

# ONCE UPON A TIME IN SOWETO

NANDI

-Diary Entry-

January 6, 1975

My last day at home. This time tomorrow, I will settle into my room at Wits Junction. Mama's been moody all day. She's sad that she doesn't have enough rands to buy the ingredients for the festive send-off supper she's been planning for days. The market stall hasn't been doing well lately. For the last two weeks, we've been surviving on the rotting fruit and vegetables she couldn't sell. I told her I don't mind. And I don't. Really. One more meal of okra and pap will not kill me.

It took me exactly ten minutes to pack my suitcase. After fitting in everything I own, which amounted to four dresses, two pairs of jeans, three skirts, two blouses, four T-shirts, two bras, six pairs of knickers, one nightdress, two pairs of shoes, and takkies, I still have plenty of room left. It's all brand new. Bafana took me shopping at the Carlton Centre yesterday. When I got back home, I took the bags to Mpo's so she could hide them for me. This morning, after Mama left for her market stall, I went and retrieved them. She doesn't know about Bafana, so I couldn't let her see the stuff. I left my old bell-bottoms and takkies for my sister, Busi. She didn't bother to say thank you or try them on. Like Mama, she's been moody all week. I don't know what her problem is, and if she doesn't want to tell me, I will not press her.

Tomorrow will mark a year since Bafana and I met, and I still haven't found the nerve to tell Mama about him. I thought I would have before I left, but I kept putting it off, and now it might be too late. I don't know what her reaction will be, and I don't want to risk an argument on my last day at home. I turned eighteen last week, and I think I'm old enough to have a boyfriend. Most girls my age and all of my friends do, and they don't sneak around. But then again, most girls don't have mothers like mine.

Miss Sansole offered to lend me her suitcase. I went to say goodbye and took my brother, Bheki, with me. She lives alone in the corner house directly opposite the Regina Mundi Church. Not much had changed since I frequently visited when I was a little girl in her standard class. She's as neat as ever. Her front yard is still the best tended in the entire street, though nowadays, she complains about how hard it is to stay on top of it because of her arthritis. She offered us Rooibos tea and biscuits. When she brought out the open tin of Assorted and laid it on the coffee table, my brother went for them as if he'd never seen bikkies before. I was so embarrassed. He was grabbing and stuffing them in his mouth one after another, and for a minute, I thought he would choke. I wanted to slap his grubby hands, but I couldn't. Not in front of Miss Sansole. One of these days, I need to sit down with my younger siblings and teach them manners. For all I know, they always act like that when they visit people's houses. I can't let them go around giving Mama a bad name, making people think she doesn't feed her kids.

Anyway, I am looking forward to tomorrow. At 10 o'clock, Bafana will meet me at the Indian's shop and drive me to my dorm at Wits Junction in Park Town. Mama thinks I'm going by train. I have told no one the truth, except Bheki, because I need him to help me carry my suitcase to the Indian's store. So, I will have to bribe the bugger with a rand or two. Otherwise, he will go back home and blabber everything to Mama. Apart from Mandla and Busi, the twins, he's the only other person in the family who knows about Bafana, and it has not been cheap, making him keep his big mouth shut. But it's all about to end for him. After tomorrow, there will be no more sneaking around for me.

Yesterday, after Carlton Centre, we went to have lunch at Wandie's in Dube township. Bafana wanted to show me his father's old hangout. I'd heard a lot about Wandie's but never thought I'd ever step foot in it. As the rumour goes, the place used to be a shebeen and was popular with famous politicians such as Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, and other ANC members. I also discovered that Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba would sometimes appear and regale patrons with a song or two. However, when we arrived, the place was empty. Bafana explained it was because it was midday and that at night the place is usually packed and live.

Nevertheless, he made a promise to bring me there one weekend. Mr Wandie himself greeted us. I was amazed by how down-to-earth and friendly he was. He even sat down and chatted with us while we waited for our pap and oxtail.

Afterwards, we stopped to fill up at Bafana's family-owned petrol station. Then he drove me to Gogo's house and parked by the corner while I went inside. I intended to stay for only a few minutes, but my grandmother insisted on making me something to eat. I told her I was full, but she wouldn't hear it. So, I braced myself for another round of pap, though this time with sour milk and sugar. Once upon a time, this was my favourite dish, but Gogo thinks it still is. The truth is, I haven't cared for sour milk since I was about nine or ten. Sugared or not, the sight of it now makes my stomach turn. Nevertheless, I still like pap, just not with anything cold.

I also didn't want her cooking for me because I know how exhausted she is always after working all day in white people's homes in Rosebank and Sandton and then travelling on buses for two to three hours back to Soweto. But it is hard to say no to my grandmother. So, sitting on the cold kitchen floor, I watched her work the little Primus stove and set the pot of water on it. Then, while waiting for it to boil, I listened as she told a story about an older woman on the metro bus who'd beaten up a *tsotsi* who was trying to rob her. The young thug, fooled by the hump on the old biddy's back, believed he'd found himself a perfect mark. But everyone, including the gangster wanna-be himself, was dumbfounded when, instead of reaching for her purse and emptying it as ordered, the old lady closed the bag and started slapping her attacker on the head with it. I laughed at the story, but Gogo, as always, kept a straight face. She is good at telling stories and cracking funny quips, but no matter how amusing the tale or joke she is narrating, Gogo never smiles. When I was little and lived with her, I would look forward to when she returned from work so I could listen to her tell me about her day. It seemed to me then that all her days were full of wacky adventures. And Gogo invariably told them with a casual air. She could tell a story about a man knifed on the train or a foolish *tsotsi* ridiculed by a woman on the bus, and her face would always remain expressionless. I will miss this old lady.

## 2

### BAFANA

Out of the eighteenth-floor window, Bafana can see the city of Johannesburg in its entirety. The office is nothing more than a cubicle in a large room shared by the

eight journalists and reporters who work for the Rand Daily Mail. It is not perfect, a little cramped, but the view is sublime, and, for this, Bafana is grateful. From here, he can see the emblem of Witwatersrand University and, if he casts his sight further, he can almost make out the parts of Wits Junction where he had lived for one year whilst studying for his years as a Masters' student. He can also see the top of Jubilee Hall, a few blocks from the dorms of Wits Junction, which Nandi now calls home.

He usually can't wait to get to his little corner, his coffee-stained desk, his cranky old typewriter, and his cracked mug. He loves the oversized cup his eight-year-old nephew made for him at a crafts workshop almost three years ago when he first came to work at the Rand. So, he is usually one of the first to arrive. When he enters the cubicle, he always grabs his mug, which sits on the desk, then heads for the stuffy little staff room across from Sam's office and fills it to the brim with steaming coffee. Unlike everyone else at the paper, he likes his brew black and strong. Once back in his cubicle, he opens a brown leather satchel, takes out his notebook, and starts tinkering away at the typewriter, pausing now and then, taking a sip from his mug.

Today he isn't feeling the enthusiasm and the rush of excitement he usually experiences when he enters the building. This morning, he dreaded coming in and deliberately took the longest route from Orlando East. He isn't looking forward to facing his boss, Sam. Yesterday, he didn't show up for work. He'd spent the day moving from the small Braamfotein flat he'd been renting illegally into the two-bedroom house on Vilikazi Street, the home where he and his five siblings had grown up. Bafana knows he should have called and apologised for his absence, but he hadn't felt like bothering yesterday. His younger brother, Roy, was in town and had offered to give him a hand with the move, which he had been putting off for weeks.

Soon after she came to study at Wits, Bafana asked Nandi if she would consider moving in. The idea made sense to him since they'd been spending a lot of time together and enjoyed each other's company. Moreover, the rationality of it was so apparent he was sure she would see it too. But unfortunately, that didn't turn out to be the case.

'Cha, Bafana! *Suka la, wena!*' She'd exclaimed when he'd first broached the topic one night when he was walking her to her dorm.

'Mara, I'm serious,' he'd insisted.

'*Hayibo*, you and your ideas! And what would I tell my mother, hey? *Ja* indeed! I can just see her liking that idea!' She chuckled, playfully bumping him with her elbow. However, being spurned that first time hadn't deterred him. He'd hounded her for weeks, doggedly, each time coming up with an additional reason the move would be beneficial for her. Of course, it was easier to do if she was in high spirits because then she would half-listen or, at least, pretend to. So, he learned to gauge her mood and, if the timing seemed right, he would make his pitch. The conversation might go like this:

'*Lalela, s'thandwa*,' he'd begin, 'You know how you're always saying that you wish you could get a job so you could send money home to help with your brothers and sisters school fees?'

'*Ja*. And then?' she'd say, rolling her eyes coquettishly. 'Have you thought up a job for me, my Romeo?'

'Not exactly, *s'thandwa sami*,' he'd replied, 'I'm talking about the moolah you'd save if you didn't have to pay for that dingy little dorm room. Think about how much help that would be to your mother?'

These types of conversations had continued for weeks on end without fruitful results. At first, Bafana assumed she was turning him down because she didn't like the fact that he lived in Braamfontein unlawfully. Six months after his return from England and a few weeks into his employment, he had convinced a gentleman from Germany, Mr Fritz, who was a close friend of his new boss, Sam, to rent him his one-bedroom pad in Braamfontein. Bafana had made him an offer of two hundred rands a month, and his old man had not hesitated to accept. Both knew they were breaking the law, which forbade Blacks, Coloureds, and Indians from living in Johannesburg. But neither of them cared. Mr Fritz was going back home and no longer concerned himself with what the South African Law dictated. Bafana, too, had long ceased to care about the rules and regulations of his biased country.

A month after he moved in, Ndodana asked Bafana if he could crash on the sofa for a few days, and he'd consented without giving it a second thought. Ndo, whom Bafana had known since primary school, was the most amicable of all his friends. He was also obsessively neat, so he hadn't thought that cohabiting with him would be a problem. But a few days had turned into one week, then two, then a month. At first, Bafana hadn't minded. He appreciated the company and the few rands his friend was chipping in for the rent. But when two years had passed, and Ndo had shown no

sign of vacating, Bafana's appreciation began to wane, and soon enough, it was turning into resentment. He wondered if his Ndo's presence in the flat was another reason Nandi refused to move in with him. Still, as badly as he wanted him out of the way, Bafana could not find the heart to throw his best buddy out onto the street. And then, just when he'd given up hope, he spotted an opportunity to regain his freedom. Word had reached him that the folks who'd been renting his old family home in Orlando East were planning to move to Durban. Shortly after their divorce, six years earlier, his parents left the house on Vilikazi Street. His father migrated to Cape Town, and his mother and younger siblings moved into a newly built home, a short distance away, in Dube Township. Bafana had wasted no time contacting his father to request a takeover of the house. At first, the old man had been reluctant, stating that running a place was too big a responsibility for a young man, but Bafana had persisted and jokingly said, 'Baba, I'm twenty-four years old, and I'm sure I can manage a four-roomed house.'

Eventually, his persistence paid off. One day his father visited him at his booth at the Rand Daily and plopped a set of keys on his desk. Then, sighing, he declared, '*Kulungile ndodana*, if you say you can handle it, then I have no choice but to trust you, don't I?' And with that, he'd turned his back and walked away. Two weeks later, Bafana finally won Nandi over.

Now, sitting back to catch the last drops of his coffee, Bafana reflects, with regret, on the way he'd handled things yesterday. He wishes he had taken the time to call the office to at least say he would be absent, albeit he would have to fib about the reason. He knows that Sam is exasperated by the blasé manner with which he's been treating his job lately but hopes Sam will show up in an excellent mood this morning, so he can approach him with his idea that he's been burning his brain for days. Rumour's been circulating that kids are running away from home and crossing the border into Angola to train as guerrilla fighters. It's whispered that ANC is behind all this - that they are recruitment are recruiting kids as young as eleven. Another story also making waves around the township is that these boys and girls are subjected to brutal torture and forced to live under appalling conditions once they cross the border.

On top of that, there are allegations of horrendous torture. Bafana hopes these are just fabricated tales. Last night he and Nandi were up till the wee hours, mulling over the veracity of these speculations. She's the one who'd brought it up.

'It makes little sense that the ANC would recruit these kids only to torture them,' Nandi had voiced her doubt.

'Ja, but maybe the ANC doesn't know about the abuse. So, it's feasible, *s'thandwa*, that they are fostering the recruitment but not doing any follow-ups,' he reasoned.

'Hm... I suppose,' she murmured torpidly.

'I mean, if there's no one monitoring what's going on over there in the bush, what's to stop those guerrillas from committing barbaric acts against their charges?'

'I hear you, *s'thandwa sami*. Unfortunately, though, it's hard to separate truth from fiction when you have no eyewitnesses,' Nandi, the aspiring lawyer, concluded, as she pulled the blanket over her shoulder and turned away from him.

'I hear you too, *s'thandwa*,' he said, as he turned on his side and began kneading the back of her neck. 'I suppose there's only one way to find out.'

*'Usho ukuthini?'*

'I mean, maybe it might be worth one's while to take a trip out there to find out what the real deal is,' he said, trying to sound as casual as he could. The idea had first entered his head a week earlier, one evening after he had stopped at Sis MaBree's, to wet his whistle. Most of his buddies were already gathered at the shebeen, in their usual corner, nursing their beers and debating politics as usual. He'd strode over to join them, planted himself on the empty crate next to Dumo, who was relating to the group a story about his fourteen-year-old who'd been missing for ten days. Dumo had come up with the theory that the boy had crossed over and joined other young dissidents in the bush.

*'Uyazi*, I heard that not all of them are runaways. Word on the street is that some of these youngsters are kidnapped and forced across the border,' Ndodana imparted.

*'Nami futhi*, I've heard the same thing, *mfowethu*. They say they're snatching kids in broad daylight!' put in Nkosi, who typically never contributed to discussions until well into his fourth or fifth beer.

Bafana does not have a clear-cut plan on how he will persuade Sam not only to allow him to take on this self-assigned assignment but to support it too. However, he's already decided that if Sam does not come through, he will go and pitch his idea to Drum, the magazine he contributes to from time to time. He has a cordial

relationship with the magazine's editor, John Bush, and knows that John will champion his proposal.

He is swivelling in his chair, mulling over his anticipated investigative venture trip when, out of the corner of his eye, he spots Sam strolling through the office's double doors. For the umpteenth time, Bafana muses over the uncanny resemblance between his boss and the American actor, Andy Griffith. Like Griffin's character, Matlock, Sam's fluffy hair looks like a comb has never been through it, and he appears to favour dull colours. His tailor-made suits are usually light grey or pale blue. Sam is also a creature of habit. Bafana can set his clock by his routine -from what time he will stroll into the office to what time he will come out for his last final cup of coffee. Bafana knows it will take his boss approximately thirty minutes to come out and check on his employees. Ordinarily, Bafana would appreciate the time to get himself together, catch up with his colleagues on whatever he may have missed when he was out in the field. However, this morning is different. Today he is too eager to wait for Sam to come to him.

Bafana walks into the office without knocking. Sam has taken off his suit jacket and is hanging it over the back of his leather chair. He takes a few seconds to register Bafana's presence. First, the older man gazes at him with a distracted look in his eyes, then that look turns into puzzlement. Finally, he glances at his wristwatch, then back at the man standing in front of him. 'Dare I ask what you're doing here? Perhaps, I'm losing my mind. I mean, as far as I know, you are supposed to be at Phefeni Junior High, interviewing the principal...'

'Calm down, Baas. Your marbles are still intact...'

'Well, then tell me what the bloody hell I missed out in my instructions to you yesterday, Gerald.' Sam is the only person in the world who calls him by his Christian name. Not his teachers, friends or siblings, or his father who gave him the title. It had taken a while for Bafana to get used to being addressed so formally. And, although he's heard it repeatedly over the three years, the name still sounds odd to his ears, significantly when Sam shortens it to Jerry, which he tends to do quite often.

'Relax, baas. You didn't miss nix,' Bafana assures him as he makes himself comfortable in the battered leather chair across from his patron. 'Something important came up, that's all.'

'Something came up! Are you bloody yanking my chain or what? What could be more important than talking to the man whose own pupils beat the crap out of him?'



'Hold your horses, baas. I didn't say I would not interview the arrogant bastard. I know you have a busy schedule today, so I wanted to catch you early to... Um...'

Bafana clears his throat, not sure where to begin. 'To...'

'What?' Sam snaps impatiently.

'You've heard the rumour about the kids training as freedom fighters in Angola, right?'

'I don't believe I have. Why? What do you know?'

Bafana leans back in the chair leisurely and beams at his boss, chuffed because he got the older man's attention without having to exert too much effort.

'Everyone in the townships is talking about nothing else,' Bafana embellishes. 'They say kids as young as ten are being kidnapped and forced to train as guerrilla fighters across the border. I know the families of some of these kids, and I've spoken to them. But baas...' he paused for emphasis.

'I'm listening,' Sam nods encouragingly.

'Baas, there's talk that these youngsters are tortured in these training camps, starved and forced to live under appalling conditions.' Bafana relates all this with an expression of utter disgust on his face; anyone listening would think he's witnessed these distressing conditions with his own eyes.

'How long have these rumours been circulating, you say?'

'Two weeks at least, baas.' 'Hmm... Are you sure about this, Jerry?' Sam's voice gives away a hint of scepticism. 'I mean, if that's all everyone is talking about, as you say, shouldn't have one of the papers... say the Sowetan or the Daily Mail, especially the Daily Mail...picked up the story already?'

'Exactly, Baas! That's why I came rushing to talk to you to prevent that from happening. This is our chance, sir. It's our turn to be the first ones out with a hot story. I mean, how many times has the Star, the Daily Mail, the Post, the Sowetan, you name them. How many times have they beaten us to a story? Aren't you sick of that? I know for sure I am.'

'And so, what do you suggest, Jerry? We print some of these rumours in the Rand?'

'Course not, baas, what I'm saying is we investigate these stories to see if there's any truth in them. And if there is, well, this could be...'

'...our big break,' Sam finishes the sentence for him. 'Yes, yes, I know Jerry! And I can also sense where you're going with this, and before you ask, the answer is no.'

'But Baas...' Bafana is taken aback.

'No, Jerry! I'm not sending you to Angola. End of story!' Sam gets up and paces towards the window.

'But why not, Baas? Excuse me, but aren't you the one who's always telling me that I'm the best reporter you've ever had to work for this paper? Remember what you said to me when you sent to Rhodesia to interview Joshua Nkomo when there was a war going on? Do you recall what you said to me? 'You are the only one I can trust with this one. None of these other journalists is as capable as you are, Jerry. Not one of them has the pluck, the grit?' Those were your words, Sam. Was that a load of bollocks then? Were you simply bullshitting me to get me to do a story that no one else wanted to go near?'

'No, no, no, son,' Sam rushes over and places a hand on his shoulder to appease him. 'Of course,

I meant all that,' he sighs before adding, 'the problem is that you are also bloody unreliable?'

'How so?' Bafana challenges him though he knows just what his boss means.

'How so? How bloody so? Give me a break, will you, Jerry!' Sam exclaims as he paces back to the window. 'Who was it that was sent to interview the principal at Phefeni Junior High yesterday but decided they had better things to do instead, hey? And talk about stories that my friend was a story.'

'Okay, okay. I get it, Sam. So yesterday, I messed up. I'm sorry, okay. But I'll still down there to interview the man. Right after I meet with that fat bastard.'

'Your meeting with the fat bastard was at seven-thirty, an hour ago. That was the first thing you were supposed to do before coming here.'

'I know, baas, but I couldn't wait to run this story...'

'Ah, ah, rumour, Jerry,' Sam wags his finger at him. 'Remember, it's only a rumour.'

'I know, but I could change all that if you let me,' Bafana mumbles as he gets up and heads to the door.

'Jerry,' Sam calls.

Bafana turns around and looks at him wearily.

'I know you have charm, the ability to make people open up to you, the gift of gab as they say. But I worry about you and that temper of yours. I don't think you and

those guerrillas in the bush would gel. And, sorry, but I don't want to be responsible if you get head blown off over there.'

'Trust me, baas, I have no intention of getting my head blown off,' Bafana assures him as he opens the door and steps out.

### 3

#### NANDI

-Diary Entry-

July 16, 1975

I've been at Wits Junction for six months and have relished every minute of the experience. My room is on the third floor of block 24, or 'Shosholoza,' the name by which our dorm building goes. Only us Africans are residents here. The other students - the Coloured, Indians, and Whites - live in separate dormitories in various parts of the university. My window faces a small courtyard. For the first time in my life, I have a bed that I don't have to share with anyone. At home, my mother, myself, and my sisters sleep like packed sardines on one bed-Mama and little Za at one end, and Busi and me at the other. We've been kipping in this fashion and smelling each other's feet for so long the cheesy odour no longer bothers us. The boys - Mandla, Bheki, and Bo, sleep a little more comfortably on the sitting room floor. They each have straw mats, which they use as makeshift mattresses. Here, I also have a desk, a small table next to it, and two chairs in my room.

There's a tiny fridge that is empty right now. I could have stocked it last week with the money Bafana gave me, but I received a letter from Mama complaining that the school fees had gone up, and she was struggling to come up with the payments. So, I sent the whole ten rands to her. Ever since I moved here, I've been sending her a few rands when I can. She thinks the money is from my scholarship and grant. She does not understand the scholarship only covers my tuition at the university, and the

allowance barely pays for my room. If it wasn't for Bafana, I don't know how I would survive here.

There are altogether eighteen blacks studying at the university. Still, only ten of us could secure grants to cover our accommodation here—the other eight students commute from their homes in Soweto. Four of us are all on the same floor: Zola, Mbulelo, Lerato, and me. Even though we are all from distinct parts of Soweto and had never met before, we became tight, quick. Especially Zola and I, because we're both studying law. Mbulelo is studying engineering and Loreto mathematics. Two or three times a week, we gather in Mbulelo's room and try to digest the food he cooks for us as we listen to his wisecracks. Mbulelo fancies himself the chef amongst us. He even has this apron and white hat he bought from a vendor near the Carlton Shopping Centre, which he likes to don when practising his culinary skills. Unfortunately for us, his passion for cooking doesn't quite match his talent. Zola, Lerato, and I agree that he's the worst Cook we've ever met. None of us, however, have the guts to tell him. Nor do we have the heart to reject his weekly invitations. So we nod yes, every time and faithfully appear at his door every Thursday night, with our one plate and fork or spoon (the university only provides one of each), bracing our stomachs for whatever surprise our host has in store for us. We do this because we love Mbulelo and also because he is so hilarious. He always has us in stitches with his witty stories. Like Gogo, he can deliver pun without cracking a smile.

I spend all my weekends with Bafana. He used to pick me up after work on Fridays. But now that I have the key to his house, there's no need for me to wait for him. I usually walk ten minutes from Braamfontein to Park Station and take the Soweto train to Phefeni Station. From the station, it's only a ten-minute walk to the house on Vilikazi Street, his home. The entire trip is about forty minutes, but it feels like fifteen because I always have a book to distract me. Since I started making my way there, Bafana no longer rushes home from work but stops at the shebeen for a pint or two or three with his buddies. I think he gave me the key solely for this reason. But I don't mind. Really. Especially when I have an assignment that I need to complete.

He's been renting the house from his parents since he moved out of his flat two months ago. It's the house where his parents raised him and his little brother and four sisters. Bafana's childhood home sits across the street from Mandela's house and is two houses away from Bishop Desmond Tutu's home. Like most houses in

Orlando East, it has a wide veranda, a tiny yard at the front, and a spacious one at the back. The veranda has a stoop, painted bright red. So are all the windowpanes. In the backyard is a little garage/room. Bafana told me that it only had two rooms shortly after their marriage when his parents first moved into the house. They added the extra bedrooms after the birth of their second daughter. Then ten years and four kids later, they turned the garage into a makeshift bedroom for him and his brother Roy, who had become too old to share a bedroom with their teenage sisters. The house is now three times the size of my family home in Naledi. Maybe it's the long wooden kitchen/dining table, all graffitied with childish scribbles, the six mismatched chairs surrounding it, and swallow up all the space that could have been. Or, possibly, the bright furniture and the constant sunlight that pours in through the framed windows. I'm not entirely sure what it is, but the house has warmth and energy as if it still houses a family with six vibrant children. I love it.

I love the neighbours, too, even though they did embrace me right away. It's a close-knit community. Everyone knows everyone else by name, and they tend to be suspicious of strangers. So, when I first showed my face, they would respond to me with reservation or answer my greetings reluctantly if I offered them. I could tell they were curious. They wanted to know just who I was and where on God's earth Bafana had found me. They knew for sure I wasn't one of his sisters because they knew each one of his siblings. I couldn't be a relative, or they would have seen me before. I watched with amusement as they surveyed me with those eyes, hungry to grill me for information. They were waiting for an explanation. Wanting to know, but not daring to ask. Only one of them had the audacity MaNgwenya, the next-door neighbour on the right. It was after my third weekend there. I was in the backyard, hanging my smalls on the line, when I felt these eyes watching me. I turned my head, and she was right there, leaning her heavyweight on the fence. I don't know how long she'd been spying on me, but when my eyes met hers, she didn't flinch or look away. We stared at each other for what seemed like an endless minute. Finally, I realised she was waiting for me to say something, so I politely mumbled, 'Sawubona Mama?'

She returned my greeting with an incoherent grunt. I didn't know what to say after that, so I just bent down, self-conscious now, picked up another pantie from the washbasin, wrung it out, and hung it on the line.

'*Ungubani wena?*' I heard as I dug in my skirt pocket for a clothes peg. 'Who are you?'

'*Ningu Nandipha,*' I answered, without a glance in her direction.

'*Nandipha bani?*' she demanded.

'Sansole,' I gave my surname, hoping that would put an end to the interrogation.

