where has she been all my life!

We keep talking and she's quite open. Elik and her have been through the most. I doubt I would stay with Don if he cheated. I can't share, I'm sorry. I made myself that promise after my cheating good for nothing ex! If he sleeps with someone else, I don't care how much I love him, I'm leaving. Listening to her giggle and talk about Elik makes me believe in love again. I even ask if we could do like double dates and couple things in the future and she says most definitely. That would be fun except I doubt I would ever be able to convince Don to go to a spa with me or

to do things like chilling on a yacht and eating expensive foods or sunset picnics by the beach.

"I'm so used to being with Don you know. I'm not sure how I'm going to survive without him". I'm getting emotional all over again.

"You'll be just fine. You have to be strong for both you and him. You know how these men act all tough but they're actually marshmallows inside. So you have to be strong for him".

"I don't know. I'll try".

"You know, Lemon asked me to do something for him, a favour if we can call it that but I don't want you to look at it that way".

I hate this 'Lemon' name. Like, he's Don, Donovan okay! Alpha is even better. But that's not my worry right now. I'm scared to hear what Don asked her to do. To kill someone maybe? The fear must be showing in my face because she laughs and says "Relax. It's nothing criminal!".

"Ok so thing is I'm going to Thailand on vacation next month to get some fresh air. I was gonn travel with Elik but something came up and yena laboLemon need to take care of business so now I'm travelling alone. So Don says he promised you a vacation and he never delivered. So when I told him my travel plans he asked that I go with you".

"Thailand?", blink blink.

"Yes! All expenses paid baby. Think sunset - infinity pool - cocktail - bikini - no stress. Close your eyes and see it!".

I close my eyes and I find myself smiling. I see it! I want it! My Instagram will be so lit. I was going to go to Zanzibar with Chelsea but considering our endless fights these days maybe not.

I've never left South Africa and I'm scared and excited at the same time. At least that's something to look forward to. I won't have to sit at home all day and be bored out of my mind.

She's doing a good job of cheering me up and I'm feeling so much better now. Dating Don is an extreme sport! I need all the support I can get.

We get back to our table and get to dessert. We're laughing like we've known each other forever. She still thinks going is the best thing to do. I needed that reassurance so thank you. It's nice to know I have someone on my team.

We pass through Louis Vuitton because she says she lost her purse and wants to get another one. It's R34000 and she takes it! I'm hella confused. She's wearing a R99 jersey and she buys a R34000 purse? How does that work? Shouldn't she wear brands all around if that's what she's going for? More like what I did today?

We go to Mr Price and get a jersey just like hers. Same colour even. We are giggling and laughing as we see this statement Tees on the window of some shop. We get matching T-shirts written 'I'm An Idiot'. She says it will be fun everytime someone reads that out loud.

"Tonight is your last night with Lemon, right?", she smiles like an idea just occurred to her. I nod, looking at her suspiciously.

"Come with me. We'll make that man come for you faster than lightning, excuse the pun".

Lmao! She's crazy. She refuses to tell me where she's taking me.

Victoria's Secret? Ok.

"Take this set and this suspender belt. You know how to put on suspenders right?", she looks so excited.

I shake my head no and she shows me. It's easy! I had no idea.

"Trust me, Lemon will go cray cray! Do a dance tease for him. Lalela, make him sit there, get the music on and channel your inner stripper. Dance for him. Grind, shake, leave him powerless. Make him feel like he's the man. Thank me later".

Ok now I'm excited. I hope Don will be out all day so I can practice my dance routine. I have the perfect song in mind.

She walks me to my car even though she says she parked at the other end.

"Your car girl! This is beautiful!", she wows and wows around it. I think she's exaggerating.

"But it's not a Jeep. It doesn't even cost half of what yours cost".

"Hawu! It's not a competition. Be happy and celebrate your blessings". She gives me a big hug and I don't know why but I start crying. I'm so emotional these days it pisses me off. She holds me there as I break down and further mess up her jersey.

"Everything will be alright my love. Lemon loves you more than anything. You guys will get through this I promise". I cry even more.

After forever I'm able to drive and I drop her off outside her parkade.

"Do you guys wanna come over for dinner or something?", she offers before she jumps off.

"No we can't. Remember, tonight I'm dancing for Don", sly grin of anticipation.

"And make little blue eyed babies while at it", she sticks her tongue out and I can't help laughing.

"Obvious!".

"Well, go get it girl", she has this naughty smile on her face.

"Thank you Fierce. Drive safe".

"You too hunn. Let me know when you get home".

God bless her heart.