'*Uphuma kuphi?*'

'Naledi.'

I suspected her curiosity had more to do with the status of my relationship with her handsome, eligible bachelor next-door neighbour than my address. But I wasn't about to give her any satisfaction. I would not make it that easy for her. If she or any of the other nosey neighbours wanted the scoop on the new chick on the block, they'd have to come up and ask me. So, I finished hanging my washing, waved at her, yelled, '*Ube nemini emnandi, Mama,*' I called out as I gathered up the empty washbasin and headed back towards the back door. She didn't respond, but as I entered the kitchen, I glanced over and saw that she was still there, leaning over her fence, still staring and sizing me up.

Later that afternoon Bafana, Nnodana, and Dumo returned from a football match. I heard them come in, but I didn't bother getting up from the bed where I was reading *Things Fall Apart*. I knew they would go straight to the fridge, grab their beers, settle down somewhere and, for the next three hours, discuss the game. Instead, they made themselves comfortable in the backyard, right outside the bedroom window. I was waiting for the football banter to begin when I heard, '*Sawubonani zinsizwa?*' It was unmistakably her voice, though now it had taken a more friendly tone.

There was a brief pause and a clearing of the throat before she went on. 'I saw someone in the yard earlier that I didn't recognise...'

'Ah, so you've met my girlfriend Mama!' Bafana quickly cut her off. '*Igama lakhe ngu Nandipha.*'

I smirked, tickled by my man putting the busybody neighbour in her place. Good, I thought, that'll teach her to keep her nose out of people's business.

The other night when I asked him why he moved back to Orlando East and this house, Bafana, he told me he could no longer stomach the homesickness he experienced when driving to work every morning. He confessed that he'd never quite felt at home in the house in the expensive suburb of Dube Township his mother had relocated the rest of the family after the divorce. Then, nuzzling up closer to me and

massaging my boobs, he added, 'The main reason I did it, if you must know, was you?'

'Me?' I feigned surprise.

'Ja. You. *Wena s'thandwa sami*,' he whispered to my chest. 'I wanted you to be comfortable, my love!' He declared and planted his mouth on my right nipple.

'Liar,' I said and playfully slapped the back of his head.

'Cross my heart and hope to die,' he mumbled to my breast and, laughing, I slapped his head again.

Although I was reluctant to move in, I must confess I'm enjoying our new living arrangement. Some days, when we have nothing better to do, we lie in bed and chat for hours. I relish listening to my man, especially when he talks about his writing or exploring stories. I appreciate that he always seeks my opinion like he values my thoughts. And I'm learning a lot just by staying attuned and devouring his articles. Last week I came across some notes he'd written for a story he is investigating for the Drum magazine. It's about the Immorality Act (or the 'Evil Law' as he wants to title it,) which, for years, has caused endless misery to couples, broken up families, created scandals, and driven many to commit suicide. I knew he'd been working on it for months, going as far as the Cape to interview people who've fallen victims to this Act. It shocked me to learn there were so many.

I was privy to the existence of this Act, even before I became a law student, and my opinion was that it was just as warped as every other the Boer government insists on imposing upon us Africans. It's common knowledge that there have been people who have dared to cross the race line and suffered drastic consequences. I'd also heard stories about people who'd taken their own lives. I guess the pain of being separated from their significant other was too much to bear. However, until I came across these notes Bafana had jotted for his article, I'd never put much thought to the statistics. The numbers blew my mind.

'Are these figures accurate?' I later questioned Bafana when he came home.

'No, I suspect they are way higher than that. Maybe even double!'

'*Ayi, Nkos'yami!*' I swore, unnerved by his answer. Even before I became a Law student, I knew the Act existed and perceived it as many of the countless inequitable laws that the government imposed on us Africans. However, I'd never chewed over its direct effect on our individual lives. Bafana's article opened my eyes. Like everything he wrote, it made me think. The boars already control too many aspects

of our existence; you'd think they would at least grant us the right to choose who to love. I don't think something as private and intimate between two people, regardless of their colour, should be under the jurisdiction of the law. You cannot govern human emotions by legislation, can you? I think the Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, was spot on when he said the parliament has no place in people's bedrooms. Our Prime Minister Vorster and his minions up in Pretoria should read this sensible man's book.

In this month's issue, Drum published an article proclaiming that change is on the way. According to the report, the government has promised us that racial discrimination will soon be history. 'Ha,' I snorted when Bafana asked for my point of view.

'I will believe that when I see it.' I know I sound cynical, but, hey, that goes with the territory of growing up black in South Africa. 'But if there's any truth in it, the first thing that needs to change is this ridiculous Immorality Act,' I added as an afterthought.

'You think so?' Bafana gave me a quizzical look.

'What? You disagree?' I returned the look.

'I'd prefer to see the pass law go first.' He said, leaned over, and kissed my nose.

Last Wednesday, Zola and I bunked our final lecturer and hitchhiked to Kimberley. We wanted to witness Robert Sobukwe (aka Professor) defend 20-year-old Peterson Gumede in the Bantu Commissioners Court. Unfortunately, Peterson had been nabbed for being in Kimberley illegally. The last time Mr Sobukwe had addressed a court and stated his view on the Pass Law, he and other former leaders of the banned Pan-African Congress were arrested and sent off to Robben Island. Now, the Professor was ready to come back and take another punch at Pass Law and Influx control, and Zola and I were not about to miss the show.

The case was, ironically, his very first. He'd been sworn in as a lawyer only three days earlier. But you couldn't tell by listening to him speak. After seeing him in action, I understood why they call the Professor. The man is brilliant! It was no surprise to us when he won the case. Peterson escaped with just a warning. Unfortunately, we could not linger around and get a closeup of our hero, as we were unceremoniously thrown out of the gallery for cheering too loud. Still, we didn't care; we had seen the brilliant man in action, and nothing could dampen our spirits.



## Bafana

It's a hot Saturday afternoon, and he, Nkosi, Dumo, and Ndodana, are back from playing football in Jabulani Stadium. They've taken their sweaty tops off and are sitting in the backyard of 1088 Vilikazi Street. They lost the match but are no longer feeling sore since they've downed a crate of Lion beer between them. Roy, his younger brother, is on his way with another box, so Bafana knows the day is far from over. Nandi is in the kitchen cooking. The mouth-watering scent of curry floating through the open window makes him smile at his good fortune. Since she moved in with him for the umpteenth time, he offers a silent thank you to God.

Before he moved into this house, these post-match gatherings always took place in the Braamfontein flat. The men would take turns cooking before the start of the game. Occasionally, one of them would show up with a girlfriend, who would then claim the kitchen, thus sparing them all the agony of digesting half-burnt meat and undercooked pap.

Bafana relishes these laidback Saturday afternoons with his pals, Dumo, Nkosi, and Ndodana. Though they each make an effort to meet for a drink, it is not always easy during the week as they all have different work schedules. So, they all look forward to the sabbath day. It's not that they sat down and discussed it and unanimously voted to make Saturday their day to play and catch up. Saturday just happened to be the only day that they were all free. They've kept this a ritual for three years. The four of them have been tight since Junior High School. Even though they came from different townships, they all ended up at Phefeni Junior High, which sat at the top of Vilikazi Street. Ndo and Bafana first met at creche when they were toddlers. However, it wasn't until primary school that they became tight friends.

Now Bafana sits back in his chair and watches Dumo deal the cards. Meantime, a disgruntled Nkosi begins recounting his recent visit to his family home and exasperation with his teenage twin sisters.

*'Lezo zikhala, uMpo lo Mponeni, uyazi majita!* You know, the older those two get, the less I understand them. They told me they were excited to learn that the boycott

was going to go ahead. I asked them why and you know what those knuckleheads said. "*Bhuti*, how can you ask a stupid question like that?" That was Mponyana, the smart mouth, of course. "We are tired of sitting back and swallowing the shit that those Boers push down our throats. "Yes, we're not going to," now this was Mpo putting in her two cents. "*Okhulu bethu nabazali bethu* have been swallowing it for centuries, *mara thina* we are going to put a stop to it! We're going to let the Boers know enough is enough, man!" "What about your exams?" I asked the two. "What's going to happen if you boycott your exams? Are you telling me you want to flunk?" The two of them flipped me away like I'm an annoying fly and said, "Fuck the exams."

The other three men chuckle. Then Bafana turns sombre and says, '*Eish, mara*, I agree with them, *mfo!*'

'*Nami futhi!*' Ndodana confers.

'Ja, those Boers can go and stick their Afrikaans where the sun doesn't shine,' Dumo adds. 'Mara majita, I know that this Afrikaans thing yi kaka ngempela, but I think there's got to be a better way of reacting. I believe if these kids boycott their classes and flunk their exams, they'll be giving the Boers just what they want. We all know that they don't want us to get an education so they can keep us down.'

'*Mfo,*' Bafana's voice takes on a serious tone. 'Just what kind of education do you think these kids will get when they are being taught in a language they don't understand?' All three men turn their gaze on Nkosi, waiting for his answer. But before he can formulate one, Nandi sticks her head out of the kitchen window and loudly announces that the food is ready.

'*Siyabonga,*' the men chorus their thank-yous but do not make a move to get up. Instead, they continue watching Nkosi expectantly.

'Well... I mean...what I meant is...' Nkosi stumbles. '*Ebengikushoyo...*'

'*Madoda, ukudla sekumi ngomumo!*' Nandi shouts out impatiently. 'Is that game more important than my cooking?'

'*Cha, s'thandwa,* nothing is more important than your cooking!' Bafana hoots as he rises from his chair. The other men follow suit, and they all head to the kitchen.

## NANDI

-Diary Entry -

February 10, 1976

Today, Lerato, Zola and Mbulelo paid their visit to Vilikazi Street. To be honest, since moving in with Bafana, I've been missing my friends and feeling guilty about not spending time with them. I know I should have invited them over a lot sooner, but better late than never, *akunjalo?* None of them is still living in the university dormitories since the grants people decided to scratch the housing allowance we were once entitled to. All Africans had just seven days to clear out of their dorm rooms. Lerato has joined her mother and older brother, Willie, in Killarney, in the one-room shack behind MaWillie's Jewish employers' house. Next to the tiny dwelling is a kennel that houses four canines, whose loud barking keeps them up all night and prevents Lerato from studying. Mbulelo moved back to his parents' home in Meadowlands Township. Now he has to rely on three buses and the train to get him to the university. The whole trip takes over two hours, so he needs to up before dawn if he wants to make it on time. I suppose this would have been my fate, too, if I hadn't moved in with Bafana. For me, it would have also meant saying goodbye to freedom and hello again to Naledi Township and sharing a single bed with my mother and two sisters.

Zola lucked out because of her boyfriend. Mark, a white Jew, has a flat in Newtown, and Zola recently moved in. It takes her less than thirty minutes to walk to the university. The problem is that only white people are allowed to live in Newtown and, if she ever got caught, my friend would end up in hot trouble. Mark too. Both of them could end up in the slammer for a very long time. But this doesn't seem to faze either of them.

The first time Zola confided that she and Mark had been talking about moving in together, I was taken aback. In hindsight, I should have tried to conceal my dismay.

But I didn't. Had I imagined that it would cause a rift in our friendship, I would have kept my trap zipped and my opinions to myself.

Initially, Zola had brushed off my concerns with a wave of her hand and scolded me for being a worry wort. 'You fret too much over nothing, *wena!* You need to learn to relax. Loosen up a little,' she'd laughed. 'Besides, what makes you think we'll get caught? Only careless people and idiots put themselves in a position where they can get nabbed. Mark and I are neither. *Bheka u Bafana lo Ndodana.* How many years did they live in Braamfontein? And didn't they get away with it?'

I didn't answer. Yes, Bafana and Ndodana had lived in Braamfontein illegally and managed to avoid getting nabbed. Bafana had become so confident in his invincibility and ability to evade the police. He'd even tried to convince me to move in with him in that flat. But I'd firmly refused. I've witnessed with my own eyes how vicious those Boers can get when they catch you breaking the law. They don't just throw you in jail; they make sure that you suffer first. They want you to experience real pain so that maybe next time you'll think twice. I've watched it happen to my mother, our neighbours, and our father before they made him disappear for good. I could never forget those nights when the police tore into our home, demanding to see the 'pass' – the elusive document that neither of my parents could ever produce. I recalled the times my terrified siblings and I would be hurled in a corner, trying to remain invisible, trying but failing to hold back the tears. The image of my father – my giant, burly Baba - reduced to nothing as he silently took a beating from a policeman young enough to be his son was one that I could never erase from my mind. The burning shame, the humiliation of watching my mother being force-marched into a *kwela-kwela* with nothing on her but a flimsy petticoat – her shaky hands covering her rubbery breasts, holding on to whatever little dignity there was left to preserve. That, I could never forget or forgive. Even when I was very young and didn't understand everything going on around me, I knew that nobody had a right to do that to another person in my little head. And as I got older, I vowed that I would never let anyone do that to me.

So, when I got tired of Bafana doggedly begging me to move into the flat, I told him. '*Lalela, sthandwa,* I love you more than anything in this world, but cha! There's no way I'd willingly give those savages a chance to rough me up. Never would I place myself in a position where they have an excuse to put their hands on me. You want to take chances? Go ahead. But, *mina,* leave me out of it.'

However, I didn't bother to argue further with Zola. I knew doing so would have been a waste of my time. She's just as stubborn as I am, and once her mind is made up, there's nothing anyone can say or do to change it. So, I didn't see or hear from her that weekend. Monday came, and there was no sign of her anywhere in the university. I went looking for her in the dorms, but there was no answer when I knocked on her door. Mbulelo and Lerato had already moved out of their dorm rooms, so they couldn't tell me anything about her whereabouts. I wasn't sure if she had already moved in with Mark, but I went and banged on her door every day. Then, on Friday, I finally caught up with her. I'd been pounding her door for about five minutes and was just about to give up when I heard footsteps and my friend's voice screaming, '*Ngiyeza, ngiyeza, dammit!*' When she opened the door and saw me, Zola yelled, 'Bloody hell, Nandipha, are you trying to wake up the whole dormitory?'

'*Hayi wena, hlanya*, it's three in the afternoon,' I said and pushed past her. She'd been painting her toenails. There were boxes scattered all over the room. We sat on the floor, and I watched her finish her toenails, then kicked off my sandals and asked her to do mine. Because she seemed to be in a pleasant mood, I took a chance and brought up my concerns over her relationship with Mark, hoping she wouldn't be defensive this time. 'Zo, *uyamkhumbula u Thandie Kubheka lo Lydia Monamodi?*' I asked her, trying to sound as casual as I could. Zola shrugged her shoulders. 'Ja, of course, I remember them. Thandi moved to Germany so she could marry her German lover. Lydia emigrated to Swaziland for the same reason. So?'

'*Hayibo, wena, yeka ukudlala ngami!*' I scolded her playfully. 'You know very well they did not just leave the country so they could marry their German lovers. They were forced into exile.'

'Ja, mani, I know! And? Do you think they could have continued living here after they were nabbed?'

'Nandi, what's this? Question time?'

'I'm worried, Zo,' I said. 'Worried that this thing of yours with Mark... But, I mean, you're my friend, and I don't want to see you behind bars...'

'Wait...wait a minute, this thing?'

Perhaps if I'd stopped to think, I would have phrased my apprehension better, but even though she might have felt offended by my words, I think her reaction was a little over the top – a bit too dramatic even for her.

'First of all, my friend,' she said, wagging a bright red fingertip at me like I was a little child she was scolding. 'What Mark and I have is not a thing. It's called a relationship. Relationship, *uyangithola*? Just like what you and Bafana have.'

'Zo, I didn't 't mean it like that. *Bengisho nje...*' I tried to explain, but Zola wasn't about to give me a chance.' Do you think you're the only one who reads the paper? You think I don't know that Lydia spent five years playing cat and mouse game with the police before fleeing to Swaziland?'

'My point exactly!' I told her. 'Can you imagine what those five years of living in fear were like for her? Do you...'

'*Uyazi wena, Nandipha, uyadelela!*' Zola suddenly banged the nail polish hard on the floor, and it splattered on my legs and the hem of my skirt. 'First, you try to deter me from moving in with my boyfriend. Then you come here all high and mighty, trivialising our relationship - calling it a thing, like *yinto nje* that's not expected to last. So maybe it's not perfect like yours and Bafana. Perhaps you see it as puppy love when you compare it to yours. And maybe it won't last as long as yours has, but get this straight once and for all, Mark and I - our love is very much real. And if we want to risk everything so we can be together, that's our decision to make. *Akuyona ibhizinisi yakho!*' she angrily spit. I had never felt so chastised in my life. That was the end of my pedicure. I went home with half-painted toes.

I hadn't seen or spoken to Zola since and didn't think I ever would again. So, imagine my surprise when she turned up today with Lerato and on Mbulelo. I'd deliberately not invited her cause I didn't think she'd accept. But I was glad she decided to come along.

They arrived in a raggedy old Toyota that belongs to Mbulelo's brother. Zola was the first one to jump out and run into my arms. We spent the afternoon finishing off the beer leftover from Bafana and his friends' last gathering and listening to Mbulelo's endless tales, which were unfortunately not amusing this time but downright depressing. One particular story left me feeling so discouraged it almost made me wish I hadn't invited Mbulelo.

It was about Mike Mzingani, an otherwise law-abiding black even though he once spent ten days in the clink for a Pass offence. 'He came up here from the Cape as a toddler. He attended school in Soweto, and after completing his schooling, he has been working in Johannesburg all his life. Mike has since married.' Mbulelo relayed to us. 'And, like all married men, wants a house to bring up a family, see. Wag n

*bietjie*, he is told by the authorities. They say he is classed as a migrant worker in Johannesburg, so he cannot have a house in Soweto. He cannot live with his wife. For all they care, he can practise his conjugal rights telepathically and raise a family somewhere else. Mike is at his wits' end as he enters Albert Street. The mlungu explains Mike's plight to an official who wants to know if Mike ever served a six-month prison sentence or more. Mike explains that his jail experience is limited to ten days. Then out comes the rubber stamp. Mike can live with his wife in Soweto.'

While Zola and I shook our heads and tsk-tsked, Loreto mumbled something.

'*Utheni*' Mbulelo quizzed her.

'I said that's nothing new. I've heard stories like that before.'

'Maybe, you have, but let me finish telling it because this one has a twist. The young mlungu who helped Mike is a foreigner from the UK who has recently completed a year in South Africa. He still has to wait four years before he can apply for citizenship. See what I mean? Using cold logic, Mike, who was born in South Africa, should have been the one helping his mlungu buddy get South African citizenship. But things being the way they are, it was the other way around,' Mbulelo concluded and eyeballed Lerato for a comeback. There was none this time. Satisfied, he continued with his next story, which was about something he'd witnessed in town only a few days earlier. 'Two people are hurt in the street. One is black, and the other a mlungu. The black is severely injured and bleeding profusely, while the mlungu is not in such a terrible state. An ambulance arrives on the scene. The mlungu is carried into it, but a white cop says the black man cannot be taken too.'

Another mlungu cop says, in fact, the black needs treatment far more urgently than the other person. But the first cop replies, "Nix! It's against regulations to have dying mlungus and blacks in the same ambulance." Here Mbu paused to draw a sip from his Castle beer before proceeding. 'Perhaps this cop was applying the separate but equal policy to the letter. We've got to live separately, eat separately, enjoy ourselves separately, and even die separately. Who cares if the mlungu and the black were injured together, the law is the law and must be obeyed, *akulona qiniso lelo?*' The question was rhetorical, so we didn't respond.

'But his mlungu brother will not relent. He insists that the black is taken too. The crowd of blacks, myself included, call the uncooperative mlungu names and shout angrily that our brother must be taken to the hospital in the same sick van reserved

for whites. It could have been the persistence of his brother mlungu cop. It could have been the pressure and anger from the milling blacks. Or maybe it could have been that after some time, this mlungu cop realises that the blood flowing from the black man is not only plentiful but just as red as mlungu blood. Whatever the reason, after some time, he orders his assistants to take both the injured men. I heard through the grapevine that the mlungu was treated and discharged. The black died some hours after being admitted.'

Mbulelo stopped and lowered his head. He was silent for a while, but when he looked up again, he had a new expression on his face. Since I've known him, I've never seen him look this earnest or sad. And when he opened his mouth to speak again, the choked voice sounded like it belonged to someone else. 'I'm no medical expert,' he said, 'but somewhere at the back of my mind, I have a feeling those precious minutes that were wasted before he was taken could have been invaluable. I don't know. But all I know is that this did happen.'

*'Hayi, kunzima!'* I sympathised, then quickly excused myself and rushed to the kitchen to check on my lamb stew. Mbulelo's gloomy tales were hitting close to home, and I couldn't sit there and listen anymore.

## 6

### BAFANA

Bafana is driving to Orlando East to interview the principal of Phefeni Junior High, the school he and his siblings and most of his friends attended. He parks in front of his house then walks the short distance to the school, which sits on a small hill at the top of Vilikazi Street. Bafana is very fond of this street, with its broad, dusty road, uncharacteristic semi-detached houses, and colourful characters. Once upon a time, this street served as a playground and football field for the neighbourhood boys. He remembers spending hours here, kicking ball with his friends. It was their territory, although once in a while, a group of bold girls would show up and try to



claim it for their netball game. The boys would fight them, and, more often than not, they'd win.

Although the houses in Orlando East are tiny, they are not nearly as bad as the minute, 'matchbox' houses that line the streets of other townships. Unlike the other township, Orlando also has a community centre home to Teach and Learn, the youth club designed to keep Orlando youths out of trouble. As a boy, Bafana spent a fair amount of time in the youth club, learning to debate and act. Back then, the club was trendy, and there was always something going on. There'd be poetry readings on some nights, where the boys and girls show off their creative talent. On others, there'd be Shakespeare readings, which often led to animate discussions about morality, philosophy, and everything else that had nothing to do with the play. Bafana vividly remembers his first stage performance as Macbeth. He had taken the role to heart, and its words are still lodged in his memory.

Fair is foul, and foul is fair.

Is this a dagger which I see before me?

O damned spot!

Bloody instructions, which being taught, return.

To plague the inventor.

Phefeni Junior High looks just as it did when he was a student here almost a decade earlier. It's as if time has stood still. It is difficult to fathom that what took place here actually did. He approaches the gates and is surprised to find them chain locked. As far as he can remember, these gates were always open when school was in session. Every morning, he drives by the school on his way to, and he has never seen the gates chained.

He peeks through the bars of the gates but sees nothing alarming. But it is eerily quiet. Well, maybe the children have started their lessons, he tries to reason. It is almost 10 am, after all. Still, something sits uneasily with him. He starts towards the back, heading for the entrance generally reserved for staff, and as he rounds the corner, he hears the animated voices. Then he sees them - the boys and girls in their respective uniforms - chanting and bopping like they are cheering a game. Then, before he has time to wonder what the hell is going on, Bafana catches sight of the smouldering flames in the sky. He is captivated by the smoke and the ribbons of fire jumping high in the air, big, bright, and spellbinding. So enthralled is he by sight, it

takes a few moments for him to realise that this fire or, to be precise, the burning school, is the source of these youngsters' excitement.

'What the heck? What the bloody hell is going on?' He yells at no one in particular. 'Who is responsible for this?' It's impossible to get an answer from any of these fired-up youngsters. Bafana then wanders to the back of the crowd, where he comes across two women and a man, standing together with their arms crossed and a bewildered look on their faces. Assuming they are the teachers, Bafana approaches them.

'Bafana Mkhwananzi,' he introduces himself. 'From the Rand Daily.'

'Mister Gwebu,' says the man, extending his hand. 'Jabu Gwebu.'

'Miss Ngwenya,' one of the women, who Bafana estimates to be around his age, offers her hand next.

'Mrs. Maseko,' says the other woman, who looks like she should have retired years earlier.

'*Kwenzakalani?*' Bafana questions them, noticing as he does that he sounds just as frantic as the kids.

'*Hayibo, kunzima!*' Exclaims the older woman, her eyes shifting nervously from the jeering kids near the fence to the growing flames. 'They are burning them alive.'

'What are you talking about, Mama? Who's burning who?' Bafana grills her.

'*Lezi zingani,*' the woman gestures to the students, still chanting at the gate. 'They locked them up and set fire to the classroom.'

'I'm not following you. Who is burning? *Ubani okhiyiwe ekilasini?*'

'*Amapohoyisa,*' another Miss Ngwenya explains. '*Bheka i kwela-kwela yabo laphaya.*' She motions across the street. Bafana follows her gesture. Then he spots it - the familiar military green police jeep, hiding in plain sight under a colossal jacaranda tree. As always, the presence of the menacing vehicle stirs up overwhelming feelings of loathing and memories he'd rather forget.

'They came to arrest a pupil boy, but when they started assaulting the boy with sjamboks, the other pupils jumped in to defend him. Before you knew there was a full-fledged war between the three policemen and the thirty-odd students. Those cops stood no chance, *wena!*'

'Ag, no chance at all, *wena!*' Mrs Maseko lets out a loud murmur of assent. 'The pupils managed to disarm the men of their sjamboks and *then babashayanga nje mnandi!*'

'*Ja, kamnandi impela!* They beat them up nicely. Very nicely, my friend! Gave them a taste of their own fucking medicine. You should have seen how those grown men yelped like babies. Shit, if they weren't such fucking arseholes, I would have felt sorry for the bastards.' Mr Gwebu sniggers as he tries to light a cigarette stump. Bafana chuckles too. He feels nothing but hatred for policemen. As far as he's concerned, the bastards can all roast in hell. Had he been in that classroom when they barged in, he would have been happy to throw the first match for all the trouble they'd put him through when he was a teen.