It took a little while to master this dance routine. Dancing is not so hard and I'll improvise here and there as I channel my Sasha Fierce. I locked the door from the inside so that Don has no option but to tell me when he's outside. I cross check that he's alone and he says yes. I had to ask. Fierce told me her horror story of her opening the door in skimpy lingerie only to be met by Elik and his friends. Yho! Imagine Hilton seeing me like this!

I get the door and stand back a few steps. I hold my gown tight so that he doesn't see his surprise.

"Hey. I brought you wings", he kisses me.

"Thank you baby". He walks past me and I follow him to the kitchen.

"Why did you rearrange the couch?" I had to move it back to make space for my dance.

"Shhh. You take too much Don! Come and sit here. No talking".

He looks at me funny. I grab his hand and take him to the couch. He looks confused but I'm glad he sits. I get the remote and Beyonce comes on with Dance For You and I get into formation. I hear him gasp when I throw my gown away.

I'm in a Hanky Panky low rise thong with a matching lace bra that shows the outline of my nipples. I feel sexy and dangerous. The suspender belt blends well with the thong and suspenders are holding up the stockings. I finished the look with a black heel and I took my time with the make up. I oiled my body and I look like a sophisticated stripper.

I have to break my routine because when I turned around he stood up and got behind me. I told you he's obsessed with my figure these days. But I'm not done yet so I push him back. The way he's buying that lip and the way those eyes are overflowing with lust! Yes daddy.

I sashay towards him and position myself on him as Beyonce goes

'Tonight it's going down

I'll be rockin on my babe rockin rockin on my babe

Swirlin on you babe swirlin swirlin on you babe

Baby lemme put my body on your body...'

I swear if B saw how I'm pulling off her moves, she would ask me to be her stunts double.

I give him a lap dance he will never forget. I don't finish the song as he stands with me and kisses me like there's no tomorrow.

"Don wait, I'm not done", I try to say.

"I can't wait any longer baby. I want you". Oh oh! I'm in trouble, I might have just awoken the wolf.

He has me everywhere! In positions I didn't know my body could bend into! Beyonce is still singing in the background, I'm glad because this boy has me screaming my orgasms. I quickly lose count of the I love yous I tell him and surrender to my fate.

FINALE [3|3]

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I don't believe in goodbyes, so it's so long my darlings.

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SUNDAY

"Let's go to church". Don wakes me up. I'm so tired. What exactly did we do yesterday?

"But I'm travelling today!", I pull the covers over my head.

"The bus leaves in the evening. Come let's go and shower and go to church". It takes a while for me to agree. He's not fair really, he'll drop me off and come back to sleep or go and do whatever it is he does on Sundays. Where does he get his energy from? I'm exhausted!

"I'll miss your snoring the most", he smiles at me as I drag myself out of bed.

"I don't snore. You snore!", I throw a pillow at him.

"You know you do, especially when you're tired. I think it's cute".

He's teasing me unprovoked. I do not snore!

"Come Lotus let's shower. We'll be late!".

I sulk but I follow him to the bathroom.

The hot water splashing on my back wakes me up. He takes the sponge and squeezes on shower gel. He stands behind me and works a lather on my breasts while his other hand rests on my stomach. I feel his umm getting hard and pushing against my ass. He puts the sponge away and rinses me with his hands, deliberately lingering on my nipples. His hand goes down and he washes me, playing his finger on my sensitivity. I close my eyes and moan as he continues washing me.

He closes the tap and works on me with just a few showers spraying over us.

"You ready for me?", he whispers with a husky voice. I'm sore from last night but I want him just as bad.

We are still on time. He woke me up too early this guy. I put on a pretty dress, nice heels, do my face and I'll wear my afro today. My hair is still wet so afro it is. The natural gang would yell at me for drying it with a blow dryer but hey, I gotta go fam. Do I know how to do my face or what? Beep beep. Pretty girl incoming.

Don smiles when he watches me coming down the steps. I love how he's so smitten with me.

"Last night you blew my mind. I can't stop thinking about it", he kisses me on the cheek when I get to the bottom. Blush blush.

He drives my car and I keep telling him to drive with caution. This car is pricey! He keeps laughing and apologising saying he's used to his skorokoros yena so he has no idea how to handle 'pricey' cars. I'll miss him so much. We stop at a red traffic light and I find myself tracing the scars on his face with my finger.

"I love you".

He takes my hand away from his face and kisses it then gives it back to me. I love him so much I don't have the right words to explain it.

"Pick me up at 12:30. I need to stay behind for confession", looking at myself one last time in the mirror and checking my teeth for lipstick. He gets out of the car and he comes around and opens my door, like in those romantic movies. It's going to rain today shoo!

He may be from the ghetto but my man knows how to look clean! His sneakers look clean as always, pure white. His hair is brushed, most of his tattoos are covered by that white hoodie and his jeans just look clean. I guess it pays buying expensive brands. I know coloured people don't compromise when it comes to their clothes.

This is not my church but it's the nearest Catholic Church, the one he used to serve at when he was little. He takes my hand and walks me towards the entrance.

"You look beautiful my angel", he says, his hand finding mine and interlocking fingers.

"You too lover boy. Now run back before these church girls steal you from me!". We are early and people are still standing outside in small clusters, probably gossiping! When we get closer, all eyes are on us and the looks of disgust are enough to murder!

"Why are they looking at us like this?", ya I can be that naive at times!

"They hate me. I'm quite popular around this place you know", he says. I tighten my hold on his hand and keep walking, he can't leave me now and walk back with

all these eyes throwing so many daggers our way. "Really?". That wasn't even a question, it was just a remark that came with a question mark.

"I'm a king in the streets and kings are known, isn't that so? As if my 'killing the community' isn't terrible enough, I show up here with a black girl".

I've noticed how the older women give me stares like I'm beneath them although frankly speaking, I'm lighter in complexion than most of them.

"Let's go home Don. We don't need this", I unintentionally pat my afro. Must have been that black comment that made me so self-conscious. I know I'm supposedly coloured but my afro and I agree that I will always be black and clearly in Don's eyes too.

"No. Who cares what anyone thinks? Half the people hating on us right now wish they were us.....and you are my girl who cares what anyone thinks? Now leave that hair alone, it looks beautiful but you messing it up now", he pulls my hand off my head. He could be a motivational speaker yazi!

We are by the door and the stares have followed us religiously. I'm holding onto Donovan, not trusting myself to walk straight on my own. At least he should leave me by the door.

"Thanks for walking me baby. I'll cook you and your brothers lunch when I get home", I tiptoe and kiss him on the lips. I'm sure a few of our Judge Judys looking on just had a disgust attack.

"We can cook together", he smiles at me with that tooth sparkling.

Before I know what he's doing, he takes my hand and we walk in through the church doors. I'm amazed as he dips his fingers in the holy water, makes a neat sign of the cross and takes the knee before asking me if I'm coming or not. I follow suit and since there's not many people around we get to choose where to sit. We sit three benches from the front and I hold on to his hand. I can't believe he finally came to church!

"I thought you only believed in the Source", I whisper.

"Yes. But the Source is everywhere, even in church".

Lol.

"I grew up here, the memories are killing me. I don't know if I want to be here", he says, sounding scared I think.

"Just hold my hand throughout. You'll be fine. Don't leave now my love". He stays long on the kneeler with his head bowed and I patiently wait. As much as I need to be ok, I need him to be ok.

When he sits down I have to quickly pull down his hoodie. He brought a gun to church?

The service is beautiful and the priest preaches about unconditional love and about the prodigal son. He says,

"Never cease loving a person and never give up hope for him, for even the prodigal son who had fallen most low, could still be saved".

Then he says of love "Forget all the reasons why it won't work and believe the one reason why it will. People who are meant to be are the ones who go through everything that's meant to break them apart but come out even stronger. True love is selfless. It is prepared to sacrifice. Sometimes in life you do things you don't want to. Sometimes you sacrifice, sometimes you compromise. Sometimes you let go and sometimes you fight. It's all about deciding what's worth losing and what's worth keeping. Sometimes you have to do what you don't like to get to where you want to be. But at the end of the day, let your heart guide you because that is where He lives and He is love so if anyone is to guide you in the path of love, it's Him".

Did this priest know that Don and I would be here? His sermon sounds tailor made for us. I have peace in my heart after listening to him. I pray hard and ask all the angels and saints to sign a petition for the disappearance of the word WAR. Can it just vanish and lose meaning so Don and his brothers can be saved.

See why I love the Catholic church? Mass gets straight to the point and gets done. Don goes before me into the confession booth and takes forever to come out. At least he can confess to his deepest crimes in there and the priest will never snitch. Priests are bound by a heavenly gag order and can never repeat what's discussed in the confession room.

By the time he's done, it's getting late so I skip confession and we leave. I have to finish packing the last things and I need to get to the bus stop early so I can have time with Chelsea. She's still upset with me for leaving and when I ask that we meet at the bus stop she says 'whatever'. I hope she comes on time.