One particular incidence stands out in his memory. Nine years have since passed, but Bafana still remembers it as if it happened yesterday. Three Special Branch policemen had burst into his home in the early hours of dawn, ransacked the whole house before cuffing him and carting him off to Vorster Square for questioning. Six days later, they explained his crime to his parents: writing and distributing inciting material. The inciting material in question was a play he'd written for a group of kids in the drama group he was coaching at Teach and Learn. The plot involved many students who planned to break their teacher out of prison after being arrested for treason. Back then, he wrote a lot of poems and plays and performed them himself. But the police never found any of these in his home because he never kept anything he wrote. Instead, once it was acted out or read to an audience, he tore up the play or poem and waited for another to come into his head.

Nevertheless, once they got hold of him, they charged him with being an 'agitator.' It took his parents three weeks to find a lawyer who could negotiate bail for him. Finally, five days after he was released and two weeks before his seventeenth birthday, his parents bought him a one-way ticket to England, where he was to join his oldest sister Lethu, who was already living in exile in north London.

'So, *mdala*, how many of those Boers are in there?' Bafana retrieves a packet of Marlborough cigarettes from his back pocket and offers one to Jabu Gwebu.

'Four, *ndoda*. But not all are Boers. *Omunye wabo ungomunye wethu*, but he got it too. *Naye bamshaye mnandi*. The bloody traitor! He's in there roasting with his *malungu* comrades!'

'That will teach him! Fucking bastard!' Bafana spits. 'The student they came to arrest. What was the reason? Did they say?'

'Why would they? When have the bastards ever needed a reason to harass our children? It's part of their job, *akunjalo*? As far as they see it, anyway.'

'Ja, kunjalo, mfowethu,' Bafana agrees.

'Frankly, I saw this coming, man.' Jabu continues to divulge. The kids are fed up. *Bakhathele, mfowethu!* I knew that sooner or later they were going to react.'

'*Sonke sikhathele,*' Miss Ngwenya puts in her two cents.

'*Ngiyalizwa bantu bakithi,*' Bafana says in concession with them.

'Two days ago, they raided Naledi High and arrested three fifteen-year-old boys and a sixteen-year-old girl. For no reason whatsoever. Our pupils here got wind that our school was next, so they prepared themselves. They were ready for them. Boy, were they ready!' Gwebu titters.

'Which newspaper did you say you were from?' Mrs Maseko turns her attention to Bafana.

'Rand Daily Mail Mama,' Bafana tells her.

'*Mara* how did you know about the fire, and how did you get here so fast?'

'*Cha*, Mama, I didn't know about the fire until I got here,' Bafana tries to clear the confusion. 'What I came here for was to talk to the principal, Mr Ngugi.'

'Oh, him,' she mumbles and waves a hand dismissively.

'I take it; he is not in school. *Kuphi engingamthwela khona*, Mama?'

'You can try his home. I suppose that's where he's been hiding since the beating.'

'What beating, Mama?'

'You didn't hear? *Izingane zamshaya kamnandi!*' They beat him nicely! *Kahle, mngane!* Jabu blares before breaking into another fit of giggles.

He is not the only one who is tickled. 'You should have seen the way he took off when those kids started stoning him. *Heyi wena*, I have never seen that man move so fast!' Miss Ngwenya chuckles. Bafana is amused but also puzzled. What the hell was going on with the kids in this school? Had they lost their minds? He wonders what would drive them to turn against their principle and want to harm him?'

'He was siding with the bloody police, telling the kids they should cooperate,' Mrs Maseko explains. 'And to make things worse, he's been supporting this Afrikaans nonsense the government is pushing down our throats.'

'So, he never came back to school after that?' Banana asks. The three teachers shrug and give him a look that seems to say, 'would you?'

'*Angiqondi,*' Bafana, still perplexed, tells them. 'My boss sent me here to get his views on this Afrikaans nonsense and the planned boycott. Mr Ngugi agreed to be

interviewed. Why would he have made arrangements for me to come to the school in the world if he knew he was not going to be there?'

'Maybe you can ask him when you find him,' Mrs Maseko says before turning her attention back to the kids near the gates.

'*Liphi ikhaya lakhe ndoda?*' Bafana questions the younger teacher, and Miss Ngwenya gives him directions to the principal's house, adding, 'If you don't find him there, try shebeens.'

'*Ngiyabonga. Libe lemini emnandi.*' Bafana thanks her and bids the teachers farewell. As he strolls home, Bafana passes a telephone booth and contemplates whether he should stop and call the fire brigade or wait until he gets home. Clearly, no one else is going to. Certainly not those teachers or nor the scheming pupils! He wonders if he would be doing anyone a favour by trying to save the lives of those policemen - the same men who never think twice about burning down a black man's home, brutalising him in front of his children. These men take pleasure in torturing and killing black youths. No, let the bastards fry; he decides That would be doing everyone a favour.

## 7

### NANDI

-Diary Entry-

February 13, 1976

Yesterday was Bafana's birthday, and I'm pissed as hell with him. In fact, I'm beyond pissed. I slaved over the stove for two hours cooking his favourite meal. Not to mention that I had to endure MaNgwenya's company for longer than I cared just to learn to bake a cake. And the son of a bitch never came home! At first, I wasn't bothered, assuming that he got stuck at work or decided to stop for a drink with his pals. But when nine, then ten o'clock came and went, I started to get worried. By

eleven, I was frantic. I tried calling the Rand, but of course, no one answered. Everyone, except the night printers, would have gone home by then. Midnight came and went, but still no sign of the man. At this point, I was losing it. My panic and anxiety levels were skyrocketing.

I fell asleep on the sofa, waiting for him. When I woke, the sun was up, and I rushed to the bedroom, thinking that I'd slept too deep and not heard him come in during the night. But there was no sign of him in there, and the bed hadn't been slept in. Then my panic turned to anger. Where the hell was this man? Surely, he hadn't spent the whole night celebrating his birthday with his buddies. Did he prefer their company over mine? Well, in that case, he could stay exactly where he was. I wasn't going to waste my time and go looking for him. The selfish bastard! At some point, he'll have to come home, of course. And I'll give him the cold shoulder for ruining my night and putting me through all this angst. Then, of course, he'll try to charm his way back into my good graces, but I'm going to show him where he can stick his apologies and kisses. This time he's gone too far!

How could he do this to me? Things have been going so good between us. Last weekend he took me to the cinema to see *Lady Sings the Blues*. I'd been dying to see the film since they lifted the ban on it. Diana Ross's portrayal of Billie Holiday was lekker. Afterwards, we stopped at Wandie's to join his friends for a drink. Nkosi had brought his new girlfriend, Nonoza, along. She and I hit it off. We got to talking over a bottle of wine and found out we had a few things in common – like we were both once students at Naledi High, though at different times, and our parents were from the same province.

Whilst getting to know each other, my new friend and I downed a substantial amount of Wandie's house special one. I lost count of the number of glasses after the fifth or sixth. By the time we left, we were both three sheets to the wind. I don't recall the journey home, but I must have dozed off cause Bafana had to me inside the house. The rest of the night is a blank. The next thing I recall is waking up on the sofa with a splitting headache, Bafana's body squeezed against me, both of us naked, and our clothes sprawled all over the floor? Did we do anything after we entered the house? The evidence said yes, but I honestly don't remember.

Since I moved in, we've been careful and always use the withdrawal method, by which Zola swears. But I have no idea if we used it that night or if we even made love at all. I didn't want to ask Bafana as that would confirm just how smashed I was.

Anyway, I hope that he wasn't as sloshed. I prayed that If anything did happen, he was sensible enough to use the method. Usually, when I'm with it, I can control the situation. I can always feel when he's about to come cause he has this way of hunching his shoulders and letting out a weird, animal-sounding groan before going into a shiver like he's suffering an epileptic fit. This is usually the cue for me to push him off me if he hasn't pulled out himself. So far, it's worked. That's why I'm still bump-free. And I'm planning to keep it that way. There's no way I'm flushing my dreams down the toilet for a few seconds of pleasure. Not a chance, *mngane*.

Yesterday when I came back from the butchers, MaNgwenya was sitting in her front veranda, fanning her face with a newspaper and reading her bible. I slowly pushed the gate open, praying to make it inside the house without arousing her attention. I wasn't in the mood to be cornered into a conversation or undergo the usual third degree. But, alas, God was not listening. As soon as she heard the squeal of the gate, MaNgwenya's head quickly shot up.

'*Sayibonani, Mama,*' I called as I rushed towards the front door whilst trying to retrieve the house key from the back pocket of my bell-bottoms.

'*Uvelaphi?*' As usual, MaNgwenya answered my greeting with a question.

'*Ngivela ezitolo,*' I answered as I unlocked the door.

'*Ngempela? Awuhambhanga esikoleni namuhla?*'

'*Cha, angihambanga,*' I answered. '*Libelemini emnandi, Mama,*' I called out politely as I fumbled with the door, then swiftly stepped inside before I was obliged to explain why I had not been to university or '*esikolo*' as MaNgwenya likes to call it. I had kicked off my sandals, changed into a comfortable dress, put the oxtail on the stove when knock I heard a loud knock on the back door. I opened it, only to find myself staring at MaNgwenya's massive chest. As before, she was fanning her face with the newspaper. She'd never visited me before, so I was surprised and suspicious of her motive.

'*Konke kulungile, ntombi?*' She asked, in an overly friendly tone that only made me warier.

'*Ja,*' I replied, hoping she'd take the hint from my clipped answer and bugger off. But if she caught the message, MaNgwenya chose to ignore it. Before I knew it, she'd brushed past me and entered the kitchen.

'*Upheke ini?*' She inquired as she sniffed the air and headed to the stove.

'*Ngipheka i oxtail,*' I answered needlessly as she'd already lifted the lid off the pot and seen what I was cooking. I couldn't believe the nerve of it! This presumptuous woman needs to be put in her place, but I wasn't about to be the one to do the honours. Didn't have the nerve to. All I could do was curse her under thought and my breath and try to think of a rouse to get her out of my hair.

'Why *ungayanga esikolo?*' MaNgwenya interrogated as she turned away from the stove and focussed her attention back to me. I was speechless. Was the woman serious? Surely, she hadn't come over to find out why I had not gone to 'school.' Was my busybody neighbour keeping tabs on me? Since when had my comings and goings become her concern?

'Get lost!' I wanted to scream. 'And keep your nose out of my business!' But, of course, I didn't. Instead, I found myself explaining to her that today was Bafana's birthday, so I had skipped *isikolo* to prepare a special meal for him. I hoped this would be enough to satisfy her curiosity, and she would piss off and leave me alone. But I wouldn't be so lucky. Instead of making herself scarce, MaNgwenya pulled a chair and made herself comfortable.

'*Ukube ungibuzile bengizokufundisa ukupheka i oxtail.*'

Trying not to feel offended, I opened my mouth to ask what she thought was wrong with how I was cooking it, but as soon as I opened my mouth, I felt bile rise in my throat. Then suddenly I was dizzy. My head felt like it was spinning. Dazed, I scrambled to the bathroom and just about made it before a flood of amber puke came spewing out of my mouth. I was on my knees, retching into the toilet bowl for what seemed like an eternity. I tried several times to get up, but I'd feel another wave of nausea and the vomiting would start all over again each time. At some point, I thought it would never end - that I'd spew up my insides until there was nothing left, and I'd be found dead with my head inside the porcelain. I was sweating with panic, my heart pounding fast as though I'd just run a marathon. And before I knew it, I was bawling my eyes out. I was crying like a baby, feeling sorry for myself, when a voice jolted me back to reality. '*Ukhulwele wena, angithi?*'

Mangwenya, I'd forgotten all about her. How long had she been standing there watching me? Finally, I lifted my head to face her and managed to whack my forehead against the toilet bowl rim.

'*Ini?*' I cried as I rubbed the swelling bump on my brow.



'*Ngithe, ukhulelwe wena, angithi?*' MaNgwenya, reiterated, enunciating each word slowly as if speaking to a retard. This time, though, the sentence sounded more like a statement than anything.

'What? Why would you ask me a question like that?' I gave her a baffled look, and she folded her arms on her chest and eyeballed me back. 'Who do you think you're fooling, *ntombi?*'

'I have no idea what you are ....' I started, but she cut me off.

'When is the last time you bled?'

## 8

### BAFANA

Business at Sis Bree's is usually at a standstill around this time of the day. So, when he strolls into the shebeen, Banana is surprised to hear the familiar loud, drunken voices of cronies belting out Miriam Makeba's *Pata Pata*, playing in the background. Nkosi, Dumo, and Musa gathered around an upturned crate littered with beer bottles and empty ashtrays in their usual corner. It's mid-afternoon. These three should still be at work. Bafana orders a plate of pap and grilled meat from Sis MaBree then saunters over to the group.

'What's going on? You guys all voted to skive off work today?' he jibes as he plants himself on an empty beer crate next to Nkosi.

'*Cha, ndoda*, it's lunchtime.' We are just chowing our graze.' Dumo is quick to quip back, causing the other men to cable.

'Lunchtime, my arse! Your lunch was over two hours ago. And since when does your graze come in liquid form?' Bafana challenges him.

'Since his wife got tired of him and left his broke arse,' Nkosi jests, and the men convulse with laughter.

Dumo ignores the jibe and turns his attention back to Bafana. 'Since when did you become my baas?' But before Bafana can respond, Sis MaBree approaches their table with a plate of food a bowl of water on a tray. As he washes his hands in the bowl, Bafana turns his attention back to Nkosi.

'So, that's Dumo's excuse. *Wena ke, ndoda?* What's yours?'

'Me? I don't need one. Do you forget that my name is Nkosi? Need I remind you of the meaning of my name, my friend.'

'No need, king.'

'Yes, and since when does a king need permission or an excuse to do what he wants?'

'Yebo, chief, *ngiyakuthola, mfowethu!* Bafana tells him. 'Mara, keep up the clowning, and very soon, you'll be jobless king, my friend.'

'*Hayi, suka la!* Don't jealous me, *mfo!* Nkosi quips back, patting his imaginary crown. His mind is still on Mr Ngugi, whom he spent the best part of the afternoon trying to track down.

When he finishes eating, Bafana orders a round of pints for himself and his friends. Within the next hour, he downs three more Castle beers, but he is not feeling the buzz at all. Instead, his mind wanders back to his encounter with Mr Ngugi.

After leaving Phefani Junior High, Bafana had walked back home and made a phone call to the fire brigade. Then he jumped into his car and drove to Mr Ngugi's house in Meadowlands, where he had no luck finding the headmaster. It wasn't until an hour later, after he'd tried four or five shebeens, that he finally tracked down the elusive headmaster. He'd given up the search and was heading back home when he decided to stop at Wandie's for lunch. He hadn't eaten breakfast, and his head was still feeling a bit heavy from all the alcohol he'd downed the night before. He hoped an order of pap and biltong would cure the lingering *bhab'laz*.

Wandie was perched on his favourite stool near the entrance, reading a newspaper. As usual, he got up and greeted him with a hug and a slap on the shoulder. Wandie had known him since Bafana was a little boy and always treated him like a son. His father had been a loyal patron of Wandie's, and when they were young, he'd allow Banana and his brother, Roy, to tag along when he came to the shebeen to enjoy his Saturday afternoon drink. Wandie would hand each boy a pack of Simba crisps and whatever soft drink he had chilling in the fridge before shooping them away. And while their old man was inside enjoying his pints and debating politics with other punters, Bafana and Roy would while away the time playing with neighbourhood kids. There was always a football game going on down the street.

'Back so early. What's going on? Didn't you have enough last night? So, you decided to skip work and come back for more?' Wandie jibed as he sat back on his stool.

'*Cha*, Baba Wandie. I am working,' Bafana told him.

'*Ngempela?* What's your assignment today? To spy on old Wandie and put him out of business.'

'I wish, Baba! That would be easier than this assignment I have. *Ngine bhab'alz* and I've spent all morning looking for this elusive man, the headmaster of Phefani Junior High. I'm supposed to be interviewing him. *Mara* I don't know if you heard, last week the kids put a thorough beating on the man...'

'*Eh, eh...*' Wandie looked down at his paper and cleared his throat.

'*Ini* Baba?'

'The man you're looking for is sitting right over there, so I'd lower my voice if I were you,' he said, gesturing with his head. Bafana followed the gesture saw a sorry-looking man sitting alone at a corner table in the dimly lit bar and playing around with his empty pint glass. The old headmaster looked uncomfortable and out of place in his brown suit and bright red tie. Bafana approached him.

'*Sawubona*, Baba Ngugi?' He said, offering his hand to the old headmaster. 'Can I get you another pint, sir? It would be my pleasure,' he added, thinking it would be in his best interest to ingratiate himself with the old headmaster.

'*Lokhu kungaba kuhle*. Thank you, young man,' Mr Ngugi's eyes lit up, and he grinned, revealing tiny but even yellow teeth. Bafana wondered when the headmaster had last looked in the mirror. The overgrown stub on his chin and dishevelled hair clashed miserably with his formal attire. 'And what is your name, young man?'

'Bafa...Gerald Mkwanzani,' Bafana told him but could see his name didn't register anything with the old boy, so he added, 'from the Rand Daily Mail.'

'The Rand Daily Mail. *Ja, mani!* What do you know, I completely forgot about that!'

Mr Ngugi waved his hand flippantly and gave out a weak laugh. Bafana knew he was lying. He could tell the man never intended to meet him for an interview or go anywhere near that school. He'd probably agreed to the interview to get Sam off his back. Bafana suspected that the headmaster had been dressing like this and leaving home early every morning for the past two weeks to fool his wife into believing he

was going to work as expected. But he decided to ignore the lie and called out to Thembi, the young waitress/cook, and ordered two Castes. He requested a plate of pap with roast meat and greens for himself and a pint of Castle for Mr Ngugi. He waited for Thembi to turn away, then said, 'Mr. Ngugi. I have been to school. Sir, are you aware of what happened at the school today?'

'No idea,' Mr Ngugi shrugged indifferently.

'No, I don't suppose you do. I hear you've not been back to the school since the incident with the students. Anyway, I went there to interview you, as per your arrangement with my boss. And I found the school on fire.'

Bafana waited for the old headmaster's reaction, but his attention was on Thembi, Wandie's cook/waitress, who was returning with the drinks. Only after Mr Ngugi had taken a third sip did his eyes come back to meet Bafana's.

'What do you mean you found it on fire? *Ukhulumani wena mfana?* What are you talking about?' He asked, his tone remaining neutral. Bafana wondered about the man's demeanour. Had he always been this indifferent, or was this apathy a result of the beating he'd taken?

'I'm talking about your kids who locked up four policemen in a classroom and set it on fire.'

Ngugi shrugged again, and this time Bafana thought he detected a smirk on his face. 'Why am I not surprised? Those children are not humans. They are animals. *Bayizinja nje. Imgodoyi ngempela!* I'm sure you've heard what they did to me. Do you want to see it?' Without waiting for an answer, Mr Ngugi had disrobed his suit jacket, tie, and shirt. Bafana saw the lesions on the chest, neck, and shoulders. Then the headmaster stood up and turned around to display more lacerations on his back. The wounds looked as fresh as if they had happened yesterday. 'They tried to kill me, those baboons. Kicked me like I was a dog. And when I tried to run, they chased, throwing rocks at me.'

'Why? Why did they turn on you, Mr Ngugi?' Bafana thought now was as good a time as any to pose the question. 'You've been a good headmaster to them for seven years, and.'

'Eight,' Mr Ngugi corrected him and took another sip of his pint. 'I gave eight years of my life to those ungrateful shitheads, and this is the thanks I get! You go back there and ask them why. I told them that to keep things peaceful and avoid our school being closed down, the teachers must follow the new law and teach in

Afrikaans. And for that, I get accused of being a traitor and siding with the government. Can you believe that?' Mr Ngugi shook his head and seemed to be waiting for Bafana to express his disbelief.

'But sir, all the secondary schools and junior highs are being forced to follow this order. Of course, the children are not happy about this, and many have decided to boycott classes. However, none of them so far have turned on their headmasters. So, I'm thinking maybe something else is going on at your school....'

'Wait a minute. Wait one goddam minute! Are you trying to accuse me of something?' Mr Ngugi interrupted. '*Usho ukuthini ngalokhu?* What do you mean by that, boy?'

Boy? You wait one goddam minute, you, fat bastard. Bafana wanted to say. Who the hell are you calling 'boy? Do I look like one of your pupils? He was beginning to loathe the arrogant bastard and understand why the kids, or anyone, would want to thrash his pompous arse.

'I'm not accusing you of anything, sir. I just want to get to the bottom of....'

'Oh, I think you are. And if you expect me to sit here and listen to your allegations, you'd better buy me another round,' the old geezer declared. Before Bafana could respond, Mr Ngugi shouted out for Thembi to come and take the order. Bafana was becoming exasperated. Although he wanted to go back with a story for Sam, he could tell that getting the truth from this irritating fart would be like pulling teeth. Fortunately, his food was ready. He got up and followed Thembi to the kitchen to wash his hands. He came back in time to catch the grumpy git with his dirty paws in his pap. Bafana sighed. Caught red-handed, the headmaster had tried to laugh it off, choking on the biltong as he quickly tried to swallow the biltong.

'Mr. Ngugi?' Bafana said, without bothering to sit back down. 'I just have one more question.' He had plenty more, but he wasn't about to waste another ten minutes on this man. 'Are you planning to go back to school anytime soon?'

'Hey, *wena mfana!* Do I look like a mad man to you?' Mr Ngugi had looked him square in the eye. *Yebo, empeleni, ubukeka njengomhlanya*, Bafana wanted to say but felt he'd already wasted enough breath on this idiot. He paid his bill and bade Wandie farewell. Then, instead of returning to the office like he was supposed to, he decided to go home and sleep off his *bhab'lazi*. He'd woken up almost hours later, feeling even more famished. He could have returned to the Rand and worked for an

hour or two, but he just didn't feel like tinkering with the typewriter. Not on his birthday.

Bafana nurses his fourth beer, half-listening to his companions, who are now roaring drunk and bickering over who won the world match some years ago. When he's had enough, he shouts, 'Hey, *majita*. You haven't forgotten about the meeting at Regina Mundi tomorrow night?'

However, before anyone can answer him, the door is kicked open, and three policemen in camouflage attire and army boots burst in. All four men jumped up swiftly, but it is too late for any of them to make it to the back door. In just a few minutes, everyone, including Sis MaBree and a handful of other unfortunate punters, 'are being loaded roughly shoved into the kwela-kwela waiting outside parked outside the shebeen. As the caterpillar-shaped van pulls away, Bafana thinks about Nandi, wondering if he'll make it back home in time for his birthday surprise.

## 9

### NANDI

- Diary Entry -

February 13, 1976

It's been two days. Two whole days and three sleepless nights and still no sign of Bafana. Not even a call! Then this morning, while I was drawing the curtains in the sitting room, there was a loud knock on the back door. I rushed to the kitchen, almost tripping on the coffee table.

'*Yimi uNonoza*,' a voice called from the other side of the door. 'Open the door, please.'

I hadn't seen Nkosi's girlfriend since we met at Wandie's. So, I couldn't imagine what she was doing here.

'*Shesha uvula*,' she urged as I fumbled to unlock the door.

'What's the matter, Nonoza?' I asked.

'Haven't you heard?' She said, tumbling into the kitchen. Her hair and clothes were messy as if she'd been in a fight. 'They've gone mad. Mad, I tell you....'

'Calm down,' I said, ushering her to the sitting room. 'Who? Who are you talking about?'

*'Eish, labo bantu!* I almost got killed, *mngane!*"

*'Ini?* I cried. *'Unamanga wena?'* I wasn't sure whether Nonoza was serious or just pulling my name.

*'Ngempela!* She said dramatically. 'You haven't heard about the bus strike? They're stoning buses, beating up anyone who tries to get on them!'

'On, the strike! *Bengikhohliwe.*' I had forgotten entirely about the PUTCO planned bus strike. The drivers have been campaigning for more pay for the longest and getting no reaction from the bus company. The talk around town was that if the company didn't meet their demands by February 12, the drivers would strike. The drivers have a band of supporters, and they are not afraid to do whatever it takes to make sure the strike goes on - including harming anybody who tries to sabotage the strike. It's a given. It's happened before. So, I didn't understand why Nonoza was so upset.

'It's ignorance! *Yi kaka ngempela!* They stopped the bus I was on and tried to force us out. Some of us refused. We told them *thina abanye* we don't have the luxury of striking, we have families to feed, and they say. 'Alright, manini. Stay there!' And, so, *thina* there we are, thinking we've talked some sense into the riff roughs. Then the next thing we know, the bus is shaking, and we are tilted sideways like there's a sudden hurricane. We look outside and see those ignorant people — about twenty or thirty of them — have surrounded the bus and attempting to overturn it! *Heyi wena, mngane,* you should see how fast we scrambled out that bus!' Nonoza cried. *'Uyazi, mngane,* I have never been so scared in my life!'

'I can imagine *mngane!* *Ngiyakuzwa,*' I tried to console her. *'Ngikwenzele itiye?'*

*'Yebo, ngiyabonga.* Tea would be nice, *mngane.*'

I went to the kitchen to prepare her the tea.

*'Khonapha,* I was on my way to an interview, *uyazi.*' Nonoza shouted from the sitting room. 'I couldn't get another bus, of course. So, I walked all the way here. More than an hour, I've been walking, my friend!'

I sympathised with her but wondered why she'd chosen to come here when she could have simply returned home.

'Uphi uBafana?' She asked when I returned with a tray of tea and biscuits.

'Angazi,' I told her as I pulled the coffee table closer to her and laid the tray on it.

'Utshoni? What do you mean you don't know?'

Before I could explain, the phone rang in the kitchen. I bolted to it, almost knocking down Nonoza's tea.

'Uphi uBafana?' A voice said, reiterating Nonoza's question. It was Dumo - the rude friend who never bothered with greetings whenever he called looking for Bafana.

'Akekho!' I answered, just as curtly.

'Ah, so he's not back yet....'

'Back from where?'

'Never mind,' Dumo said.

'Lalela, Dumo. Bafana hasn't been home for three days, and I've been worried sick. So, if you know where he is, *ngitshela ngiyakucela*. Please tell me,' I said quickly before he had the chance to hang up. I hated how desperate my voice sounded.

'The last time I saw him, he was headed for that party.' Dumo said. 'With Besta,' he added before I could ask him what party he meant.

'Ini? With whom? Besta?' I was sure I'd heard wrong. 'Did you say Besta? *Mara Dumo*, is this a joke? Cause if it is, I'm not laughing...' But before I could finish my sentence, Dumo hung up.

'Besta. Besta, where have I heard that name before?' Nonoza's question startled me. I hadn't heard her follow me into the kitchen.

'Oh, now, I remember! She's the psycho who went nutty when Bafana dumped her.' Nonoza then went on to ramble about all the rumours she'd heard concerning this Besta and her crazy antics - how she'd stalked Bafana and his friends, put a brick through his car windshield, but I'd stopped listening. My mind was on Bafana. I was livid and thinking about all the things I wanted to say to him when he finally decided to return home. After the trauma that Besta put me through, how could he do this?

'UNkosi *wathi* she's a piece of work, that one. A raving loony!' Nonoza chuckled at her joke. 'I heard she once tried to set some chick on fire.'

'Nonoza, that chick was me,' I said.



'Yebo?' Nonoza stared at me open-mouthed as if I'd just revealed something mind-blowing. But I didn't buy the performance. I suspected she'd known all along. 'I didn't know. *Uxolo, mngane.*' She gave a half-hearted apology and tried to put her arm around me, but I shrugged her off.

'There's a lot you don't know, Nonoza,' I wanted to tell her but decided it wasn't worth the bother. I was suddenly feeling drained and dizzy.

'Nonoza, *uxolo*, but I need to go lie down for a bit.'

'Are you alright, *mngane?*' I heard her anxious voice call as I groggily staggered to the bedroom, praying that I'd get there before in time.

## 10

### BAFANA

So, this was it. Dumo's genius plan to get back at him at last, Bafana mused. Even though he was still livid, Bafana thought he had to give it to the guy. He had finally got the chance to kick him where it hurt. And it did hurt. Boy, did it hurt! And to think that he had handed the man the opportunity. How ironic, he thought. How foolish he'd been. Dumo must be smiling like a cat, wherever he was. 'it had taken a while, but he took the opportunity when it came his way' and had finally won the long-waged war.

After an hour of pleading with him, Sam had finally relented to bailing him out of jail. He'd sent Ndo in the Rand Daily Mail van to get him, and as soon as he saw his friend, Bafana commanded him to drive to MaBree's. Ndo was reluctant at first. He didn't want to get in trouble with Sam, who'd instructed him to come straight back to the office. But he was soon won over by the promise of a free pint. They settled in the van and started chewing the fat, talking about the old days when shebeens had been their primary source for stories, how they would spend hours there listening to punters tell different drunken versions of the same incident. Then Ndo was telling him about the bus strike and the conflict it was causing in the townships. He related

that the picketers had turned violent and injured numerous drivers because they refused to join the strike.

'*Ngiyakutshela mfo!* I've never seen anything like this,' Ndo shook his head in disbelief. 'Never! There's been riots, *mfo*, rampage followed by bloodshed. *Ayi, ndoda, kuyafiwa!* Wait till you see the damage, *mfo.*'

Bafana didn't have to wait long. As soon as they entered Braamfontein, he noticed how eerily quiet the streets were. And, as the van rolled into Newtown, he began to see what Ndo meant. Broken glass from shattered shop windows littered the pavements and clear signs that looting had taken place. Bafana was outraged.

'Man, what the heck?' He cried out. 'What the bloody hell do these innocent business owners have to do with the bus strike? They are not the ones stiffing the drivers, for Christ's sake! So why not take it out on PUTCO, the real culprits.' He thought about his own family's businesses – the petrol stations and supermarkets scattered in various townships and wondered how they were being affected. Were they still standing, and would they survive the storm? What about his mother and the dozen or so employees?

'This is fucking madness, man!' He said, shaking his head.

'I know,' Ndo agreed. 'I don't understand my people sometimes.'

As they entered Johannesburg town, Ndo slowed down the van, and Bafana, still shaking his head in disbelief, entirely took in the wanton vandalism.

'So, who did baas man put on this one,' he finally asked as they approached the shebeen. 'Who's been covering it?'

Ndo shrugged and said, 'I guess he's been waiting for you.'

When they arrived at the Sis MaBree's, Bafana was relieved to see that his car was still intact and sitting in the same spot he'd left it. Undoubtedly, the queen had paid some neighbourhood kid to keep an eye on it. Although he still yearned for a cold pint, the need for it no longer felt urgent. At that very moment, what was pressing was the overwhelming compulsion to jump in the car and race home. He longed to see Nandi - needed the assurance that she was still there, in the house on Vilikazi Street, waiting for him. But Bafana knew very well that he couldn't just abandon Ndodana her when he was the one who'd implored the man to bring him here.

The shebeen was empty, as he'd expected it to be. They settled down on their usual crates, and Ndo started filling him in on what else he'd missed in the last three days.

'The meeting went ahead without you, *mfo*. I told the guys that we should postpone - wait for you to get out, but no one wanted to listen...'

'It's alright, man. I wouldn't have wanted it cancelled because of me.' 'Well, it turned out to be a waste of time anyway. Those kids couldn't agree on anything. They locked horns for two hours. It seems the students from Isaacson Morris have chosen a couple of leaders to represent them.'

Just then, Ntombi, Sis MaBree's shy niece, approached with their pints on a tray. Bafana waited for her to set the tray before them and dash away before inquiring.

'Who?'

'*Inĩ?*'

'You said the students from Issacs picked out their representatives.'

'*Ja*. A boy named Mbonisi Hadebe and a girl by the name of Dudu or Gugu...'

'Siboniso,' Bafana mumbled as he reached, absentmindedly, for his beer.

'Siboniso Hadebe.'

'*Inĩ?*'

'The kid from Isaacson Morris - his name is Siboniso Hadebe, not Mbonisi.'

'*Ja*. Him. Do you know him?' Ndo also picked up his pint and brought it to his lips.

'You could say that. I think I went out with the older sister back when we were at Phefeni Junior High.'

'You think, *mfo?*' Ndo sneered. 'Oh, that's right. There were too many. Of course, you can't be expected to remember every one of them.'

Bafana ignored the gibe and said. "I could be wrong, mind, but the surname is the same. Anyway, I'm happy the kids selected their representatives. It shows initiative on their part. Also takes the pressure off the SASM.'

'*Ja, ngiyakuthola, mfo*' Ndodana assented. 'Besides, it's their cause, not ours.'

'Right. Our role is to offer support.'

'I'll drink to that, *mfowethu*,' Ndodana declared and raised his pint in a toast. After the salutation, Bafana gulped down his beer, got up, and announced that he had to dash home.

'What? You are not coming to the office with me?' Ndodana sounded genuinely baffled. Bafana feigned an expression of disgust and said, 'Looking like this? Honestly, Ndo?'

'But...but...Sam said...' Ndodana stuttered, but Bafana had already exited the drinking house.

When he arrived home, the back door was open, which gave Bafana hope that she was still there. But, instead, he found her in the bedroom, bent over a suitcase on the bed. Quietly, he snuck behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist. Startled, she jumped and yelped.

'It's only me,' he laughed and spun her around. The look on her face was not the one he was hoping to see.

'What are you doing?' He said, even though now he could see what she was doing. It wasn't the coldness in her eyes but her overall appearance. He was momentarily taken aback by the dark circles underneath her anxious eyes, which contrasted with her caramel complexion. Her hair, usually pulled back into a thick bun on the top of her head, was loose and wild around her face, making her look much younger than her twenty years. And when their eyes met for that brief, tense moment, there was no denying the hate in them. He took another step towards her, and she took one back. She put up an arm like she was controlling traffic and, through clenched teeth, warned him, 'Don't you dare come near me. Touch me, and I swear to God, I will scream.'

'Nandi...baby, what's the matter? What's wrong, baby?' He tried advancing towards her again, and, once more, she retreated, almost bumping into the wall behind her. 'I'm serious, man. Stay away from me or....'

'Alright, alright. I won't touch you. I'm not going to touch you. But for God's sake, tell me what the hell is going on here before I start screaming? *Kwenzakalani lapha?*'

'*Kwenzakalani?* Are you asking me that? Are you serious, man? Are you for real?' she screamed back as she brushed past him, shaking her head and mumbling, 'You have the nerve Bafana Mkwanzani. You sure do. I'll give that to you.' And, without another word, she resumed her packing. He sat down on the edge of the bed and watched her for a moment, feeling his heart sink with every garment she hurled into the suitcase.

Finally, he said, 'Alright. I get that you're pissed right now. And I don't blame you. But can you at least hear me out? I mean, don't you want to what happened?'

'Oh, I know what happened. What I don't get is why you asked me to move in with you? It's obvious you still want Besta, so why did you have to involve me?'

'Besta?' Bafana was baffled. '*S'thandwa sami*, what are you talking about?'

Nandi slammed the suitcase and dragged it out of the room. He swiftly rushed after her.

'Nandi, what are you talking about?' he asked again, and when she didn't answer, he grabbed her, swung her around, grabbing her by the arm, forcing her to face him.

For a moment, Bafana saw what he thought was fear in her eyes, so he loosened his grip and lowered his voice.

'Can we please sit down and talk? *Ngiyakucela, s'thandwa.*'

'What's there to talk about, Bafana? You made your choice.' She said in a voice that sounded far away and sad. 'Now, let go of me, please.'

He let go of her arm but continued to plead with her. 'Nandi, I swear to God I don't know what you are talking about.'

'Then ask your friend, Dumo,' she said and started to walk away again.

'Ask Dumo? So Dumo did call you?'

'He did, alright.'

'So, then what's the problem, *s'thandwa*? Dumo must have explained to you what happened. Didn't he tell you where I was?'

'Oh, yes, indeed, he did. So, was that how you planned it? To have one of your buddies break it down for me. Nice one, Bafana!'

'*S'thandwa*, you're confusing me...Please tell me what exactly Dumo...' he tried to appeal to her, but she raised her hand and cut him off.

'Bafana, stop! Enough is enough. *Mina nawe kuphelile*. We're done. Finished! So, I'd appreciate it if you stopped calling me *s'thandwa*.'

'No, Nandi, don't say that, please. *Ngiyakucela*. ... you can't just throw away what we have...'

'Had...' she corrected him. 'And, for the record, I'm not the one who threw it away.'

'You're not fair, you know. You won't even let me tell my side of the story...'  
Bafana whined, but Nandi remained unmoved. She'd made up her mind. He had to

act fast if he was going to stop her. Her hand was already on the doorknob, turning it. In a second, she'd be gone. History! He had no time to waste. Briskly, Bafana made a move to seize the suitcase. But he had underestimated her strength. Disarming her of that luggage would not be as straightforward as he'd hoped. They went to war like two dogs fighting over a bone. At one point, she tried to bite his hand, and when he slapped her, she kneed him in the groin. So engrossed in their battle were they, they failed to hear the banging on the back door. It took them a good while to notice that someone else had entered the house. And when they finally did, they were both so dumbfounded they simultaneously let go of the case. It was Nandi who recovered first and spoke.

'Bheki. What are you doing here?'

Bheki did not answer. He appeared to have been rendered speechless by the perverse scene he'd unwittingly walked into. For a long moment, the brother and sister faced each other dumbly. Then, finally, Bafana seized the opportunity and to reclaim the suitcase. He'd almost made it back to the bedroom when he heard her footsteps behind him.

'Bafana! Give me back my bloody suitcase.' Nandi screamed. 'Now, before I scream,' she threatened as if she was not already doing that. He ignored her, tossed the suitcase on top of the wardrobe, and then waited behind the door. As soon as she entered, he kicked the door shut and locked the bedroom door.

'Where is it?' Her eyes darted around the room. 'Bafana, I'm not playing...' Then she looked up and spotted it. Momentarily she was on the bed, on her tiptoes, her arms to reach for the bag. But before she was able to, he knocked her off her feet, and she fell backwards on the bed. Then he was on top of her, and she was screeching louder than before. He kissed her, hoping to muffle her screams. But he'd miscalculated. He'd made a painful blunder. By the time he felt her teeth bear through his tongue, it was too late. He slapped her, but that only made her bite deeper. He smacked her again, hard this time. Finally, she let go.

'What the fuck! Why are you being such bitch?' He yelled as he staggered to the bathroom.

He spat in the sink and was surprised to see no blood rush out of his mouth. Then looked in the mirror and was alarmed by the image staring back at him—the bloodshot eyes and bags underneath, the overgrown beard and matted bushy hair. Good God, was that his reflection? Bafana was stunned - how could he have not

thought about cleaning himself up first before rushing home and begging his woman to stay? He hadn't seriously entertained the idea that he might look and smell like kaka had never even entered his mind. Dammit, no wonder Nandi didn't want him near her.

Under the sink, he searched for and found a new razor. It took him forever to shave, wash his knotted hair, brush his teeth, and shower. When he returned to the bedroom, Nandi was curled up in a ball on the corner of the bed. She did not stir when he closed the door and turned the key. Nor did she respond when he called her name. Bafana assumed she was giving him the cold shoulder until he looked down at her tear-stained face and saw that she had dozed off - cried herself to sleep. He bent down and kissed her brow, then pulled a blanket and covered her. He found a pair of black jeans and a white t-shirt and a blazer in the wardrobe, which she'd picked out for him the last time they went shopping.

Satisfied with his fresh, clean look, Bafana strode to the kitchen, where he discovered Bheki standing in front of the open fridge and stuffing his face with leftover food.

'Usharp?' Bafana asked, startling the boy and causing him to chock.

'Take it easy,' he said and repeatedly slapped him in the back until Bheki coughed up a chicken bone. Then, Bafana handed him a cup of water and asked him if he wanted to go for a drive. Bheki burped then asked where his sister was.

'Sleeping. Finally,' Bafana told him.

'Are you sure?'

'Go and see for yourself.'

Bafana watched the boy stroll down the corridor and peek into the bedroom.

'So? Are you satisfied? Now, you coming with me or not?'

'Ja,' Bheki nodded. 'I'm coming,' he mouthed and gently closed the bedroom door. They wandered outside without another word to each other. Only they'd been driving for about ten minutes, did Bheki ask, 'so what was that all you about?'

Bafana opened his mouth but then changed his mind. There was too much explaining to do, and he didn't feel like it right now. Maybe later.

What was it?' Bheki persisted.

'Long story and you're too young to understand. Anyway, tell me the truth. How did you get here?' He said, both to divert the boy from the topic and take his mind off it. 'Does your mother know about the bus strike – the riots and all?'

'Are you kidding me?' Bheki gave him a sceptical look. '*Wonke umuntu*. Who doesn't know about the bus strike and the riots? Even in Rhodesia, Swaziland, and Botswana, they know.'

'Okay, that was a dumb question,' Bafana conceded as he continued to back out of the driveway. 'What I'm trying to understand is why your mother sent you out here when she knows all this is going on? From what I hear, people have been injured and....'

'From what you hear?' Bheki cut in. 'Man, aren't you the guy who writes the news? Aren't you supposed to be in the know?'

'Okay, enough with the sarcasm already. Tell me why you came. And how did you get here?'

'Gogo is dying,' Bheki delivered the words in a flat, calm, matter-of-fact voice, which unsettled Bafana. It was as if the boy was talking about someone else's grandmother.

'I'm very sorry...' he began, but Bheki cut him off.

'She's been asking to see Nandi. So that's why Mama sent me here to get her. The only problem is that Nandi forgot to tell us that she's left university and is shacking up with you now. So, thanks to her, I've spent all fucking day walking to....'

'Hey. '*Lalela, mfana*,' warned him. 'I know you've had a rough day, but you can't use that kind of language. You're bloody twelve years old for crying out loud!'

'I'll use any language I....' Bheki started to say, but Bafana abruptly cut him short. 'Not in my bloody car, you won't!' The castigation momentarily silenced the boy. Soon they were in Meadowlands, and Bafana was pulling up in front of a house that still had its lights on.

'Stay here,' he commanded as he got out of the car. He approached a rickety gate, kicked it open, and crossed the yard. As he neared the front door, he could hear mbaqanga music blaring inside the house. He had the urge to put his foot through the front door - make a grand entrance but, somehow, managed to restrain himself, pause and collected himself.

The room, just like a typical shebeen, was dimly lit and cloudy with cigarette smoke. It was late, but there was still a decent number of punters sitting in small groups and nursing their pints. No one noticed him as he entered. Bafana surveyed the room until he spotted the man he was after.

'Dumo!' he yelled over the loud music.



'Mfo! What...when did you get out?' His voice was shaky as he tried to force a smile onto his face.

'Dumo, who is this?' the woman demanded, rising and straightening her skirt. She wore heavy make-up, but even her youthful attire failed to disguise the fact that she was no spring chicken. She had to be at least twice Dumo's age.

'Who is he? *Ngubani lo?*' Then turning her focus on Bafana, she put on a fake smile and said, '*Singakunceda ngani bhuthi?*' He ignored her.

'Sit down. *Hlala phansi wena,*' Dumo instructed her gruffly. 'Don't get your blood pressure up. He's just an old buddy of mine.' Then addressing Bafana, he said, '*Ey, mfo. Can I get you a pint? Castle or Lion? Tonight, they have both....*'

But Bafana didn't let him finish. Without saying a word, he grabbed his old friend by the collar and lifted him off his crate. The first punch landed squarely on his face, and Dumo was sent reeling backwards. He fell like a weightless sack against one of the couples who had stood up to dance. A woman screamed. Others followed suit after Bafana threw the second punch. Dumo tried to get up, but Bafana's third jab sent him back to the floor. He tried again, but Bafana was now straddling him, pinning him to the ground and punching him in the face. Dumo seemed unsure about what to do – protect his face or fight back. When he attempted the latter, his punches barely grazed Bafana's cheekbones. By now, everyone in the shebeen had gathered around the two men. The women were screaming while the men cheered. No one appeared in a hurry to stop the fight. Not even when the shebeen queen came running with a broom, telling, 'Phumani! Out!! You want to kill each other – do it somewhere else! Take it outside. Phandle! I don't need no policemen coming back in here and disturbing my business.'

They paid her no attention- their rapt attention on the two men brawling on the ground. A few minutes went by before Bafana stumbled out of the house towards his car, sweating and breathing heavily. His tightened jaw and flaring nose made it clear he was still raging. Bheki was sitting in the car, looking as if he hadn't moved an inch. But Bafana wasn't fooled by the little bugger's act of innocence. At one point during the fight, he'd seen his raggedy, slight figure in the cheering crowd. But he didn't feel like confronting Bheki right now. So instead, he wiped his brow with the sleeve of his shirt and started the car.

'So?' What was that all about?' Bheki finally said after about five minutes of silence. Bafana sighed. He didn't feel like answering the question but knew the boy

wasn't going to let it go. He'd just keep on badgering him about it until he got his answer. So, reluctantly, Bafana told him, 'That, my friend, was the answer to your earlier question.'

'*Ini?*' Bheki sounded baffled, but Bafana wasn't sure if he was putting on another performance, but he went on to explain anyway. 'You asked me earlier what your sister and I were fighting about?'

'*Ja.*'

'Well, that guy you just watched me fight is the cause of it all.'

'I didn't see any....'

'Quit lying. I know you. Anyway, I suppose news about Sis MaBree's raid hasn't made it to your corner of the township yet?'

'*Cha.*'

'You're lying again.'

'Okay. I heard about it. But what has that got to do with you and Nandi?'

'Well, my friends and I, including that fucking snake, Dumo, were in she shebeen when those bastards raided. It happened so quick none of us had a chance to escape. Anyway, long story short - Dumo was the first one to go free....'

'And? Is that why you were angry with him? You think he set you up?'

'*Lalela.* Don't interrupt if you want to hear the whole story. He didn't set us up. He came and paid his fine, so they let him loose. Before he left, like a fool, I asked the man to call Nandi and let her know what happened....'

'*Mara,* Dumo didn't, right? That's why Nandi was angry with you, and that's why you beat him up just now.' Bheki finished, animated as though he'd finally found the final piece of the big puzzle.

'*Cha.* The son of a bitch called alright. But it's what he said when he called that's caused all this mess between your sister and me. The son of a bitch told Nandi that I was with this other chick.'

'Oh shit. Sorry. But why? Why would he do that? I thought he was your buddy.'

'*Ja.* So, did I. *Mara,* take this as a valuable lesson Bheki. I've learned it the hard way. Never trust a man –no matter how good a friend you think he is. Not when it comes to your woman.'

Now here he is, less than twelve hours later, driving along the same route with his woman sitting in the back, not speaking to him. Bheki sits next to him, but he, too,

is reticent today. Bafana wonders what happened to the self-assured boy from last night, the optimist who was supposed to fix everything and make it all right again? Bafana doubts he even tried to talk to his sister. The silence is not tranquil. It's the kind of ambience associated with hostility and tension. Since their quarrel last night, Bafana hasn't been able to utter another word in his defence. The opportunity hasn't presented itself. They haven't been alone since he returned from confronting Dumo. When he and Bheki got back home, she had again locked him out of the bedroom, and this time he did not have the strength or tenacity to talk her into letting him in. He was spent. The fight in him was gone for now. All he wanted to do was lie down, let his body and mind go to sleep. Luckily for him and Bheki, she'd been considerate enough to leave a couple of blankets and pillows in the sitting room. So, he let the boy have the sofa and made himself a pallet on the floor with one of the blankets.

As he approaches the city, Bafana is horrified to see the little white lie he told last night has become a full-blown reality. The sky is dark with fumes. Alarmed, he watches the harrowing scene in front of him. Smoke billows from burning trucks and buildings; bodies are being dragged out of the Carlton Shopping Centre; people run out of shops, carrying bags, cartons of food, and other items, some of which drop as flying stones hit them.

'Jesus Christ!' The words escape his mouth, and a second later, he hears Bheki echo them.

'O *thixo wami!*' Nandi mutters in the back. They are the first words she's spoken since the start of the journey. Bafana does not realise he's stopped the car in the middle of the road until the vehicle behind him starts honking incessantly. Even then, he is motionless. He feels movement in the back and a kick in his seat and imagines Nandi diving onto the floor, just like Bheki beside him.

'Hamba, Bafana, move man. Drive. What are you waiting for? *Umeleleni? Ufuna sibulawe?* Are you trying to get us to get killed?' Nandi hisses. But he can't move. A Meikles supermarket truck two cars ahead of him has been stopped by a gang of people yelling at the driver to get out. While some men brutally evict the scared driver, others have swung open the truck's back doors and started throwing out yoghurt, condensed milk, cheese, and butter at wolfish and grasping hands.

'Bafana!' He hears Nandi scream again. Without further prompting, he steps on the clutch, puts the car in reverse, and swings the car around, almost hitting two women who are fighting over a bag of *Wisa* mealie-meal. He turns into the first street

he sees. An overturned bus lies in the middle of the road, and next to it, what appears to be blood. Bafana, his heart pounding fiercely, pauses, then drives around it. He passes a beer hall that has been burned down to the ground. Panic-stricken, he presses his right foot on the accelerator hard and does not let go until they are in Naledi township. Only then does Bheki emerge from the floor.

'That was close. *Siphose safa nya, majita!* We were almost dead, man!' When they get to the Indian shop, Bafana is surprised but relieved to see that it is still standing. Unlike most days, no cap-wearing *tsotsis* are loitering about, waiting to harass girls or rob little kids sent on errands by their parents. Then, just as he is about to turn into her street, Nandi suddenly raises her head and tells him to stop the car. Then, before he even comes to a complete stop, she opens the door and starts vomiting. Bafana and Bheki exchange dumbfounded looks. Bafana wonders what in the world she could have in her stomach to throw up. She had turned down the breakfast he'd cooked for her and Bheki this morning, and later when he'd stopped to buy drinks at a petrol station, she'd rejected those too.

When she gets back into the car, he asks her if she is all right, but she ignores him. Bheki looks at him and shrugs. They drive the rest of the way in total silence. Finally, he parks the car, where he typically drops her off at the top of the street.

'Nandi,' he says, turning around to face her as she opens the door and grabs her suitcase next to her. 'Don't walk away, please, darling. *Ngiyakuchela s'thandwa sami....*'

But he doesn't get to finish his sentence because she's already banged the door shut. Meanwhile, beside him, Bheki hasn't moved a bone. Together they sit in silence and watch her struggle down the dusty path with the suitcase. Finally, Bheki finds his voice and is again acting the part of the buoyant old pal.

'Eish man,' he says, his hand moving to pat Bafana's on the steering wheel. 'Don't worry. I'll talk to her. *Ngizakhuluma laye engaphola.* I'll explain how she got it all wrong. Once she's cooled down, she'll understand. I'll make her understand. This is not the end of it, *mfo.* You'll see.' Bheki reassures him in a voice that usually Bafana would find condescending.