He makes me a lunch of Russian sausages with chips and a salad. He put it all in a roll and as much as he says it's not a Gatsby, it actually is! He makes me a creamy cup of coffee as well. I didn't even know he knew how I liked it! So he pays attention? Wow. We sit on the couch facing each other and eat. I haven't had an appetite for Gatsbys in a while but the love that went into making this opens my heart.

He goes out of his way to make my afternoon memorable. With little compliments, a memory of how we met, a reminder of how I kept staring at him shivering that first time we made love. How I looked shocked the first time I had an orgasm. We take a sensual shower together and say goodbye goodbye. He helps me pack the rest of my things, teasing and asking why I have so many clothes. Says someone with a closet full of sneakers!

Caleb and two other brothers come around to say goodbye. I hate goodbyes so I tell them I'll see them soon. I try to fake a smile but it comes off just that - fake. I'm glad when Hilton doesn't show up. Can he remain in my nightmares and end there.

"I'm ready baby. Let's go", I close my suitcase for the last time.
"It's only temporary. I'll come for you when all this is over", he promises.
Can he stop? He'll make me cry again. I miss him already and I haven't even left.
"We'll be fine my skat".
I so desperately want to believe him but there's nothing more real than reality.
And right now reality tells me to let go of fairy tales because they are not real.

I'm taking a bus by the way, he insisted. He said no to me flying. I look out of the window and blink back tears as we join the N2 then take R300 towards Bellville. I can see the random quick glances he keeps throwing my way. I try Chelsea's phone to distract myself but it's off. Maybe she's already there and her battery died.

He's had this song on repeat since we left his house and listening to it is hurting me more. I don't know if it's the song itself or if it's the fact that it's Stand Still, the soundtrack of my these days' favourite series, Step Up: High Water. The very fact that he pays attention is painfully amazing. I had no idea. I close my eyes and rest my head back, taking in the lyrics.

'In the middle of the dark see your soul shine through
Always been a rebel breaking all the rules
Been preparing for this moment for all of your life
Put it all on the line got the world to lose, got the world to lose

How do you?
How do you bring the best out of me?
How do you flow so gracefully?
Don't wanna look away
You got me lost in a stand still
What have you done?
What are you doing?
Oh what have you done?
What are you doing to me?

Hear your heart beat amidst silence
Going out of style way beyond timeless
Nothing like a vision coming to life
It's more than valuable
Safe to say priceless

You're more than amazing
Can't nobody do it like you
I am at a stand still now
Oh I'm feeling overwhelmed
Just can't help myself, oh no
Don't wanna turn around
Never heard my heart beating so loud
Look what you've done'

I didn't even notice we're in Bellville already. My bus is scheduled to leave at 18:15 and it's 17:25 now. I have so much to say to him but I don't know where to begin so I just look at him and hope and pray that my eyes will relay my feelings. He reaches for my hand and wipes the tear off my cheek with his thumb. I'm scared.

"It was never supposed to come to this Lotus".
I know. I know he blames himself for everything, I heard him tell Caleb how everything he touched turns to stone because he found me happy and innocent and how he wishes he could go back to that night and leave me alone. He blames himself for my pain and for the way I'm attached to him.

"What have I done Caleb?", he said.
"It's not your fault Don. She loves you and that's a beautiful thing. All this will pass and you guys can have your happy ending. You deserve to be happy my bruh and this girl is your happiness", Caleb said.
It was the first time I heard Caleb refer to him as Don. He always calls him Alpha like everyone else.

I get out and do a quick scan. Chelsea is not here and I can't see her car. Her phone is still off. Sigh. I guess she really didn't want me to leave. Or maybe she's on her way? Fingers crossed.

We sit in the car waiting for the bus and time seems to be flying today. I'm crying then laughing then back to crying. It's tough being me, I tell you. It's 17h58 and the bus is boarding and we kiss our goodbyes for the umpteenth time.

"Take this Teddy bear, it will keep you safe but only use it when you have to", he says.
"You bought me a Teddy bear?", ncooow, he's getting soft on me, isn't he?
"Yes and a duck to put in your bath whenever you miss me", with that low key smile of his. Is he for real? What am I? Five years old? I don't believe this. He's not one for toys.
"On the real, listen to me carefully Lotus. In the Teddy bear there's a gun, fully loaded. Use it only when you need to. I wish you never have to use it but just take it with you".

My eyes pop open. A gun?

“Inside the duck there’s R50k worth of high grade oil based Crystal Meth. Keep it as ‘savings’. If push comes to shove, find a buyer and use the money to keep going until you find another job”.

Drugs? My eyes pop again but he ignores me.