## BOOK TWO

## NANDI

- Diary Entry -

March 30th, 1976

So, it's been confirmed. My life is officially over. Just when I thought things couldn't get any worse. Today, my beloved friend Mpo showed up and forced me to face what I've been avoiding for a whole month. It seems she hadn't heard the news about Gogo's passing until just a few days ago because she hadn't been back to Tembisa in a while. But as soon as she did, Mpo, my ever so thoughtful friend, immediately resolved to find and comfort me. I've been camping on Zola and Mark's sitting room floor since I returned to Wits, a week after Gogo's funeral. Yes, my friend and I have made up. I didn't have anywhere else to go since I broke up with Bafana, so I had no choice but to crawl to Zola and Mark's doorstep, with my tail between my legs, as the saying goes. I was ashamed. After all, I was the same person who, a few weeks earlier, had rebuked the girl for taking up residence with her white boyfriend. But what choice did I have? Zola, of course, welcomed me with open arms. Maybe she felt sorry for me because I had just lost someone so close to me. Or perhaps she is just the kind of person who doesn't hold grudges. Who knows what her reasons are for not slamming the door in my face? Anyway, I'm not sure how Mpo found out because nobody else, but Mark and Zola knew my whereabouts.

I was in the toilet, praying to the porcelain god, when I heard the knock. At first, I thought Mark or Zola had forgotten their key or something. I went to the door, and you can imagine my surprise when I opened it and saw Mpo standing there. I didn't stop to wonder; I just grabbed her into my arms and hugged her hard, as if my life depended on it. In my haste to get to the door, I'd neglected to look in the mirror, and so I wasn't aware that I had a goatee of golden bile shining on my chin until she pointed it out. I didn't know I was weeping either. '*Ini Nandi? What's wrong? Tell me.*' Mpo is the only person in the world who calls me Na. She rechristened me by

shortening my already shortened name the first day we met at Tembisa Primary while lining up for soup at recess. I tried to answer her but only managed to break into more sniffles. Mpo opened the small bag she was carrying, took out some tissue and went to work, wiping away the tears, mucus, and bile from my face.

'It's okay,' she said in a soothing voice. 'You don't have to say anything right now. It's okay. Hush now, my friend. It's going to be fine. *Kuzalunga*.' She took my hand and led me into the sitting room as if this was her home, and I was the guest. She sat me down on the soft velvet sofa, then, taking on that familiar, sisterly role, settled next to me and drew my head onto her shoulder. The pent-up emotions of the last three weeks – the anxiety, frustration, anger, confusion – came rushing out of me. Shamelessly, I bawled my head off on the back of her neck for a good ten minutes. Then, as I sat up and tried to compose myself, I experienced a rush of nausea. I knew I was going to spew and didn't want to do it in front of Mpo. I jumped from the sofa, but it was too late. The minute I stood up, a flood of bile rose from my throat, and, involuntarily, I opened my mouth and let it all out. It barely missed Mpo's beige Lady Di pump shoes.

'Fuck, Nandi!' Mpo didn't bother to conceal her repulsion. 'What the bloody hell did you eat?' I opened my mouth to say 'nothing' but almost choked on yet another onslaught of vomit.

'*O Jehova wami!*' Mpo swore, then grabbed me by the arms. 'Let's get you to the bathroom,' she said as she hauled me towards the corridor. Too late. Another downpour of slimy liquid came flying from my mouth, and this time it landed directly on the Lady Diane pumps.

'Shit!' Mpo cried though she sounded more amused than pissed off. 'How long have you been shooting it out like this?'

'I don't know. Two maybe three weeks,' I managed to say. 'Shit. Oh, crap! When did you have your last period, Nandi?' I hadn't expected her to ask me anything like that and her question made me freeze.

'Girl, you're fucking pregnant,' Mpo pronounced matter-of-factly. My heart skipped a bit. 'You know that don't you?' Mpo pressed. I shook my head dumbly and looked down at her ruined shoes. '*Ja*, you are.' Mpo's thumb forced my chin up, compelling me to meet her knowing eyes. 'And you know how I know?' she asked but didn't give me a chance to answer. 'This is exactly how I was in my first few months with Lolo. That's when I knew I was pregnant.'

‘No, no, I can’t be. How...’

‘How?’ My best friend gave a great laugh as if I’d just uttered the most amusing joke she’d ever heard. I watched her howl, and she slapped my back like I’d made her day. She laboured to collect herself and said, ‘I’m sorry. We need to get you to the clinic.’ I agreed with a nod of my head.

We sat back down to figure out which clinic was the nearest. It had to be in the closest township because there were none for blacks in Braamfontein. Then we had to sort out how we were going to get there. We discovered that we had less than four rands between the two of us, which wasn’t even enough for one train fare to Soweto. It was clear we had no choice but to wait for Zola to return from her lectures. We were hopeful that she’d have a few rands in her pocket.

While we waited, Mpo and I passed the time by raiding Mark and Zola’s fridge for food and beer and reminiscing about our bad days at Sacred Heart, where we spent two years as boarding students before being disgracefully dismissed. The booze quickly lifted my spirits and made me forget my problem. In no time, I was doubled on the floor as Mpo recalled the events that led to our disgrace. Over the years, I’d tried my best to forget the unshakeable Sister Lucia (or Lucifer as we called her behind her back) who’d made it her mission to make our lives at Sacred Hearts a living nightmare. I’d worked incredibly hard at putting behind me the events of that scandalous morning – the morning of March 16th when we were sent packing. It was Sister Lucifer who’d caught us red-handed and decided to make an example of us. We’d snuck out of our dorm and spent the night partying away and boozing at Victoria Falls with the Christian Brothers College boys. Mnyaradzi’

boyfriend, Ray, had picked us up just after midnight. The four of us - me, Mpo, Joyce, and Mnyaradzi, had scaled the six-foot fence and trod the half-mile walk in our vertiginous high heels to where Ray and his three friends were waiting in the truck. I remember the boys passing around the already half-empty bottle of Johnny Walker, and then later someone retrieving another one from under one of the seats. By the time we got to Victoria Falls, where the party was, I think all six of us were pretty much beyond tipsy. I don’t remember much about the party except dancing with each of the four boys. By then, we’d gone from sipping Johnny Walker to just gulping down whatever was handed to us. I don’t know about the others, but I know for sure that I was three sheets to the wind by the time we left. I have no idea who

drove us back, but none of us could easily make it over the fence when we got to Sacred Heart, even with the boys helping us.

About half an hour later, all four of us girls had managed to get to the other side of the fence. After waving goodbye kisses to our heroes, we staggered and giggled back towards our dorm, our shoes in our hands. The window we'd snuck out of was ajar (I was sure we'd closed it), and Sister Lucifer was standing next to it. So, that was the end of our days at Sacred Heart. We didn't need to be told that. She could have just told us to start packing, gone to her office, and called our parents or guardians to let them know we'd been expelled. But no. Sister Lucifer couldn't resist the opportunity to humiliate us one last time. She chose to hold onto us until the rest of the school was up, then paraded us at assembly like we were models auditioning for a show. However, her efforts at embarrassing us were wasted because all four of us were still too drunk to care. It didn't stop our fits of giggles as she marched us – in our cheap mini-skirts and precarious heels – to the front of the school hall.

I think the seriousness of the situation didn't sink in until we were facing our parents. I remember when Mpo's father came to pick us up, hours later, we were still indecorously (Sister Lucifer wouldn't allow us to change) dressed. I remember how he chastised us for the whole six-hour drive from Rhodesia to Soweto and how sober I was when he dropped me off at my grandmother's, who slapped me hard in the face before sending me off to Mama's house.

For five years, I'd managed to keep that day securely stored in a locked compartment of my memory. But yesterday, Mpo, after our third or fourth beer, threw the bolt open, and everything came tumbling out. And when she was through mimicking Sister Lucifer, impersonating her galled father and my disappointed grandmother, the memory had lost its demoralising force. We laughed like we'd never laughed before. And for the first time since her passing, I could think and talk about my grandmother without crying. We pillaged more food and booze so that by the time Zola and Mark got home, there was nothing in their fridge but a slab of cheese and a carton of milk, and we were falling down drunk. So, of course, we made Mark the first to get home, go out for fish and chips and more beers. Before long, I'd forgotten why I'd been distraught and why we'd waited for Zola.

It was only in the morning when I woke up with a banging hangover and was again kneeling at the toilet bowl that it all came back. Mpo was snoring on the sitting room floor where we'd both passed out, and Zola and Mark were, as far as I knew,



asleep in their room. The panic and dread I felt as I sweated and puked were more significant than ever. The problem seemed to loom more extensively than it had previous days. Yesterday, while Mpo and I were drinking and laughing the day away, I'd started feeling optimistic. Reflecting on the bullshit we'd gone through over the years had left me feeling confident again, like there was no problem I could not handle. Now that self-assuredness was gone. I was, once more, a lost child with no hope whatsoever.

I stayed in the toilet for what seemed like hours, purging until I was dizzy. When I went back to the sitting room, Mpo was still asleep, but I heard movement coming out of Mark and Zola's bedroom. Soon Mark emerged and strode to the bathroom, then the kitchen. Listening to him groan as he shuffled between the kitchen and the toilet and the bedroom, got ready for work, I figured he was suffering from the bhab'laz as I was from last night's binge drinking. Then about twenty minutes later, I heard his feet padding around the sitting room. I closed my eyes and pretended to be asleep as he tip-toed over us and on his way to the front door. I waited for five minutes to make sure he wasn't coming back for anything he'd forgotten, then got up and went to the bedroom. Zola was buried up somewhere under the blankets, fast asleep. I jumped on the bed, shook her, and, not caring whether she was awake or not, started spilling my guts out.

Tearfully, I told her everything, how I'd been living with the suspicion something was wrong for over three weeks now since the day MaNgwenya confronted me. I confessed to her that when Bafana had gone AWOL, I'd spent three sleepless nights fretting, not only about where and who he might be with but also about the possibility that I might be pregnant. My appetite had disappeared around that time and never returned. I'd been secretly throwing up for three weeks, and I couldn't remember the last time I had my period. I'd been shitting myself with fear, scared to tell anyone because I thought voicing my worries would make them real. Unlike Mpo yesterday, Zola listened without a word, only a nod here and there. When I finished, she drew me to her chest and hugged me hard. That embrace only made me weep harder.

I didn't expect Zola to judge me. It wasn't her character. But I couldn't help but wonder what was going through her mind as she listened to my story. Was she thinking you little bitch, you little hypocrite? You had the nerve to preach at me about moving in with Bafana when the whole time you are shacking up with your boyfriend. Who's the smart one now, hey? She had every right to think that way. After all, I was

dishing out advice to her only a few months ago, like I had it all figured out. Hadn't I warned her about the dangers of her decision? God, how smug I must have sounded! I cringed with embarrassment just at the thought of it. Now here I was, Miss Cautious herself, crying my eyes out to the very same person whose recklessness I'd been agonising about not so long ago. When I was busy brooding over the dangerous situation my friend was putting herself in, shouldn't I have been worrying about the risks that I was already taking? I was ashamed, but I held onto my friend's hug like my life depended on it, let her caress me and tell me that everything would be all right. I didn't believe her words, but I clung to them. Moments later, when we let go, I was touched to see that her eyes were wet too.

After bathing and sharing the carton of milk left in the fridge, Zola and I sat down on the bed and counted the few coins she had in her purse. They came to four rands and twenty-two cents, barely enough for two bus tickets. We fumbled in Mark's trousers and jackets and came up with another rand and fifty-eight cents. Still not enough for three bus tickets to Soweto. Zola then decided we should go to the clinic without Mpo, who was loudly snoring in the sitting room. Her decision suited me fine. It spared me an argument and the daunting task of having to choose between two of my closest friends. I know that if she'd been awake, Mpo would have protested. She would have insisted that she should take me to the clinic. My friend would also have pointed out that the clinic idea was hers in the first place.

Anyway, Zola and I did go to the clinic without Mpo, and it was an experience I'd rather forget. To make a long story short, we waited our turn on the stiff benches outside (because the clinic was too full) in the smouldering heat, with screaming infants and tired mothers all around us. When my name was finally called (more than three hours later), I followed a nurse, who looked to be about Mama's age, into a small room where she asked me just one question, 'When was the first day of your last period? Do you remember the date?'

'You mean the last day?'

'No. I mean what I asked you. The first day.' She sounded piqued by my effort to correct her. I stared at her starched white cap, then her name badge, which said Nurse Teboho, as I tried to think of an answer that she might find acceptable. 'January...the 13th,' I finally blurted out. I'm not sure why I chose that date. All I know is that I didn't want to try her patience further by telling her that I didn't know or wasn't sure. She then handed me a plastic cup and stonily instructed me to pee in it

before closing a flimsy curtain around me. It took a good five minutes to squeeze out everything I had in my bladder. On the other side of the curtain, I could hear the old nurse clearing her throat impatiently. Then I pulled back the curtain and held out the cup with three or so droplets of my bright yellow urine. I expected Nurse Teboho to yell at me, tell me to go back behind the curtain, and fill the cup, but she snatched it from my hand and gruffly ordered me to go back outside and wait to be called again.

Zola was no longer sitting on the bench where I'd left her. For a moment, I panicked, fearing she had had enough and decided to dump me. I looked around frantically at all the benches, but there was no sign of my friend. I was about to give up when I spotted her under a giant palm tree. She was sitting cross-legged, her petite frame hunched over something that was on her lap. Nearby, three little boys were playing kickball with an empty milk carton. I ambled over to the tree, and when I got close, I saw that the magazine she was reading was the Drum.

'Hey,' I said.

'So?' Zola looked up and squinted her eyes at me. 'Wait, sit down first,' she patted the ground next to her. I lowered my butt to the ground and leaned my head against the tree, then wearily told her, 'I have to wait for them to call me again.'

'Oh, God,' she mumbled. 'If they make us wait another bloody half day, I swear I'm going to go in there and...Never mind. Anyway, there's still a chance of good news, right? I mean, you could just be late because of the stress from the death of your grandmother or the break-up with Ba...' She stopped suddenly and looked away sheepishly as if she'd just inadvertently let a curse word slip out. 'Anyway, my fingers are still crossed,' she said and pretended to refocus on the magazine.

'What are you reading?' I asked. At first, she ignored me and continued to peruse the magazine as if she hadn't heard my question. I quizzed her again, even though by now, I had a fair idea of what it was she was studying. This time she, reluctantly, laid the magazine on her lap, with the page she'd been reading facing up. I glanced at the title of the article, 'This Town Is Black and Ugly'. I didn't have to look at the top of the page to know who the author was. I could feel Zola watching me intently, so I looked back at her and casually said, 'Mhhh. I didn't know you were a fan of the Drum.'

'I'm not really. It's Mark who buys it. He's a fan of Bafana. I just put it in my bag today because I didn't know how long this thing was going to take, and I didn't have anything else to read....'

'Zola, you don't have to explain,' I cut her short. 'You have the absolute right to read whatever you want. Frankly, I am a big fan of the Drum.'

'Really?' Zola sounded relieved. 'Want to read?' she offered.

'No. Thanks. I've read it. I was there when Bafana wrote it,' I said after a prolonged pause. Zola didn't say anything. She picked up the magazine as if to continue reading, but I sensed she wasn't really. I had turned my attention to the little boys who were still tearing at the milk carton with their frayed tennis shoes and laughing like they were having the best time of their lives. I was thinking about my little brothers back home and how I missed hearing their laughter. When was the last time I'd seen them play? Since Gogo's passing, things had been sad at home. The house wasn't as full of life as it had been before. It seemed that her demise had made us all withdraw a little into ourselves. Even little Bo and Za, who I doubted fully understood the impact of death, appeared to be mourning in their way. They tip-toed quickly around the house like they'd been warned not to disturb anything or anyone, and they no longer invited their little friends to frolic with them in our tiny backyard. The once cheerful atmosphere in and around the house had become unbearably depressing. I hoped that the situation was a temporary one, that the next time I returned home, I'd find that everything was back to normal.

'Are you going to tell him?' Zola was nudging me, jolting me back from my reverie. She'd closed the magazine and was giving me all her attention.

'Tell him what?' I said, looking away from her glaring eyes. The last thing on earth I wanted to do was talk or think about Bafana. I'd done an excellent job avoiding doing just that ever since I broke up with him almost a month ago. But Zola wasn't about to let it go. She shifted her butt closer to me, put an arm around my shoulder.

'You know what I mean, Nandi. If it turns out you are, you know, are you going to tell him? I'm sure you've thought about all this....'

'What for, Zola?' I interjected. 'We are not together anymore. We broke up. All right? He left me. Left me to be with her, if I may remind you.'

'But,' Zola started, and I put my finger up to stop her. 'From what I understand,' she went on, ignoring me, 'it was you who left him. Okay, sure, he did disappear for a few days. Maybe he was with her. Maybe the story he gave you was true. Who knows, hey? But he did come back, didn't he?'

'Zola!' I cried. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. 'Are you defending his actions?'

'No, I'm not,' she said. 'But, Nandi, everyone deserves the benefit of the doubt. And I think the least you could have done was verify his story.'

'Verify it with who? His friends? It was one of his best friends who told me the truth, in case you forgot that part.'

'Okay, okay. Let's forget about that. Perhaps you are right. Maybe taking Bafana back is out of the question.'

'You can bet on that,' I said. 'And I did tell Bafana that I never wanted to see him ever again.' 'Has he tried to see you?'

'He sent a couple of letters with Bheki, begging me to meet him. I didn't even bother to reply. Then, I didn't hear anything. I think he finally got the message.' I hoped this would put an end to the topic. Zola was silent for a while, I guess, pondering on how to put her next question. When she spoke again, her voice had taken on a serious tone.

'But, my friend,' she said and leaned her head against mine. 'What are you going to do if it turns out you are pregnant? I mean, let's be realistic here for a minute. Do you honestly think you could cope without him? Without his help?'

I knew that question would come out of someone's mouth sooner or later. It had been plaguing me for the last few days. I had no answer and was relieved when Nurse Teboho came out to call me at that moment. I trod through the stuffy clinic full of tired and anxious mothers and their screaming babies for the second time. I reached the backroom, and before I could close the door behind me, the nurse bluntly gave me the dreaded news. 'Positive.'

'What does that mean?' I asked, knowing even as I mouthed the words that I sounded stupid. 'What do you think it means, silly girl?' Nurse Teboho snarled, and I cringed like a small child being scolded in front of her chums. 'You're eight and a half weeks gone if the information you gave me is correct. How old are you?'

'Nineteen,' I murmured. 'And a half. I'll be twenty soon.' I don't know why I felt it necessary to add that fib. My birthday is in December. That's nine months away. Nine long and miserable months away, I thought.

'Old enough to know better,' Nurse Teboho continued. 'Didn't anyone ever talk to you about family planning? All you had to do was walk into a clinic and ask for the

pill, for God's sake. That's all you had to do once you decided you were going to start sleeping around.'

I was offended by that and immediately flew into defence mode. Who did this woman think she was, judging me like that when she didn't know a single thing about me? 'Excuse me.' I said. Now it was my turn to put on the superior airs. 'I did not sleep around. For your information, I had a boyfriend. One boyfriend, and he is the only man I've ever slept with.' Now there, go fuck yourself, I wanted to add.

'Hmm,' Nurse Teboho snorted. 'Had.' She was going to have the last word, no matter what. The best way I could think of to retaliate to her uncalled-for maliciousness was to turn my back and stomp out of the door. I wasn't going to sit there and cry in front of her. I was going to save my tears for later, though they were already blinding me as I plodded through the still bustling clinic. I don't remember much about the journey back to Braamfontein, except crying on Zola's shoulder throughout the bus ride. I don't even recall where Mpo was when we got back to the flat. All I remember is lying on Zola and Mark's oversized bed and listening to my friends discuss my predicament as if I was not just in the next room and could hear everything through those thin walls. It was easier to pretend I was not there than to deal with the reality that had just slapped me in the face. Of course, the fact had been there all along, staring me in the mug. Only I had stubbornly refused to see it. What had I hoped for? Perhaps, subconsciously, I thought that it would eventually go away if I didn't acknowledge it.

Does he know?' This question came from Mpo.

'Don't be silly,' Zola snapped at her. 'How could he, when she didn't even know?' 'Well, is she going to tell him?'

'I don't know. I asked when we were at the clinic, and Nandi said no. She was annoyed that I even asked.' I think she should tell him. It's his baby, after all,' Mpo reiterated Zola's earlier pronouncement. 'And

I don't think she should suffer alone.'

'I know. I told Nandi the same thing, but she was unyielding. Sometimes she gets on my nerves, you know. Agh, she can be so stubborn, you know - sometimes she makes me want to scream.'

'I know...'

'Let's hope she'll change her mind.'

'Do you think they'll let her sit her finals?'

'I don't know.'

'It would be a shame if they don't. Poor Nandi - she's been studying so hard.'

'She's not showing yet, so maybe she can get away with finishing this semester. Unless somebody rats on her. Maybe.'

'Will you and Mark let stay?'

'Don't know. I suppose we'll have to. Our friend has nowhere else to go.'

And, so my fate was decided without me having to open my mouth at all. For now, I can scratch off homelessness from my worry list. I'm going to be camping out with my law-breaking friend and her boyfriend - become another illegal resident dodging the forces of law and order.

## 12

### BAFANA

He is lying on a pallet on the dirt floor in the dark, listening to the intermittent tinkling of rain on the tin roof and the noise of people snoring around him. The room reeks of the sour funk of unwashed bodies and burning wood. He's been in this camp room for over five hours, long enough for his nose to become accustomed to the fetidness, but every time someone turns, the smell assails him afresh. Just this afternoon, he'd praised himself for his prudence, his decision to abandon his hotel room, his camera, and notebooks. Now, he lies wide awake like an insomniac, regretting his hasty move. He wonders if it is not too late to escape. The night is still young, and all these men and children appear to be dead to the world. If he is careful and quiet enough, he can slip away without anyone hearing him. If he hurries, he could be dozing in a comfortable bed with clean sheets in a matter of four or five hours. He still has the key to his hotel room, after all. But is he prepared to walk those twenty-something kilometres back into town with swollen feet? And if he is and can, what will the soldiers think when they wake up in the morning and find him missing? Will his absence confirm their initial fears that he is an enemy, a spy sent

by a rival of the ANC? Will they come looking for him? The very thought sends chills down his spine. He already came close to getting his head blown off today.

He's been away from home for just two and a half days, but Bafana is already feeling home-ick. He spent the first night on a train to Namibia then had to wait in an overcrowded station for three hours before being told that the next train to Luanda wasn't until the following day. His boss, Sam, who'd finally relented to his pleas, had given him only two weeks to investigate his story so he couldn't afford to waste a day. He needed to get to Angola as fast as possible. He only knew two or three words of Khoekhoe, so it had taken him a good while to find someone who understood a little

English to direct him to the bus station. By the time he found it, a bus to Luanda had just left, and he'd had to wait two whole hours for the next one. Six hours later, he was in Luanda, the capital of Angola. But his journey was far from over. His hotel was on the outskirts of the city and, again, it took some time and effort to find someone who spoke enough English to help him locate a taxi to take him there. The drive was another thirty minutes. By the time he reached the hotel and was shown to his room, Bafana had lost enthusiasm for his long-anticipated trip. He hadn't eaten anything all day, but his hunger had long dissipated. All he wanted now was a long, hot bath and a cold beer.

It was well after 10 pm when he dragged his tired but freshly washed self to the hotel bar downstairs. Fortunately, it was still open and, to his surprise, loud with music and a decent number of carousers. He found an empty stool and ordered a cold Cuca from the young lady behind the bar, who quickly introduced herself as Estella. She had a friendly, gap-toothed smile and a gigantic Afro - the biggest he'd ever seen on any head. He downed his beer and ordered another. He was halfway through his third when the man sitting to his right seemed to notice him for the first time.

'Olá,' he said, offering his hand for a shake, '*Como está?*'

'Olá,' Bafana replied, taking the man's hand. The extent of his Portuguese started and ended at 'olá' so when the man went on to say, '*meu nome é Francisco. O que è seu?*' he responded with a blank look. 'This is my brother, Francisco,' Estella jumped in to help. 'He is asking you what your name is.'

'Oh. Gerald.' Bafana said. Then, as an afterthought, he added. 'You can call me Bafana.' 'You tourist? From which country? Rhodesia? *Onde?*' Francisco wanted to



know. 'Close,' Bafana told him. He didn't feel like conversing with the man, or anyone for that matter. He was facing a long day tomorrow, and all he wanted to do now was drink his beer in peace, numb the ache in his back and feet, go back to his room and, hopefully, pass out until the sun came out. He didn't want to get into a discussion with anyone about why he was here. He didn't want to think about how he would locate the hideout where the corrupt soldiers were allegedly abusing the young recruits that they were supposed to be training. Most of all, he had no desire to sit here and strain his brain, trying to make sense of the foreign words being spoken to him. He'd done enough of that today, for God's sake!

'Oh. Fascinating,' Estella mused.

'Jolly interesting,' Francisco put in, licking his lips and drumming the empty beer bottle in front of him with his fingers. Then he said something in Portuguese, which Bafana didn't understand.

'He is saying he has a motorcycle, so if you want to go somewhere, don't worry, he will take you. For only fifteen kwanzas, he will take you anywhere in town,' his sister translated and beamed proudly. Bafana merely nodded, downed his beer, and bade them farewell. He thought he saw a look of disappointment on Francisco's face, so, reluctantly, he ordered a beer for the man and asked Estella to add it to his bill. He knew he shouldn't be doing this. He needed to be as thrifty as he could with his money. Sam had only given him a budget of 200 rands for the trip. This cash was supposed to cover all his travel expenses, accommodation, and meals for the next fourteen days. He had already spent 12 rands just to get here and paid the hotel 86 rand for his room. That left him with only one hundred. He couldn't afford to run out of money because if he did, what would he then do? There was no one in this foreign land that he could call for help. Still, he could afford to be nice to Francisco and his sister. The only two people so far who understood him in this strange land. Who knew when they might come in handy? Anything he spent on them would be an investment. It made sense to look at it that way.

He was up before dawn. His body still ached from his journey, but his hunger pangs forced him out of bed. He made his way down to the bar for the second time, which also served as the dining room. He was surprised but happy to see that Estella's role changed during the day. It meant he didn't have to make an effort to be understood by a new person. He ordered the scrambled eggs and bacon, which, incidentally, were the only options on the menu. When his coffee arrived, it was

lukewarm, so the rest of the meal followed five minutes later. But he drank and ate everything without a word of complaint. He was grateful to put something in his stomach finally. Once he'd polished his plate, he looked around for Estella, but she'd disappeared into the kitchen. He'd heard a rumour that the campsite where the training and torture of the young *wannabe* soldiers were supposed to be taking place was in a small village called Luambo or Huambo, and he needed to ask Estella if she knew where that was.

He decided to return to his room to pack what he needed and then come back to look for the bar lady/waitress/maybe cook. He had filled his camera equipment and notebook into his canvas satchel and was about to lock the door when he suddenly had a change of heart. He had no idea where he was going, how long he'd have to trek to find the so-called campsite. Shlepping around with anything that would weigh him down and, consequently, slow his pace seemed like a bad idea. He went back into the room and emptied the duffel bag onto the bed. Then he reloaded it with a zip-up jersey and a short-sleeved t-shirt, deciding he might need either depending on which direction the weather took. He also packed a packet of Marlboro cigarettes (he'd stopped smoking when Nandi moved in but had quickly picked up the habit after she left him), a lighter, and his wallet. The battered leather wallet contained all the money he had left and a picture he and Nandi had taken on their first trip to Cape Town.

When he re-entered the dining room, Estella was wiping down the tables. Bafana approached her and asked if she knew the village he wanted to find. Estella him that she didn't, but her brother would know. Then the barmaid/waitress queried him about why he wanted to know about that particular village. Bafana reluctantly explained his mission. He related to her the rumours about the soldiers and their alleged victims. And how he'd been sent to find out if there was any truth behind it. He wasn't sure if Estella understood a word he was saying, but when he finished speaking, she held up a finger and said, 'Wait. One minute. I get him,' and disappeared into the back. Minutes later, she re-emerged with Francisco at her heels. Last night Bafana hadn't paid any attention to his size, but now, standing next to his sister and wearing an apron and a white net over his hair, the man's colossal statue appeared almost obscene. He towered over his sister, who was still taller than the average woman by at least two feet.

'Ah, *Bom dia meu amigo,*' he said, beaming to reveal a gap-toothed grin identical to his sister's. 'My sister. She say me you want I drive you to Malanje?'

'Huambo.' Bafana corrected.

'No. Malanje,' Francisco insisted. 'Huambo too far. Huambo no village. No soldier. Huambo is town nine hundred kilometres far from here. No camp there. No soldier is training in Huambo.' He explained in broken English.

'So, you know about the camp,' Bafana said, feeling excited for the first time since leaving home.

'*Eu ouvi,*' Francisco said.

'He says he heard,' Estella enunciated.

'Well, how much is it going to cost for you to take me there?'

'*Eu não posso te levar lá.*' Francisco said.

'He says he can't take you there. His scooter won't make it.' Estella explained. Bafana was disappointed, which must have shown on his face because Francisco quickly added, '*Mas eu posso te levar pra perto. Talvez a meio caminho.*'

'But he can take you near there. Maybe halfway,' Estella translated.

'Tell him I said thank you,' Bafana instructed. The two siblings then conferred in Portuguese before Estella turned her attention back to him and said, 'Fifty. He said he will take you for fifty kwanzas.'

'Fifty!' Bafana made an exaggerated show of protest. He knew that fifty kwanzas equalled no more than ten rands, but still, it would put a dent in his budget.

'Fifty kwanzas it very cheap,' Estella, ever the dutiful sister, replied. Bafana had a feeling that the number fifty was more her idea than Francisco's. She was now in charge of the transaction and was no longer playing the middleman. 'You know how much taxi charge to take you to the village? One hundred, maybe two hundred kwanzas.'

'Yes, but a taxi is a car. A taxi would take me all the way to where I need to go, not just halfway,' Bafana wanted to say but suddenly felt too tired to argue. Besides, reason told him that there was no way he would win against these two. He had a feeling they had played this game many times before with tourists, that they were old hands at it.

'Alright,' he said. 'But he'd better damn well take me close to the place, somewhere I can catch another lift or take a bus or something.' Then he pointed his finger at Francisco, who was grinning from ear to ear and gave him a thumbs-up

sign, and said, 'Man, you'd better not have any ideas about taking me somewhere and dumping me in the middle of nowhere, you hear me? Better not, or you'll be sorry.' He gave Estella a minute to translate, but she didn't bother. He wasn't sure that she had understood.

Anyway, that was this morning when he'd been very excited about finding the camp. Now, lying wide awake on the pallets, he wasn't so sure he'd made a wise choice to come here by himself. Riding in the crazy Luanda traffic on the back of Francisco's scooter had seemed risky enough, but approaching these *ganja*-smoking, bazooka-totting guerrillas in this isolated place was a death wish. If he got his head blown off like he almost did, who would find him? No one but Sam and the rest of the staff at the Rand Daily Mail knew where he was. He hadn't told a single person in his family that he was going off to the bush for fear they would try to talk him out of it. Francisco dropped him off at the edge of the town called Nidalatando and then told him, in his broken English, that he could hitchhike the rest of the way to Malanje. He handed him a marked map, and Bafana believed he did that because he knew hitchhiking to the isolated village would be almost impossible. Even if a driver were to stop for him, how would Bafana explain where he wanted to go with his limited knowledge of the local language? He surmised that Francisco had known all along that Bafana would need to complete the rest of the journey to this Malanje place on foot. Why else would the man have handed him a map with the walking route already highlighted?

The arduous journey to the remote village took almost all day. As Bafana had suspected, no car zoomed past him. It would have been impossible anyway since there were no roads to speak of, except for narrow, swampy paths that sometimes led to a dead end. By the time he spotted a kraal and heard sounds of human activity, Bafana was sweaty, thirsty, covered in mud, and beyond exhausted. An old, white-haired man sat on a stool by the threshold of the hut. As luck would have it, the older man had a few words of broken English in his vocabulary. When Bafana kneeled in front of him to greet him and ask him if he knew of a camp around here where soldiers were supposed to be training, the man nodded and said, 'Clinic. You look for the clinic?'

'No. Camp,' Bafana politely corrected, but the old man gave him a toothless grin and repeated 'Clinic.'

Frustrated, Bafana was about to give up and walk away when the man added, 'Camp if you want but is the clinic you look for.'

'Is that so?' Bafana said with a sigh of relief. 'Well, will you be kind enough to point me to the direction of this cam...clinic, sir?'

At first, the man just sat there, tapping his walking stick on the ground, and Bafana began to wonder if he'd understood him. Then he rose from the stool, pointed the walking stick at Bafana, and ordered him to stay right there before disappearing inside his hut. Minutes later, he reappeared with a piece of paper, which he handed to Bafana. On it was a simple drawing of a map.

As he got up to leave, Bafana realised for the first time just how parched and famished he was. But he'd had already intruded enough; he couldn't possibly ask the man for food or water. If the drawing were accurate, this arduous journey would soon be over. He'd be able to quench his thirst and fill his groaning, empty stomach once he reached the camp -assuming the soldiers and their charges were not too greedy to share their food and water with a stranger.

The camp/clinic turned out to be just another mud hut with an unfinished floor. The only thing that set it apart from the others around it was its shape and its corrugated roof. There was no sign of life outside. Bafana called 'hello' several times before lowering his head and entering the L-shaped room. The first thing that struck him was the overwhelming stench –a mixture of burning wood smoke, stewing meat, the musky, unsanitary stench of dirty clothes, and the unmistakable, intoxicating smell of cannabis. The room was eerily, silent, and dark. In one corner of the hovel, he could make out the figure of a girl or young woman bent over a small fire. She was stirring a big pot. He did not want to startle her, so he remained at the doorway and called out 'hello' again. To his surprise, it was not the girl who answered, but a man's voice came from the left side of the room. 'Who that?' A gruff voice questioned.

Bafana turned towards the direction of where it came from. The room was dark, but he could make out shadowy figures positioned in two circles in one corner. Once his eyes adjusted to the lack of light, he could also discern rows of pallets on the dirt floor. Carefully, he stepped over them and inched his way further inside the hut to the group of men, but before he could even reach them, Bafana felt something hard nudge him on the shoulder. When he turned around, he found himself standing face to face with a girl who looked no more than fifteen. It might have been the same girl

he'd just seen cooking on the fire outside. She was well-built, her height almost matched his six feet two inches, but her baby face, the chubby cheeks, and fear-filled eyes gave her age away.

In her hand was holding a bazooka shotgun, and she was now pointing this at Bafana's head. Her eyes were narrowed, perhaps to make them appear more menacing. Bafana felt his knees go weak and feared losing control of his bladder or bowels, or both. With a gesture of her head, the girl motioned him to step outside. He obeyed, walking backwards, afraid to take his eyes off his would-be slayer. If he were to get blown away, he reasoned, he'd rather die facing his killer than take a bullet in the back. As he exited the hut, he stumbled over a step and almost lost his footing.

Not once did the girl flinch, lower her rifle, or take her eyes off him. Once outside, Bafana became unhinged, talking rapidly like he was experiencing a fit of mania. Frantically, he tried to explain his presence, even though the girl had not asked him anything yet. He was feverishly begging her to spare his life when two burly men emerged from the hut, bearing rifles over their shoulders and the stink of ganja about them. They demanded to know who had sent him, which organisation on which side. He had to think on his feet. Now, not one but three rifles were being pointed at his head.

One answer could trigger any of them to go off. Then, out of the blue, Bafana recalled the gossip he'd heard about the ANC and its involvement with the freedom fighters. If there was gospel behind the tale, then the African National Congress party was, indeed, the backbone of this guerrilla training scheme. And, Bafana reasoned, common sense dictates that if these loyal soldiers truly revered their benefactor, the party, they would cherish everything and everyone else associated with that patron. Wouldn't they?

Bafana mulled over it for just a few seconds before deciding that he stood a chance of surviving if he claimed the ANC as his connection - that he was a comrade working for the same party; that they were in this together. He didn't doubt that revealing his true identity would be suicidal. If these men found out that he was a journalist, out to expose them, they'd annihilate him without hesitation. His body would never be found.

'I work for the Luthuli House in Johannesburg,' he heard the words come out of his mouth. 'As you all know, we have headquarters in Lusaka in Zambia, London in

the UK, but nothing here. Well, the party wants to change that. I've been sent here to scout the area - to see if I can find a building in Luanda or somewhere else central that can be used as our Angola head office.'

'Is that right?' One of the men questioned dubiously, his suspicious, red eyes sizing Bafana up and down.

'What has this got to do with us?' Another man quizzed. 'Why you are here?' This is not Luanda.'

'I'm aware of that, gentlemen. But I was also instructed to check up on you while I'm out here.'

'What exactly do you want to check? What do you want, man, hey?' The second man sounded angry and agitated. 'They send you to spy on us because of what? Do they think we are doing something we shouldn't be doing, hey? Are we criminals now that need to be...?'

'No, no, man, hold on.' Bafana said defensively. 'It's not like that. Not like that at all. I'm not here to spy on you. I was just asked to stop by to see if you need anything, more supplies, you know.' This explanation seemed to calm the man down a little. His grip relaxed on his rifle, and it fell to his side.

Then he snatched the satchel off Bafana's shoulder and opened it. Again, he thanked the Almighty above for the gift of intuition. How would he had explained away the camera equipment, the notebooks jotted with questions he wanted answers to. And, after all the lies they'd already caught him in, would these bloodthirsty men believe anything else that came out of his mouth? The man searched his satchel, retrieved the pack of cigarettes, the t-shirt, the jersey, and the wallet, which he instantly opened and emptied. When he was sure he'd cleared it of everything, he handed the empty bag back to Bafana and said, 'Okay. You can come in. Come in, and we talk,' he said, ushering everyone back into the hut.

Once back inside, Bafana was invited to join the circle of men. A few feet away, a smaller group, also sitting in a circle, was made of seven or eight boys and girls, who appeared to be in their early to mid-teens. Space was quickly created for him between two men, and as he prepared to sit, he glanced to the right and greeted the younger group with a nod of his head. The youngsters acknowledged him with sheepish gazes before returning their attention to tin plates of pap and what looked like dried meat sitting on their crossed laps. Once he was settled, the men commenced to introduced themselves, one by one.

'Comrade Godfrey Dube,' said the man next to him, who appeared to be around his age.

'Comrade Mxolisi Ngulube,' offered the next.

'Comrade Thamsanqa.'

'Comrade Rudolph Hlabangani.'

'Comrade Themba Siso.'

'Comrade Tshuma,' said the man who had confronted him outside. He had not re-joined the circle but was standing a few feet back, counting the rands he'd taken from Bafana's wallet. 'Comrade Ephram Sibanda,' the last man gave his name. Then they all turned their eyes to him and waited.

'Jerry,' Bafana quickly offered. He didn't want to give his full name, Gerald Mkwanzani or Bafana, the nickname he'd earned when he was a toddler and how everyone knew him, just in case one of these guerrillas had heard the name from someone who read the Daily Rand Mail or the Drum.

'So, Comrade Jerry,' one of the older looking men, Comrade Thamsanqa, said. 'Where do you come from?'

'Johannesburg,' Comrade Tshuma answered before Bafana could say a word. 'Comrade Jerry is from the headquarters. He works at Luthuli House,' he explained without taking his eyes off the rand bills in his hand.

So, Bafana was a comrade now. He felt like an imposter and a traitor. He hadn't earned the title or the men's loyalty. He had lied to win their trust and get into this hut. He could not backtrack and start afresh with them. It was too late. So, he tried his best to relax and graciously accepted the tin plate piled high with pap and two pieces of meat swimming in a thick gravy that his young, female would-be assassin handed to him. He started to thank her, but she'd already retreated. Moments later, she returned with a small basin of water and a dishrag. He was ravenous and had already started digging into the food with his hands. He brought the tin plate to his face and ate the food with zeal as if he was afraid someone might snatch the plate away before he was full. He was aware the men were watching him, but he did not care.

'Comrade Jerry,' one of them quipped. 'When did you last eat, man, last Christmas?' This jibe brought raucous laughter and whistles from the other men, but Bafana did not stop to answer. The men continued making jokes about his ravenous appetite, and he continued ignoring them, keeping his eyes firmly on the plate.



'You see that man?' one of them said 'That, *mfowethu*, is a champion. That's the brother I'd want to bet my money on if there was an eating competition and he was a contestant. That's the comrade I'd bet my money on. I'd wager my year's salary on this man here.'

More guffawing came from the other comrades. When he had polished the plate clean, Bafana laid it down in front of him. The men whooped, and the youngster who'd lost interest in their food joined in the cheering. Bafana further amused everyone by getting up and curtsying.

The air had been cleared, it seemed. Comrade Tshuma sat down next to him and offered around Bafana's cigarettes. Then he called out to one of the boys, ordering him to bring out more beer. '*Woza! Sheshisa wena!*' he shouted. It had been only a couple of days since he left home, but the sound of Zulu filled Bafana with melancholy, almost bringing tears to his eyes.

Over the past few days, he'd succeeded in convincing himself that the men he was on a mission to catch evil men who preyed on the youth. So far, he hadn't witnessed anything deviant behaviour by any of the older soldiers. And he hadn't them so much as yell at any of their charges. When he'd walked in, everyone was eating. So that dispelled the rumour that the kids were being starved. Bafana to wonder if he had been too quick to judge - too willing to buy into the township gossip. What if the imagined monsters he had doggedly hunted down turned out to be just ordinary people like him?

When everyone had finished eating, some of the younger collected the dirty plates and took them outside to wash. Then Comrade Tshuma sent the older ones to a nearby shebeen for more beer. Bafana was ticked off to see the man proudly count out the money he'd swiped from his wallet and hand it to one of the boys.

Soon everyone gathered around the fire outside, and the out-of-tune singing commenced. Someone would start humming a tune, and before long, the whole group would be chirping away. They sang nonstop, song after song. When one melody ended, a Xhosa or Tswana rendition of it would begin. And, in between the tunes, a joint would be passed around.

Bafana hadn't smoked cannabis since he was a teenager in England, but he accepted the spliff without hesitation, took a long drag on it, so calm and collected as if smoking dope was a habit he practised daily. By the time the boys returned with the crate of cold beer, he felt mellow and at home with everyone. He felt comfortable

joining in the buoyant bickering and jostling, the hoots of laughter, and the spontaneous singing. It all felt natural.

He drank and smoked some more and feigned interest as the soldiers, one after other, told their tedious yarn. He joined in buoyant bickering and jostling, hoots of laughter and spontaneous singing.

13

NANDI

Diary Entry -

April 30th, 1976

I have left home. Mama's house, I should say, because it hasn't felt like home since I returned with my news six days ago. Since the Uncle Caphus incident, Mama hasn't said more than two words to me, and everyone else's been acting strangely around me. I don't know what they've been told, but even little Za and Bo, who are usually loud and boisterous, have suddenly become sombre like there's been a death in the family. They've been walking around me like they are on eggshells and quickly get out of the way when I come near them – as if they believe I have a contagious disease or something. Well, today, I decided enough is enough.

I was packing my suitcase when Bheki came into the bedroom. He stood at the door, watching me. I ignored him until his presence began to irritate me, and I snapped.

'What do you want?'

He shrugged and mumbled, 'Nothing.'

'Well, go away then, will you.'

Bheki didn't move an inch. He was staring at my bruised and swollen left eye; the one Uncle Caphus busted shut with his fist when he swung at me.

'Where are you going?' He asked, inching closer to me.

'Gogo's,' I answered sourly.

'Why?'

'What do you care?' I said.

'Does it still hurt?'

'What?'

'Your eye.'

Now it was my turn to shrug. 'What do you think?' I said and resumed my packing. 'When I see him, I'll bust his head wide open.' 'Who?' I asked, without turning to look at him.

'Uncle Caphus. I'm glad Mandla got him with the skillet. I'm just sorry it didn't kill him. Next time I will do it. And I will use something that will surely knock him dead. Like Baba's sjambok, Mama keeps under the bed. That will surely do. I'll make him pay for what he did to you,' my brother promised with such solemnity that I almost believed him. Then, just as I thought he was done, Uncle Caphus added, 'He wanted to kill you, you know. And, I think, if Mandla hadn't shown up, I think he would have.'

I don't know if, in his twelve-year-old mind, he believed that telling me this would make me feel better, but before I could say anything else, he was gone. Well, I need to find Mandla and thank him, I thought, as I finished packing. I hadn't seen him since he supposedly saved my life. Or his twin sister, Busi, for that matter. I overhead Mama griping about the two of them to her friend, MaMlotshwa, the other day. She believes that Mandla has fallen in love with a married woman twice his age. He's been staying with her and her two children while the husband is in the army. I almost laughed when I heard this, and if things were right between us, I would have gone out there and told Mama off for listening to township gossip. I know my brother very well. He might be a skirt-chaser, with his teenage hormones all over the place right now, but he is not into older women. Mandla is a free spirit, not the type that can settle down with or be tied down by, as he would put it - a woman. Especially one with kids. My brother hates responsibility - he would run like Zola Budd from a situation like that.

Usually, I'm not too fond of Mama's use of corporal punishment to discipline us. But honestly, I would have gladly welcomed the whipping from her sjambok than the silent treatment she's been giving me. I knew she'd be infuriated by the news of my pregnancy, and I had anticipated her whipping me with the sjambok. But not once did it cross my mind that I would get a reaction like the one I received. She was at the market, tending her stall, when I arrived. My brothers and sisters were still at

school, so the house was empty, and I was thankful for that. I needed to be by myself for a while, to think about how I would deliver the news to Mama. I'd spent the hour and a half on the train from Braamfontein trying to think of the gentlest way to render the blow but had come up with nothing. My friends had done all they could to help. After my exams, Zola and Mark kindly told me that I was welcome to stay for as long as I wanted, and I lingered for another two weeks while gathering the courage to go home. Mpo had returned to her university in Cape Town but remained in contact and even offered to come down and accompany me home. But I refused, they'd been good friends, had done their part, but now I had to do mine.

When she returned home, the kids had just come from school, and I offered them some pennies to go and buy sweets at the Indians. I still hadn't thought of a gentle way to break the news to Mama, so I flat out told her, 'I'm pregnant.' She was unpacking her unsold vegetables. She stopped, looked at me sideways, and asked me to repeat myself. And I did. I held my breath and waited for her hand to come flying towards me. Instead, Mama pulled out a chair and lowered herself into it. Then she covered her eyes with her hands and, in a voice that sounded defeated, muttered, '*O Nkosi yami!*'

'I'm sorry, Mama. *Uxolo,*' I muttered, but I don't know if she heard me because she kept on murmuring, calling God's name as Mama always did when she was deeply distressed, '*O thixo wami! Jesu wami!*'

'*Ngiyaxolisa* Mama,' I offered my apology again, almost adding, 'I didn't mean to.' Still, she didn't give any indication that she'd heard. When she resumed speaking, I could hear the tears in her voice.

'Why, Nandipha? *Indaba nganeyami?*'

How could I answer that? I thought about explaining again that I hadn't meant to, but that would sound stupid and probably make her snap. 'Stop crying, Mama, please. It's not that bad,' I wanted to say, but that, too, would sound foolish. The truth was it was worse than bad. The dreadful mess I'd created with my dopiness and irresponsibility was insufferable. It was plain to see that that's the way Mama saw it. But what could I do? Nothing. I stood silently and watched her weep. I hadn't cried since the bus ride from the clinic, but now I felt tears sting my eyes. Mama had rested her head on her folded arms on the table. She was crying so loudly I was sure MaMhlophe and her kids next door could hear. I expected the snoopy neighbour to knock on the door any minute and ask what was wrong. Finally, I couldn't take it

anymore. I left the kitchen, went to the bedroom, threw myself on her bed, and silently continued my weeping. About ten minutes or so later, I heard my little brother's and sister's excited voices in the sitting room. Then they were in the kitchen, hysterically asking Mama what was wrong. She didn't answer them, nor did she stop wailing and invoking God's name, so they came to the bedroom and asked me why Mama was crying. I didn't know what to say to them, so I just shrugged and looked away.

'Why are you crying?' Za demanded to know. I wiped my eyes with my shirt sleeve and waved them both away. They didn't hesitate, and I understood why. What eight- or five-year-old wants to be around a blabbering grown-up when they could be out playing and eating sweets. I don't know how long I stayed in that room. I must have cried myself to sleep because I was later woken up by Uncle Caphus's voice booming from the living room. 'Where is she? *Ungaphi?*' My heart sank. Who had gone and called him, I wondered? I hadn't seen my father's brother since the day I got expelled from Sacred Heart, and he'd showed up to discipline me with his belt and fists. Since he'd been absent from our lives, he'd ceased to exist in my mind. It never occurred to me that I might have to deal with him, that he might be called in to handle my situation.

'*O Jesu wami,*' I mumbled, echoing Mama's prayer. I was sweating with panic, trying to think of a quick escape. The last thing in the world I needed was a confrontation with Uncle Caphus.

'*Ungaphi? Singaphi isifebe?*' He demanded in that annoying, loud voice of his.

'Shh, calm down, man. And stop calling our niece that. Nandi's not a whore.' A voice said. I recognised it as Aunty Pri's. So, she'd been called too. Her standing up for me made me feel somewhat better. If anyone could handle our bully of an uncle, it was Aunty Pri. Unlike most people, she was not intimidated by her older brother one little bit. She could go toe-to-toe with him.

The bedroom door opened, and little Bo announced I was wanted in the sitting room. I was already up, straightening my dress. When I entered the sitting room, Mama and Aunty Pri were sitting on the lone orange sofa with their arms neatly folded while Uncle Caphus was pacing the floor, his face in a frenzy of anger. I hesitated at the door, not sure what to do. Sit on the floor or wait to be told to do so?

'Where are your manners?' Uncle Caphus barked as soon as he noticed me. 'What is wrong with you, girl? Don't you know how to greet people? Is that what they've been teaching you at that university of yours?'

'*Sayibona* Baba,' I muttered, but he ignored my greeting.

'So, what's this I hear? What have you done?'

Again, another question I couldn't answer unambiguously. Should I say, 'I got pregnant?' The obvious and most fundamental answer, but I somehow felt that Uncle Caphus wouldn't be satisfied with that. Its simplicity would irritate him. He liked to do things the hard way. I kept my mouth shut, lowered my head, and studied my toenails, which Zola had painted bright red the night before I left.

'You don't know? Is that what you're telling us, huh?'

'I didn't say that. I didn't say anything,' a little voice inside me protested.

'*Ngiphendula wena!* Answer me when I talk to you, dammit!'

I didn't see Uncle Caphus's fist coming towards me until it was too late. It landed square in my left eye and sent me onto the floor. For a minute, everything went black. Then I felt the steely soles of a shoe on my back. I was reeling from the punches and the kicks, but I did not cry or beg him to stop. I would not give him the satisfaction. Next, he lifted me by my arm and started cuffing my head and arms with his fists. I heard Mama and Aunt Pri scream; saw them each grab Uncle Caphus by the arm. But being restrained did not stop him from continuing his assault. No longer able to use his hands, he settled for his feet. But I ducked his kicks, which made him even angrier, and now he became verbally abusive.