“And take this bag. Keep it with you at all times. Even when you're going to the bathroom, take it with you. There's enough cash in there to keep you afloat for a very long time”.

Now I understand why I had to take the bus! Airport dogs would have sent me straight to the gallows.

“Don, I can't take these things, they are illegal. What if the police stop us and I get caught?”, my voice is beginning to quiver.

“The police don't just stop buses so you'll be fine. And if they stop you, show no fear and they won't bother you. Keep your head up straight and don't look guilty. You'll be fine my angel, I promise you”, he says.

A tear rolls out of my eye and he catches it with his thumb.

“Don't cry my baby please. Be strong for me, I just, I just need to know you are alright. After all this, it will be just me and you”. I nod, not knowing what else to do.

“Think you can stay off Social Media and not tell everyone where you are?”.

Oh no! I can't live without Instagram!!! Eeish, the sacrifices are too much now.

“Ok, let's go”.

We make it to the bus and give them my suitcase. We already got it weighed and tagged so we're good to go.

“Did you take the morning after pill yet?”, he asks from nowhere as I stuff the duck in my backpack. I stand up straight and shake my head no. I haven't taken it in a very long time but he doesn't know that.

“Good, don't take it”, he says.

My eyes pop wide. He made it clear that I was never ever to get pregnant! So what's he trying to do here?

“Come, the bus will leave you”. I have my backpack on my back, the bag with money in one hand and I clutch my teddy bear with the other.

It feels like a dream. I keep thinking I'll wake up and Chelsea will be there standing over me, telling me I was crying in my sleep. This has to be a nightmare! And where is Chelsea? She's late.

I'm last in the queue and it's two people before it's my turn.

“Lotus”, Don turns me around to face him. We look into each other's eyes before his lips take mine, kissing me so sensually it's awakening my deep seated emotions.

“Lady! Are you coming into the bus or what?”, the driver assigning seats calls disturbing my euphoria. We break off the kiss and I wipe my tears.

“I love you Lotus”, he says.

“What did you just say?”.

I was convinced he didn't know how to say the words.

“I love you, I really do. I love you my skat”. So I didn't imagine it the first time. He actually said it. Oh Donovan. Now I'm crying crying. I don't want to go anymore.

“Lady!”, the driver snaps.

“Go on now my angel. I'll call you”, he plants one last kiss on my lips. I keep my hand in is, and walk backwards towards the door, afraid to let go. It's starting to rain now and the air is saturated with humidity. It's like nature can feel the weight of my heart.

“I love you Don”, I'm not ashamed of the tears coming down.

“I love you too. I just...it's just...I love you, I do”. Like he's telling himself more than me.

Those words are like a melody that I wish he could put on replay and say over and over and over.

"Will you come for me?", I need to ask one last time.

"I will".

I see a tear roll out of his eye and he isn't quick enough to look away. I wish I didn't have to leave right now but the bus won't wait any longer.

I've seen movies where a girl sits by a train window and looks sad and miserable. It's often raining and she follows that one raindrop until it joins a stream of water at the bottom of the window. She looks out as if she can see the outside even though it's dark clouds and rainy skies and she can't see much. Her eyes look but they don't see because her mind is not there at all. I'm that girl today. I left my soul with Donovan and I'm empty inside, following that lone raindrop with my eye.

All I have right now is this tattoo of his name and the memory of his voice saying "I love you". I wipe my tears and hug my new friend, Teddy. He said he loves me. He actually said the magic words and he never cries but he shed a tear for me.

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Now I have to remember the few things off the WOLF CREED

SECRECY

1.3: Keep your mouth shut. Anything you hear, anything you see, stays with you, in your head. Do not talk about it.

1.7: Avoid mentioning specifics when discussing business for example, names, dates and places – Beyond those absolutely necessary for understanding.

1.9: Do not ask unnecessary questions. The amount of information given to you is all you need to know.

CONTAINING CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

3.3: Violence must be used, even if only of a limited type, to ensure respect.

3.6: The alpha can direct violence, including murder, against any member of his pack but he cannot make a profit from a murder. i.e No murder-for-hire.

3.9: When a man sleeps with an alpha's bxtch, his stomach should be ripped open and a rat put inside to nibble on his insides. At the count of 50, his balls should be chopped off and stuffed in his mouth.

HIERARCHY AND RESPECT

4.1: Never ask an Alpha or a General their surname.

4.2: A brother should take orders from his alpha without asking questions.

4.7: Only a General can assassinate an alpha. The assassination should be carried out in accordance to Section 2 (2.3).

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There's no such a thing as an ending

With Love: Yvonne Maphosa 💖