'You bloody whore,' he screamed. 'You good for nothing slut! You little shit! Get out of my house. Now! Pack up all your rubbish and get out. Now!'

'Caphus,' Mama spoke placidly as if addressing a sick person or an injured child. 'This is not your house.'

'It's my brother's house!' Uncle Caphus shouted. 'Are you defending this whore, huh? Are you proud of what she's done? This disgrace, this shame she's brought into this house, are you saying you are accepting it?'

'I'm not saying that at all, but she is my child, and I will not stand back and let you brutalise her. Not here. Not in my house...' Mama's claim of the house seemed to incense Uncle Caphus even more.

'My brother's house!' He reiterated angrily. I didn't think his voice could get any louder, but it did. 'And you, MaZulu... You and your bastard child can get the hell out!

I knew she was trouble right from the beginning. I knew from the moment you brought her....'

'Caphus! You'd better shut up now.' Mama's voice had lost its calm and taken on a tone I'd never heard before. I looked at her, and there was fire in her eyes. Evidently, her rage surpassed Uncle Caphus's anger by far. There was a heavy silence as she stared at him in the eyes. I thought I'd never see this in my life, but Uncle Caphus looked cowed. Aunty Priscilla took this opportunity to say, 'What has gotten into you, man? You talk and act as if your own daughters have never made such mistakes. Look at Lindiwe. Isn't she carrying her second now? And if I remember correctly, she was far much younger than Nandi when she had her first, hadn't even matriculated yet. And Thabi...'

'Priscilla, leave my daughters out of this,' Uncle Caphus snapped. 'My daughters' situation is nothing compared to this girl's....'

'Oh, really? How so? Tell me, man. I'm dying to hear.'

Aunty Pri let go of his arm as if the danger had passed, that now they could all relax and handle the matter like civilised people. Mama, too, let go and came to stand beside me.

'I don't have to tell you anything, Priscilla, but in case you forgot, it was my mother's money that went on educating this girl. It was my mother who worked herself to death in the mlungu's yards, so this girl could have everything she wanted. While my children had to do without.' Uncle Caphus had worked himself into a fit of delirium. He was on a roll, and there was no stopping him. Bitterly, he began to list everything Gogo had done for me while she neglected his children. The way he was saying it made me wonder if he believed that his children were the rightful grandchildren, that they, and not I, had earned the right to be spoiled by her. He made me think that he somehow thought I was illegitimate.

'Do you think, if it were not for my mother, this girl would have made it at that precious Sacred Heart?'

Here I wanted to stop him and remind the man that Gogo had nothing to do with me going to Sacred Heart, that it was actually Mpo's father and his connections, which had made it possible for us. He had pulled strings so we could go to the school and secured scholarships for us.

'And then what did this girl do, I ask you? What did she do after my mother had sacrificed all she could for her? Isn't she the same girl who went and disappointed her? Disappointed all of us, in fact!' Uncle Caphus spat.

Here, too, I wanted to interject and yell, 'No, I didn't disappoint you because you wanted to see me fail. If I let down anybody, it was Reverend Khumalo. Mpo's father is the one who has a right to be angry with me.' But it would have been a waste of time. Besides, Uncle Caphus had grown tired of listing the many ways I'd been over-indulged and my many shortcomings. Now he wanted to know who my accomplice was in this latest of my many offences.

'Who is the bloody father then? Do you even know?' He asked me point-blank.

'Yes,' I mumbled.

'Tell us then. Go on, tell us.' He commanded, and when I failed to respond, the screaming resumed. '*Phendula, wena silima!* Who is the father of this...this bloody thing you are carrying? Answer me, dammit!'

'I will not tell,' I finally found the courage to get the words out. 'It doesn't matter, anyway,' I decided to add. 'We are not together anymore.'

'It doesn't matter anyway,' Uncle Caphus mimicked sarcastically. 'Who's in charge of deciding that? You, huh?'

I ignored his question and looked down at my feet. He could scream all he wanted, but I wasn't going to give him what he wanted. I was determined to hold onto a little bit of control over my situation. He could try, but he would never succeed at beating this out of me.

'You're laughing, hey? Finding all this funny, hey?' He said, surprising me because I had not smiled or laughed or even looked his way. 'See that, MaZulu. Your daughter is sneering because she finds me stupid. She thinks I'm a fool, hey? Well, I'll be damned if stand here and be laughed at by a dirty whore. I will kill her first.' He roared and lunged towards me, and I had the immediate sense to duck behind Mama. Aunty Pri tried to grab his arm again, but he hit her in the face with his elbow. Then I saw a figure appear at the door and thought Bheki had returned home. But this person was too tall. He had something in his hand that I couldn't quite make out. Then he entered the room and the light, and I could see clearly it was Mandla. The thing in his hand was a large skillet, the one Mama kept under the coal stove. I didn't have time to wonder what he was doing with it when Mandla raised the heavy pan above his shoulders and brought it over my assailant's head. Uncle Caphus



never saw it coming. One minute he was like a mad man, a raging animal; the next, he was lying dead still at our feet.

I don't remember much else about that night. I was later told that I fainted right after Uncle Caphus collapsed. I woke up on Mama's bed, and Aunty Pri was fanning my face with a rolled-up newspaper. Since that night, Mama hadn't said a word to me. She'd gone from standing up for me to totally ignoring me. Hiding behind her from Uncle Caphus had made me feel protected and close to her once again. I believed her willingness to safeguard me from harm meant she had forgiven my transgression. But I was wrong. That night, when she called in the other kids for supper, she did not call me. And later, when she came into the bedroom to sleep, I bade her goodnight, and she acted like she didn't hear me, even though she had no problem hearing my brothers who were in the sitting room. The next few days followed the same pattern. When she wanted to say anything to me, she'd say it through one of my brothers or sisters, like, 'Tell your sister the food is ready,' or 'Ask your sister what she means by leaving the door wide open like that.' She never responds to anything I say to her, and if she can, she'll leave the room as soon as I enter. It was becoming unbearable. Her silence was killing me. Many days and nights, I lay in that bedroom, praying that she'd get the sjambok and beat me, get all that anger out, and be done with it so we could move on. But I guess, this time, her silence was her preferred method of punishment, and there was nothing I could do about it, except to leave, of course.

Gogo's house is just like it was when she was here. Nothing's been taken or moved from its place. Aunty Pri and her little son, Dingani, have stayed here for the last month since she left her husband. But right now, they are not here. She is at work, and Dingani is at preschool. I don't know how I would have felt about moving here if no one else lived in the house. I've never lived alone. But I think I would have come anyway. Anything would have been better than continuing to live with Mama's oppressive silence.

## BAFANA

He sits at the top of the hill and looks down at the picturesque meadow below him, admiring for the umpteenth time its vastness and mesmerising green and gold foliage. He can see the animals, the goats and cows, roaming, and the stick figures of the two shepherds playing in the tall grass from up here. He wishes he could take more pictures, but his camera roll ran out three days ago. He's been in the bush for eight weeks and tonight is his last night. After a week at the camp, he'd finally summoned up the nerve to approach Comrade Tshuma and ask for permission to return to Luanda to retrieve the rest of his belongings from the hotel. He felt confident by now that he'd gained all the comrades' trust. There hadn't been more close shaves with shooting incidents. In fact, after the first night, the guerrillas seemed to embrace him as an uninvited but welcome guest. No more questions were asked about his background and his motive for being in the camp. No one asked him how long he intended to stay. No one seemed to care. They appeared to be comfortable around him, and, after a few days, he started to feel the same in their presence. Still, even though he appreciated their show of friendliness, he would not reveal his true identity. He would not dare take that chance.

In the following days, he quickly learned the ranks of each man in the group. It was evident from the beginning that Comrade Tshuma was the leader. He appeared older than the other soldiers, so Bafana thought he might have earned his position by default. Next in line was Tamsanqa, followed by Mxolisi. The rest of the men appeared to hold the same rank. They were younger than these three and seemed to have their older comrades in high esteem. They took orders without question or hesitation, and Bafana thought this was because they were free to lord it over the new, much younger recruits – the children they were training. Whatever duties the three younger men were assigned, if they didn't feel like carrying them out themselves, they would delegate them to the youngsters in their care. This is how things ran here, and it was clear to Bafana that everyone knew their place.

He did not know why he felt it necessary to get Comrade Tshuma's consent to go back into town. It wasn't like he was one of the soldiers. He was a free man. Free

to come and go as he pleased. Perhaps he wanted to show respect to the top guerrilla. Anyway, he did, and Comrade Tshuma's response was, 'You can take the lorry. And one of the young ones to keep you company if you like.' Bafana was surprised by the offer of a van. He'd already taken several tours around the camp and had never seen anything that resembled a lorry. There was, however, a caterpillar truck – a rusted kwela-kwela like the kind driven by policemen and the Special Branch back home when they raided shebeens and schools in the township. The vehicle sat way out in the woods, and when he first saw it, Bafana assumed it had been abandoned by one of the neighbouring farms. Could that thing be what the older man was referring to when he said van? It looked decayed. Some of its mud-caked tires were flat, and Bafana had the impression that it hadn't moved from that spot in years.

If indeed, the old truck was what Comrade Tshuma was offering him, Bafana wondered where it had come from. It wasn't the first time he'd pondered about a property around the camp that the soldiers claimed ownership of. For instance, the animals, the two dogs, goats, and cattle, the younger boys took turns herding. He doubts the story that Comrade Mxolisi gave him, that they'd purchased them from a farmer. The soldiers didn't appear to have money of their own, yet they returned from their 'training' with a case of beer and packets of cigarettes every night. He suspected that muscle and intimidation were used to obtain these and, possibly, the truck and livestock.

'So, the bakkie runs? Didn't think it did.' He said when Comrade Tshuma handed him a rusty key he'd retrieved from his camouflage jacket.

'It does,' the old soldier said. 'But none of us here know how to drive.' Bafana thought his answer strange. He wondered why this man who couldn't drive was carrying around the truck key in his pocket. And if no one in the camp knew how to operate a vehicle, what was the truck doing here? Where had the soldiers got it from?

'I will get one of the farmers to come and do something about the tires. And tomorrow, the van will be ready for you,' Comrade Tshuma said with such finality that Bafana didn't dare ask him anything more.

The following morning, he was woken up by the noise of an engine. There were no windows in the L-shaped room, so the only way to see what was going on was to get up and go outside. All the soldiers and the older boys had already headed out to

wherever it was they went every sunrise for their training. He had never been invited to join them. He had no idea what this training involved or where it took place. Each morning, two of the youngest children were left behind to take care of the animals and perform the various domestic chores around the hut, sweeping the floor and washing everyone's clothes.

The sun was already high, even though it was barely 7 am. He followed the noise to the woods, where he found a stout and grey-haired man in overalls bent under the open hood of the truck. Emmanuel and Samson, the thirteen- and fourteen-year-old boys whose turn it was to stay home today, stood close by, curiously watching the man. There were empty buckets and dirty rags near where the boys had stationed themselves. Bafana introduced himself, but the man ignored him and continued to tinker underneath the lifted hood.

'Akezwa. He does not understand Zulu. Only Khoe and Portuguese' explained Emmanuel. 'He is the owner of that farm over there,' the boy gestured with his head.

'I see,' Bafana said, walking around the truck to admire its transformation. It looked like the farms, and the boys had been at work for quite some time. The bakkie was unrecognisable, having been cleaned from top to bottom. Free of all dust and muck, it stood gleaming in the sun. Bafana couldn't believe that this sparkling olive-green jalopy was the exact vehicle he'd mistaken for junk just a few days ago.

'*Obrigado*,' he thanked the silent farmer and shook his hand. From the afternoons he had spent herding the animals with them, he'd gleaned a few words of the local dialect from the children, who'd picked it up from the neighbouring kids. After the farmer left, the boys became boisterous, jumping into the truck and playing with the steering wheel. This was the first time Bafana had seen them act their age. At thirteen, Samuel, who was the youngest of all seven kids at the camp, turned to him and said, 'Comrade Tshuma said you would take one of us to Luanda. Please take me. Please, please, please....'

'No!' Emmanuel, who they sometimes called Manny, cut him short. 'He should take me!' 'Why is that?' Bafana asked the suddenly solemn fourteen-year-old.

'Because' the boy started to explain with all the wisdom of his age. 'I'm older. I'm the brainy one, and I know the way to Luanda.'

'So, do I,' the younger boy loudly protested. 'And, Manny, who the fuck told you that you are smart, hey? Who the hell lied to you, man?'

'I don't need to be told, Samuel. I know...'

'The fuck you do!' Samuel yelled and elbowed his friend. The two then commenced wrestling in the truck and yelling profanities at each other. Bafana almost didn't want to stop them. He was relieved the lads had transformed from serious mini guerrillas to regular, foul-mouthed adolescents. This behaviour - this normality was what he'd been missing. The two boys' juvenile behaviour reminded him of his younger self, when he and his brother Roy, who was two years younger than him, would turn from friends to enemies at the drop of a hat. One minute they'd be playing in harmony, and the next, they'd be grappling on the floor of their garage-turned-bedroom. Their fights never lasted longer than a day. It would just take their mother or one of their four sisters picking on one of them, and they would be allies once again, united against the projected enemy. It made him nostalgic for those long-gone days.

'Comrade Jerry,' Samuel turned to him. 'Tell this foolish boy that it is me you want to take.'

'Who are you calling stupid, man, hey?' Manny thumbed him in the head and turned to Bafana to plead his case, 'Comrade Jerry, if you take this puny kid, you will regret it. I tell you now you will be sorry, man. He knows nothing about cars. He can't help you if the truck breaks down. He can't show you the route to Luanda because he's never been. I have been there many times with the farmer when the comrades sent him to get us supplies. I can direct you there with my eyes closed.'

'Liar...' Samuel began, but Bafana had heard enough and barked at the lads to be silent.

Pulling them, one by one, from the truck, he said, 'You keep this up, and neither of you will go anywhere. Now, there's no reason why both of you can't come with me, except for the way you're behaving right now. The way you're acting makes me think I shouldn't bother with either of you,' he finished. Both boys gave looked puzzled, as if they weren't quite following.

'But Comrade,' Manny finally spoke up. 'If we both come to Luanda with you, who is going to look after the animals? Who's going to clean the hut and wash the clothes and...?'

'You can both do that. If you work together, you can get all those chores done before noon.' The boys didn't look convinced, so he added, 'I will help you. And if we hurry up, we can be in Luanda before lunchtime.'

Bafana's offer seemed to persuade the boys – they nudged and grinned at each other and gave Bafana the thumbs up. It didn't take them long to clean the hut. There was no real sweeping to be done as there was no actual floor to speak of. All they had to do was fold the blankets, pile the pallets in a corner and place the blankets on top of them. Then they had to tidy up the alcove, where the older girls prepared the food before. This chore required no time because the plates were washed and dried every night by the younger children. All Bafana and the boys had to do was hang the pots and pans on the hooks on the walls. Once they completed this, they stepped back into the blazing sun, rounded up the two goats, four cows, and two dogs into the veldt. As the animals roamed freely and the boys played close-by, Bafana hiked up the hill and found a large rock that appeared steady enough to sit on. He loved this part of the day and looked forward to it. He could be alone with the kids, get to know them more intimately, and learn their stories.

He started following the young ones on his second day in the bush. On the first day, he woke up to find everyone had already left the camp. The comrades and the older kids had gone into the bush for combat training. The two youngsters, whose duty was that day to stay home, had already taken the animals out into the veldt. He was hungover and had fallen asleep long after everyone else, spending the best part of the night tossing and turning and agonising over his decision to come out here. When Romeo and Sifiso, the designated shepherds for the day, returned to the hut, it was way past noon. Bafana had been up for more than four hours. He'd managed to find a small basin filled with water near the cooking area. He wasn't sure whether this had been left for his use, but he took it outside anyway and washed his face, neck, and armpits. When he was done, he emptied the basin against the wall and left it there to dry.

He found a covered tin plate near the hearth where he'd found the basin, back inside the L-shaped room. He lifted the top plate and discovered two thick slabs of bread dripping with butter and red jam. Staring at the bread made him hungry again, almost as famished as he'd felt yesterday when he arrived. He did not pause to wonder if this food had been left out for him or if this was someone's saved lunch. He picked up the slices of bread and sank his teeth into them. How ticked off the soldiers would be they saw him now, he thought. He imagined them quipping about his appetite again and remarking how he could still have room in his belly after all that pap he shoved in his mouth last night. He ate without respite until the plate was

empty. As soon as he'd swallowed his last bite, he felt thirsty. Terribly parched. He longed for a cup of coffee or tea to chase the breakfast he'd just gulped down. But, looking around, he found nothing of that nature. However, there was a black kettle sitting on the unlit, makeshift stove. He lifted it, praying there were still a few drops of water in it. He was in luck. There was enough to fill up an empty jar. Now he felt a little better. His head was still pounding from the Casas he'd downed with the soldiers last night, but at least now he'd managed to solve his hunger problem. Now he could almost think straight. He wondered why the soldiers had not bothered to wake him. Did they not want him to know where they were going or what they were doing? Had their suspicions about him returned? Maybe not.

Last night they'd all retired on a good note. He seemed to have gained their trust by the time they all went to sleep. What could he have done during his sleep to change that? Come on, *mfo*, you're fretting over nothing, he told himself, trying to talk dismiss the morbid thoughts. The comrades probably didn't want to wake you because they were considerate. They think you are still tired from yesterday and want you to rest before you move on. Move on? The thought of that brought a brand-new flood of worries. Of course, he would need to move, maybe sooner rather than later. But how would he do that? Comrade Tshuma had already unburdened. He wished he knew in which direction they'd headed so that he could follow them. He went outside and wandered around the kraal, hoping to spot someone - a neighbour or anyone passing by - who could give him a clue. But there wasn't a single soul in sight. He didn't want to venture too far from the camp if he got lost and couldn't find his way back. He contemplated retracing his steps to the elderly man who'd directed him to this place to ask him if he knew where the guerrilla's training site was. But even if he were to find the older man, how would he be able to ask his question in his limited Portuguese? Yesterday had been testing enough.

The glaring sun made it challenging to think and threatened another pounding headache. He was about to step back into the hut for shelter when he heard dogs barking and the children's laughter. He turned and saw two kids running towards him. He thought they were running because the two dogs behind them were chasing them, but it soon became clear they were merely engaging in a playful race with the canines. At first glance, it appeared that both children were boys, but when they got closer, he realised one of them was a girl in lads' shorts and a baggy t-shirt. By the time they reached him, the two youngsters were panting and hysterical.

‘Comrade, did you see that? Did you see it? We raced the animals, and we won,’ the girl intoned breathlessly. Bafana sized her up and believed her to be twelve or thirteen, fourteen at the most.

‘Again!’ The boy, who didn’t appear to be that much older, boasted. ‘Those dogs are useless. The comrades say they are for protection, but how can they protect us if they can’t even run. What good are they, hey?’

‘Well, maybe they are not slow. Maybe you are just too fast,’ Bafana said, and the two kids appeared pleased to hear that. They beamed their bright, white teeth at him. Then, as if suddenly remembering their manners, they quickly introduced themselves.

‘I’m Bongani,’ said the boy. ‘They call me Bo.’ Bongani, he thought. That was the name of one of Nandi’s little brothers, wasn’t it? Bo, the gentlest and quietest of the lot.

‘I’m Nomathamsanqa. But you can call me Noma,’ the girl offered in a perky voice. She seemed to be still gloating about her victory over the hounds.

‘How old are you, Noma?’

‘Thirteen.’

‘I’m also thirteen, but I will be fourteen very soon,’ Bongani proudly told him.

‘I’ll be fourteen before you,’ Noma said. Her boasting annoyed Bongani, who quickly countered with, ‘You may be fourteen before me, but I’ll always be stronger and faster....’

‘Don’t kid yourself, boy,’ Noma interjected. ‘I am faster than you. And stronger.’ She paused to pull back the sleeve of her t-shirt and show off her bicep. ‘And Comrade Mxolisi says I’m the best shooter out of all you pickneys!’ Bongani was offended and cried, ‘Pickney! Who are you calling a pickney? Can a pickney do a hundred push-ups, hey? Can a pickney do this...?’ Here Bongani turned to the girl and, without warning, lifted her off the ground.

‘Put me down! Put me down!’ Noma protested.

‘Okay. Enough.’ Bafana felt it was time for him to step in. ‘Put her down,’ he commanded to the boy, who immediately obeyed. ‘Now you have both made your point,’ he continued, ‘I think you are both strapping young soldiers. And I imagine you are both good with the bazooka. I take it the comrades have taught you very well?’

‘Yes,’ the two young soldiers murmured simultaneously.



'Hmmm. Now, I'm intrigued by this training. Can you tell me more?' He didn't have to plead with them. The two were more than eager to oblige.

'The comrades are training us to be warriors. Proper soldiers. Bold and fearless so that we can fight the war against our oppressors, the bloody Boers,' Bongani enunciated the words slowly as if explaining this to a child. Perhaps, it had been articulated to him by his superiors.

'So that we can win back our country,' Noma put in. 'They've been training us to shoot to kill, and...' Bafana didn't hear the rest. He was busy wondering what had driven this pubescent girl to want to spend her youth in this isolated bush, learning to kill. What had made her believe, at this age, that she was capable of fighting and winning a war that no one had so far managed to win. He thought about his three nieces in England, the oldest of whom wasn't that much younger than this girl. In the five years, he'd lived with them in their Islington semi-detached, he'd become very fond of his eldest sister's four children. He often took care of them when their parents were at work. He tried to picture the three girls and boy in this bush, doing what these two kids were boasting of doing here, but couldn't. He'd never even seen the boy, Mbuso Jr, play with a toy gun.

'How old were you when you came here, Noma? What standard were you in?' Bafana interrupted.

'Twelve. I was in standard six when my best friend, Soneni, and I decided to join the others crossing the border,' she answered proudly. 'What made you want to join, and where is Soneni now?'

'We wanted to be heroes. Like the others,' she expressed plainly, and Bafana was not surprised by the answer. 'But Soneni couldn't handle the training, so she and two others tried to run away. The comrades caught them, and we haven't seen them since.'

'I don't understand,' Bafana said, trying to follow. 'If you haven't seen them since, what makes you think they were caught?'

'Because when the comrades caught them, they brought them back to the camp,' Bongani explained. 'It was very late when they brought them back. We didn't see anything. We were sleeping, but we were woken up by their screams outside. And the next morning, there was no sign of them.' This revelation chilled Bafana. It also confused him. Were these two insinuating that the comrades had killed their three friends? And if they thought this was the case, why were they still here and

even sounding happy? Why did they talk admiringly about the soldiers who'd supposedly murdered their companions? Was it out of fear? Had they remained because they'd been threatened? All these burning questions raced through his mind, and, for the first time since his arrival, he felt confident again he had made the right decision in coming. There was no doubt in his mind these kids were in danger and needed him. He made up his mind to stay at the camp as long as it took to learn more about these children and find a way to get them out of here. From Bongani and Noma, he ascertained that all the children, including the older boys and girls like Thandeka, Sifiso, and Sindiswa, were in charge of taking care of the chores in the hut and herding the cattle. Each morning, two would remain in the camp while the rest went into the bush for combat training with the comrades. Bafana saw the perfect opportunity to get to know each of the kids. He would volunteer to stay and help them with their chores. From the way Bongani and Noma spoke freely, it was clear they hadn't been cautioned about talking to him. He would find out all he could about the kids and then develop a plan to get them out and get them back home.

For the next few days, he did all he could to get along with the comrades, to maintain their trust, and avoid doing or saying anything that would arouse their suspicions again. In the evenings, he ate and drank with them, listened to their life stories, and offered made-up ones of his own. In the mornings, when they left for their training, he pretended to be still fast asleep. He'd then get up and help the children perform whatever chores they'd been assigned for the day.

This way, he'd gotten to know all of the children and their stories. They'd all been enticed here by the same things that had lured Noma and her best friend Soneni - the promise of glory and a life of adventure. They were all runaways. Their parents and guardians had no idea where they were. None of them had imagined how difficult their new lives would be and how torturous and brutal the training that was to turn them into child soldiers. There was no glamour whatsoever in this new lifestyle they had traded for their old one. It wasn't that the soldiers did anything to harm them physically.

Apart from the night Soneni and the two others disappeared, Noma and Bongani claimed the soldiers had never laid a hand on them. It was the training itself that they found too punishing and back-breaking. No one had warned them they would be expected to get up before dawn and made to run through the woods, up and down the mountains, chasing and dodging imagined adversaries. None of them

had ever done more than ten push-ups before, but now they were expected to perform a hundred at the drop of a hat. The children complained about being forced to jump fences that were higher than their height. Many of them had injured themselves trying, only to be ordered to get up and try again. They complained that the guerrillas expected them to behave as fully-fledged soldiers, even though they were young recruits and still training. They were supposed to do everything correctly as if they'd already been well taught. They weren't supposed to whine when they were in pain. If they fell, they were required to get up, dust themselves down and carry on as if nothing had happened. All of them recounted crying themselves to sleep. They'd all fantasised about running away. Until that night. The night when Soneni and the other two disappeared.

One of the things that had concerned Bafana was that the soldiers might be taking advantage of the young girls and was waiting to hear such a complaint. But it never came, and he was relieved. In the following weeks, it would become apparent why the men never bothered to make any sexual advances to the young girls. In the days after his arrival, he started noticing women visiting the camp. These impromptu visits were usually on the weekends when the soldiers took a break from training time. The women would show up in groups of seven or eight, drink, and party with the men outside until dark. Then one by one, each would take the hand of a comrade and disappear with him inside the dark hut. Bafana couldn't tell if these women were paid local prostitutes or girlfriends of the soldiers. However, one thing was clear to him, though, the women didn't appear to be fearful of or intimidated by the men. They seemed to want to be there. However, whether it was the free booze or the men's company they came for, he could not say for sure. Sometimes the women outnumbered the soldiers, so there'd be one unpaired woman whom the soldiers would offer him. Bafana always politely declined. The first time they'd proffered him the spare woman, he'd mumbled, 'Thanks, guys, but I have a cherry at home I'm jolly with.' The words had just slipped out of his mouth. He was surprised to realise that even though they had broken up and he hadn't seen Nandi in more than two months, in his mind, she was still his girlfriend. He hadn't stopped thinking of her in that way. Even though the other men didn't know, he was embarrassed by his lie. He did not stop partying with the comrades, but he always excused himself when the women started visiting the hut. Sometimes he'd use this time to seek one of the younger boys and give him a driving lesson. He'd been teaching the comrades to

drive since his return from Luanda with Samson and Emmanuel. Each night, before the drinking began, he'd take one of the men out to the truck, sit them in the driver's seat and instruct them on how to start the motor and move the vehicle back and forth. He wasn't making much progress with the grown men because they were always too tired or agitated to concentrate after a long day of training in the bush. So, he devoted all his efforts to the younger ones who'd been left home during the day. It made him feel useful. It was easier to teach the kids because they were always eager to learn, and soon most of them could do more than just reverse and move the car forward.

When he was not giving driving lessons, he helped the children with their chores and followed them into the veldt. Sometimes he would stay in the veldt with them and listen to their stories. Other times he would just sit on top of the mountain and take pictures of them. He was grateful to Estella for having the forethought to rescue and safeguard his camera when the hotel clerk decided to give his room to another guest. After a bit of resistance, he was equally thankful that the same clerk had agreed to refund him half the money Bafana had paid for the room, which he had only enjoyed for one night. He would need this cash when he returned home, so he stuffed it in his sock and vowed to keep it hidden from the soldiers. The camera had come in very handy. He had managed to take a picture of every single child in the camp before the roll ran out. These images, he thought, would be helpful when he went back home and looked for the families of these children. He hadn't made any promises to them, but he had vowed to himself that, no matter how long it took him, he would bring all of these youngsters home, where they belonged.

Now, this is his last night, and he is ready to go. The soldiers have slaughtered a goat for his farewell meal. They, along with their women, have started celebrating in his absence. He can hear their drunken laughter from up here. He knows he should be making his way down to join them, but Bafana can't compel himself to move from his rock on this mountain from where he can look down and enjoy the scenic view around him and the scaled-down image of the village below. In the two months that he's been here, this place has become his favourite spot. It's the place he comes to when he wants breathing space away from his dope-smoking, hard-drinking companions or when he needs some time to think. He will miss this rock, he knows. And the child-soldiers, the boys and girls he's grown attached to. It's been an eye-opening two months, but it's now time to go.

He's overstayed his assignment by six weeks, a whole month and a half. He does not know whether he still has a job, but Bafana does not care. He is ready to go back and begin his mission. He has two things to do: get his cherry back (God, how he misses her!), and these kids the hell out of here and return them to their families.

15

NANDI

-Diary Entry-

March 22nd, 1976

What can I say about today? I guess it was the most surprising day of my life, after all I've been going through. Lately, I thought nothing else could astonish me. But what happened today threw me off knocked me to the six. I was alone at home, lying in bed reading *Cry, the Beloved Country* (for the third time), when I heard a knock at the door. Auntie Pri and little Dingani usually at work and pre-school at this time, and no one usually comes calling here, so I was surprised. But I went to answer it anyway, only to find Bheki standing there. 'Come. Come quickly. They want you,' he said as soon as I opened the door. He sounded out of breath as if he'd been running.

'Hey *wena*, slow down. Who? Who wants me?'

'Uncle Caphus.'

'You must be joking,' I snorted. After the way he assaulted me, I'd have to be out of my mind to present myself to that man voluntarily. I was surprised he had the nerve to show up at Mama's house again. I'd half expected him to turn up here and throw me out of his mother's house, but I thought embarrassment, if not actual fear, would have kept him from going back to Mama'.

'Go back and tell him I said go to hell,' I moved to shut the door, but Bheki stopped it with his foot.

'He says important people are coming.' Bheki insisted.

'I don't care if the Queen of England is coming; I am not going anywhere near that man, *uyangithola?*'

'Ye, I get you. *Mara...*' Bheki began to explain, but I hushed him. 'Aren't you the one who told me, just two weeks ago, that the man was trying to kill me?' I touched the top of my left eye, which was still purplish from Uncle Caphus's fist. I then turned my back to Bheki and pulled up my top to show him the marks his shoe had left on my back.

'I know,' Bheki mumbled. 'And I hate him and still want to kill him. *Mara* aren't you curious to come and see what he is talking about?'

'No, fucking hell,' I said and was about to turn and walk away when I heard the gate squeak. I looked over Bheki's shoulder and saw Aunty Pri approaching. She was still wearing her work uniform, which she usually changes before coming home.

'What's going on?' She said. 'One of Caphus's boys was just at my job saying I need to get home quick; something important is happening. What's he talking about?' Aunty Pri sounded put out. 'What's that man up to now?'

'Beats me,' I shrugged my shoulder. 'Bheki just came to tell me the same thing.'

'He said important people are coming,' Bheki repeated the message he'd been sent to convey. 'What the hell is he on about?' Aunty Pri looked at me suspiciously as if I, somehow, was in on whatever scheme her brother might have up his sleeve.

'*Lami angazi, njalo*, I don't care,' I told her. 'I'm not going.'

'I think we should go and find out what he's up to,' Aunty Pri said. 'After all, I've come all the way from work. I'd like to know why he's wasting my time now.'

'Me too,' Bheki put in his two cents. I knew he was dying with curiosity.

'You, too, can go if you want to. But I'm not going anyway near that man,' I told them. 'No way,' I said and turned to go back to the bedroom.

But Aunty Pri followed me and kept on insisting that we go. Finally, like Bheki earlier, she asked me if I wasn't the least bit curious to find out who these 'important visitors' were. I told her, no, but she kept on insisting, so finally, I gave in. She helped me forage through my still unpacked suitcase and select a dress that would halfway fit me. Then she changed from her uniform into a skirt and plain top. My hair was an overgrown, unruly mess because I'd been neglecting it since my return, so Aunty Pri lent me one of her scarves, and I wrapped it around my head. Then we were ready to go.

We joked to Mama's house, tried to predict who Uncle Caphus's 'important visitors' might be.

'Perhaps it's the police,' Bheki speculated. 'Maybe he's invited one of his *maphoyisa* friends to come and arrest us for Mandla beating him up with the frying pan.' Laughing, Aunt Pri said, 'No, he wouldn't dare tell anyone that his 17-year-old nephew had knocked him out. No, that would hurt his pride. I think his 'important people' have something to do with one of his endless get-rich-quick schemes. He must be trying to sell something to these people.'

'Us?' Bheki offered, and we burst out cackling. I hadn't laughed since the day Mpo and I got drunk at Mark and Zola's place. It felt good. And, I'll be honest, by the time we reached the house, I was bursting with curiosity. When we turned into our street, the first thing we saw was a shiny, navy blue car sitting in front of our house. Instinctively, we all three quickened our pace. When we got close, we saw that the car was a Mercedes Benz. It was so shiny and new looking it could have come straight from the factory. I had never seen a car like that in the township. I don't think the township had ever seen a car like that either. Now I was genuinely mystified, as were the neighbourhood kids, who had stopped their football game and were now circling the car, peeking inside its windows and caressing the surface with their grubby fingers. While Bheki joined them, Aunt Pri and I rushed into our yard. The front door was slightly open, and I was tempted just to go straight in. But I knew that would annoy Mama, so I went to the backyard and entered through the kitchen, which was deserted and quiet. Aunt Pri had already gone in through the front, and I could hear Uncle Caphus as he introduced her.

'My youngest sister, Priscilla.' I had never heard Uncle Caphus's voice sound this tender before. I don't think any of us had.

'*Siyajabula ukulazi*. I was pleased to meet you,' I heard a man's voice mumble, then a woman and another man echoed his words. I waited for Uncle Caphus to introduce the mysterious guests, but he did not. Maybe he had already done so while I was making my way to the back. The next thing he said, in his new voice, was, '*Uphi uNandipha? Where is Nandipha? Did she not come with you?*'

I did not wait for Aunt Pri to answer but made my grand entrance. Sitting on the sofa, and taking up most of it, was a plump lady in a pin-striped skirt suit, grey hat, black patent-leather shoes, and a matching handbag on her lap. She was flanked by two equally smartly dressed men. There was a marked resemblance between the three visitors, and it was more than the cosmic nose that dominated each of their faces. Uncle Caphus was sitting in a chair that had been fetched from

the kitchen. He had a brown suit most likely borrowed from a neighbour or friend because the trousers did not quite touch his bare ankles, and the jacket struggled to contain his bulbous belly. It was clear to see he had put effort into his appearance, but the truth is he looked ridiculous, almost comical, sitting across from these well-attired people. For a moment, I almost felt sorry and embarrassed for him. Mama and Aunty Pri were sitting on the floor, on pallets that my brothers slept on at night, their athen legs stretched out in front of them. All faces turned to me as I entered. I paused, suddenly feeling shy and uncertain. What to do now? Introduce myself or sit down and wait to be introduced? But before I could think, Uncle Caphus decided for me.

'Nandipha!' he said in the calmest voice he'd ever used with me. 'Where are your manners, my girl? *Awubingeleli abantu?* Aren't you going to greet our visitors?'

I quickly got down on my knees and approached the three on the sofa, offered my hand, and a respectful, '*Sawubona,*' to each. Each visitor acknowledged my greeting with a nod. When I was done, I went and sat down in the space Aunty Pri had made for me beside her.

'This is our daughter, Nandipha,' Uncle Caphus began. 'The one we're all gathered here about. Nandipha,' he turned to me. '*Ngabantu baka Bafana laba.* These are Bafana's people. His mother and uncles from his...'

Uncle Caphus went on, but I'd stopped following. He'd lost me at Bafana's people. How? How was it possible he had found them? How did he even know? I still hadn't revealed his name to anyone. Even after the beating, I'd refused to say who the father was. As far as I knew, Uncle Caphus didn't even know Bafana existed. The only people in my family who knew about him and had met him were my little brothers and sisters. Had he twisted one of their arms and made them tell him? I didn't think that was possible. I know my siblings well. They hate the tyrant as much as I do, and they are not weaklings. They wouldn't break, no matter how he threatened or bribed them. He had to have found out about Bafana from someone else. But who? I tried to think.

Then it came to me. Lindiwe. Uncle Caphus's eldest daughter. She and I were close once, and I used to confide in her. I remember we were still friends when Bafana and I started going out. Then she got pregnant, and Uncle Caphus barred her from coming to our house. I guess he thought I was a bad influence and probably blamed me for her pregnancy. I hadn't seen or spoken to my cousin in over two years, but I guess she must have believed that Bafana and I were still an item. I



couldn't think of anyone else who would have told Uncle Caphus about him. Even so, how had he managed to dig up his family? I'd met some of his family members a year after we'd been together. Bafana took me to Cape Town to meet his father and stepmother. He'd already introduced me to his younger siblings, Roy and the youngest sister, Teboho, who they called Titi. On our second trip to Cape Town, we stopped at Rhodes University to visit one of his older sisters, Mbali, two years older than him.

I had seen Bafana's mother from a distance – a couple of times when we stopped to fill up at the family's petrol station, and she happened to be inside – but I had never been formally introduced to her. Bafana had tried to get me to meet her; I just hadn't felt confident enough to be scrutinised by her at the time. From the way Bafana and his siblings spoke and joked about her, I'd gathered their mother wasn't the most likeable person on earth. I had the impression she was pretty snobbish and very judgmental. And I didn't feel ready to go under her microscope just yet. That's why I'd stayed in the car and refused to accompany him inside whenever we stopped at one of the shops or garages the family-owned, just in case his mother was there. But now she'd been brought to me, and there was no way to avoid her judgment.

I didn't have to wonder for long why Uncle Caphus had brought them here because he got to the business right away. 'So, as you can see for yourself, it is clear what our daughter's condition is. Our cherished girl, my brother's firstborn, who we have spent years and money nurturing and educating. We appreciate that what has happened between her and your son may have been....'

'Excuse me,' Bafana's mother cut him short. 'Our son is not here to speak for himself. We do not know for sure if this girl's condition has anything to do with him. For all we know, he's never even met this girl....'

'Oh, he's met her, all right,' it was Uncle Caphus's turn to interrupt. 'He's more than met her. That I can assure you,' he emphasised with a snort. 'I have witnesses who can attest to that fact, and I don't mind bringing them to you if I have to. Trust me on that.' He finished with a smirk. What witnesses was he talking about? I wondered. Who else had he dug up? Bafana's friends? How? And was this man seriously threatening to drag them to these people so they could testify that they had seen me with Bafana? Would he go that far? I thought that if he'd played detective and found out about our relationship, Uncle Caphus had a whole lot more information up his sleeve. He was a resourceful man, after all. He'd gathered all his

chips, and now he was ready to play. I thought that if he had found Bafana's friend, then he would have learned that not only had we been boyfriend and girlfriend, but we'd been shacking up together, playing house at his old home for six months. I didn't doubt that he'd been enlightened about this and was planning to use this knowledge to his advantage. 'Our son is not here to speak for himself,' Bafana's mother repeated. 'Whatever this girl and your so-called witnesses have told you means nothing to us. Just because your daughter has decided to name him as the father of this baby that she's carrying doesn't mean that we should accept it. It is evident our son does not believe he is the father, or we would know about it. He would have come to us with this news.'

Her words angered me, and I wanted to speak up and correct this woman, but Mama hushed me with her look before addressing Bafana's mother.

'I'm sorry you feel that way, Mrs Mkwanzani,' she said in a gentle but dogmatic voice.

Again, I was tempted to jump in and set the record straight. This woman was not Mrs Mkwanzani. She'd lost the right to the name over a decade ago. I'd met the current Mrs Mkwanzani, and she was a much more pleasant and reasonable person.

'But,' Mama continued. 'Did it ever occur to you that your son has not told you because he does not know? Perhaps our daughter has not had the opportunity to inform him...'

'Not had the chance to tell him?' Bafana's mother snarled, then chuckled like what Mama had just said was the most ridiculous thing she had ever heard. 'This girl looks like she's about to drop that thing she's carrying. What has she been waiting for?' She snarled. It was an exaggeration, of course. Now, I don't deny that I'm showing. Anyone who has eyes can see I'm pregnant, but I'm not so big that the baby will pop out any minute. I'm still under six months if Nurse Tsebo's calculations were dead on. Then the former Mrs Mkwanzani cleared her throat and nudged the brother on her right to remind him it was his turn to speak. He took the cue, cleared his throat and, looking me straight in the eyes, declared his view of the situation.

'Perhaps your daughter has not told him because she is not sure who the father of this child she is carrying is. Perhaps she doesn't know who....'

I did not let him finish. I jumped in and yelled, 'I know who the father is. I have no doubt who the father is, thank you very much....'

'Nandipha! Be quiet, girl!' Uncle Caphus yelled. But I ignored him. I was angry, and I was on a roll. No one was going to hush me now.

'If you are in doubt... Better still,' I turned my fiery eyes on Bafana's mother. 'If your precious son is in doubt, why didn't you bring him here to deny it? Why isn't he here?'

Bafana's mother seemed unmoved by my outburst or my seething rage. Instead, she went on as if I had not spoken at all.

'Listen, young lady,' she said, pointing a manicured finger at me. 'You may have managed to fool a lot of men with your pretty face and those big eyes of yours. But you don't fool me one bit. I know girls like you. I have met plenty of conniving women like you. I know my son very well. And I know the kind of women he goes out with. You, my dear, are not his kind. Now I'm sorry that you've gotten yourself into this messy situation. You've been let down by whoever helped get you

into this unfortunate state. But you are not going to stick this on my son. You are not, you hear me? *Uyangizwa?* Do we understand each other?'

She was getting up to leave, and I still had my mouth wide open, trying to digest what she had just said to me, when Uncle Caphus, in his imposing and stern voice, told Mrs Mkwanzazi to sit down. He was done with pretending and was no longer interested in playing Mr Nice. 'If you think you are going to stick us with that,' here he paused to point at my swollen belly, 'you've got another thing coming. Now, I've tried to be fair with you people and give you a chance, but it seems you have no interest in cooperating with us. You are sitting here with your nose up in the air, looking down on us like you think we are nothing but trash, dirt beneath your feet. You want us to get on our knees and beg you to take responsibility for what your son has done to our daughter. It should be you on your knees pleading with me not to go to the police right now.'

'What?' It was the other uncle, who had not yet spoken. 'What are you talking about, man?' He said, voicing the question I think everyone else in the room wanted to ask. We all turned our heads to Uncle Caphus and waited for his answer. 'Yes, I'm tired of trying to be nice here as if I'm the one who did something wrong. You,' he pointed at Bafana's mother, 'seem to be so sure you know your son so well. Do you? Do you really?' He repeated the question louder, this time as if the person he was addressing had moved to another room. 'Do you know who he has been living with in the last six months? In that old house of yours in Orlando East, the same house

where you raised all your precious children? Do you know, hey? And do you know how old this girl was when he took her to bed – this girl who you believe is not his type? Do you know, hey? I'll tell you. Sixteen. Sixteen years old. That's right,' he was nodding up and down his bald head as if he'd finally won a hard-fought war. 'And do you know what they call that in this country? Statutory rape,' he said before anyone could answer him.

'What?!' I think I was the first one to shout it, but the word echoed around the room. Rape? Of all the schemes Uncle Caphus could have come up with, a rape charge! No one had seen it coming. Everyone in the room looked astounded, and Uncle Caphus seemed to be enjoying the shock he had created. I couldn't tell if he'd had this rape allegation up his sleeve all along or if this was a last-minute strategy that had just popped up in his head. 'That's right,' he said, his head still bobbing up and down. 'I said it. In this country, they call what your son did to our daughter – who is not his type – statutory rape. Now, unless you want me to get up from this chair and head straight to the police station, I suggest you start....'

I couldn't take this one more minute, so I shouted, 'Stop! Stop right now. He didn't rape me....'

'Nandipha, you shut up!' Uncle Caphus yelled back. '*Thula wena!*' Then, turning his attention back to the trio on the sofa – the once-upon-a-time important people – he continued with his threat.

'Unless you want to see your son sitting in jail for the next ten to fifteen years, you'd better cooperate with me...!' 'Man, you are ridiculous,' one of the uncles on the sofa put in his two cents. 'Do you think you can blackmail us with this nonsensical rape claim of yours?'

'I'm ridiculous? I'm ridiculous?' Uncle Caphus's animated cry resounded so loud I was sure everyone in Naledi Township heard it. 'We'll see if the courts think so... Lets' see who'll be laughing then.'

I couldn't take any more. I got up and stormed out through the front door. Behind me, I heard Uncle Caphus shouting, 'Nandipha! Nandipha *wena! Phenduka la!* Come back, you.' I did not turn around but continued walking away.

Once I was out of the gate, I quickened my pace, heading in the opposite direction to Gogo's house. I did not want to go back there because I knew he would send someone to come and get me or follow me himself, and I did not want to be anywhere near that man. I still could not believe the stunt he had just tried to pull.

So, Aunty Pri had been right after all. The man was up to his no-good schemes. He was selling something. And this time, I was the product he was peddling. To think he believed he could profit from my pregnancy, from my foolish mistake!

Yes, I was still mad at Bafana for how he had betrayed me and still outraged by his betrayal. I had loved him with all my heart, but that passion crumbled to bits when he took off with Besta and left me alone in his house for three days. He'd broken my heart and my trust, and I hated him for that. But I did not loathe the man enough to accuse him of raping me. Uncle Caphus had it all wrong. Yes, I was young when Bafana and I met. But I was closer to seventeen than sixteen. And he was twenty-one. We did not have sex until after my matriculation, a week or so after my eighteenth birthday. We'd gone out for a year and a half without doing anything but kiss in his car. And if I were to claim that he tried to coerce me into sleeping with him during that year and a half, I'd be lying. I'm not saying that he was a saint.

Sometimes, he did want to take it a step further as an average guy would, but our fooling around only went as far as I allowed it. When I asked him to stop, he would do so right away. He respected me. But I wasn't born yesterday. I didn't try to fool myself into believing that we were both abstaining or that he had taken a vow of celibacy because he loved me. Common sense told me he already had a woman giving it up to him freely, perhaps a woman closer to his age and more mature. This explained why he wasn't pressuring me into sex. Otherwise, why else would an eligible, grown man with a plethora of women throwing themselves at him waste his time on a teenage girl who was determined to hold on to her virginity?

He had just returned from England, and I had come back to Naledi Township to live with my grandmother after being thrown out of Sacred Heart Boarding School when we met. He'd landed his first job as a journalist at The Rand Daily Mail, and I'd been accepted at Naledi High School for my matriculation. Up to now, I believe he is the most handsome man I have ever met. He had everything going for him, looks, height, money, a good job, and a car. Yet, despite all this and his family's wealth, he was pretty humble and very down to earth. This trait of his was what attracted me to him. He could have had his pick. But he chose me—a skinny, knock-kneed girl from Tembisa Township who'd been expelled from her boarding school. Anyway, why he picked me is irrelevant now. The fact is, he treated me like a bit of cherub. He never once forced himself on me, never needed to. Putting aside his faults and what happened in the end, he was good to me. We had good times together. Our

relationship was beautiful, I'll even say unique, while it lasted. That's why I could no longer sit there and let Uncle Caphus desecrate the memory of what we had by accusing him of rape, statutory or not.

I walked to the little park near Tembisa Community Centre, where I used to play tennis as a kid. It was deserted today for some reason, so I sat on one of the swings and tried to think. I wasn't quite sure what to make of Uncle Caphus's threat if he was serious or not about going to the police to report this fictitious rape charge. I knew he had friends in the force. After all, he is an astute man and always tries to surround himself with people he perceives as useful. If he goes ahead with this false accusation against Bafana, the case might end up in court. Unless, of course, Bafana's people pay him whatever price he is asking to make him go away, which in fact, they might have to do to avoid embarrassment. It was clear that Uncle Caphus was trying to extort money from the family. What worried me was how far he would go to get what he wanted. I hadn't sought out Bafana to tell him about the pregnancy for the simple reason I didn't want him to think I was desperate and trying to get back with him. I wanted him to know I meant it when I told him it was over, and I never wanted to see him again. The fact that I was pregnant and would now be stuck with his child for the rest of my life was unfortunate. But it didn't change the way I felt about him. It was important to me to hold on to my pride, no matter what. But how can I do so with my uncle trying to extort money from his family? What will Bafana make of these rape charges when he hears about them, I wonder? And how will I be able to convince him I had nothing to do with it? Will he believe me?

I don't know how long I stayed in the park, but it was dark when I left. Aunty Pri had returned when I got back to Gogo's house. She told me what happened after I stormed out of Mama's house. Uncle Caphus, as I suspected, laid out his plan. He didn't beat about the bush but told the trio that unless they paid 1,000 rands, which he'd calculated to be sufficient compensation for their son damaging me (yes, I am damaged goods now) and a further 3,000 rand to keep him quiet about the rape, he was going straight to the police. According to Aunty Pri, Bafana's mother told him to go to hell. She advised him to find another fool to con. Until her son admitted to her face, she wasn't going to believe that he'd ever had anything to do with me. She advised Uncle Caphus to stop wasting his time scamming her family and start looking for the real culprit who knocked up his niece. After giving my uncle her piece of mind, Bafana's mother signalled to her brother that they were done, and the three

of them had stood up and marched out. I'm sure there were more nasty exchanges, but I guess Aunty Pri wanted to give me the condensed version. Anyway, it's been a whammy of a day. Overnight I've gone from being a girl who brought shame to her family to a rape victim. Now, I'll lay my knackered head to rest and wait to see what tomorrow has in store for me.

16

## BAFANA

He's been back in Soweto for less than an hour and already on his way to see her. His train pulled up at Johannesburg railway Station at the crack of dawn, a few minutes after six, and he took a kombi from there to East Orlando. He quickly washed his face at home, changed his clothes, and then spent a few minutes looking for his car keys. He needed a shave, and he knew that. A shave and a proper bath. But he had no time to wait for bath water to boil on the stove. He needed to see her right away. It has been ninety-eight days. Ninety-eight days without seeing her or hearing her voice and, God, does he miss her! He has never pined for anyone like this in his life before. Never! The last few days at the camp, watching the comrades take turns to entertain their tipsy women in the hut had brought home the full impact of his loss. It made him realise how much he missed her and what a good thing he'd had going on.

After Nandi had walked away from him, he'd made several attempts to get in touch with her. He'd sent a couple of letters through her brother Bheki, begging her to come back. Those went unanswered. He wasn't sure if she'd even bothered to read them. Then after a while, he began to accept that she wasn't coming back and tried his hardest not to think about her. He tried to forget about Dumo, too, his once close friend who had brought about his misery, but it was not easy to let go of the anger and deep hatred he felt towards him. One time he ran into him at Sis MaBree's and tried to jump him again, but their friends, Ndo and Nkosi, who'd accompanied

him to the shebeen, got between them. Soon he would be going off to Angola, and Bafana was looking forward to the distraction. He thought it would give him a chance to heal, forget about his loss, and move on. But he was wrong. The distance only seemed to fuel his longing. The longer he was away, the more nostalgic he felt. By the end of his stay, it was clear to him there would be no other way out of this anguish except to find his way back to her. He was sure by now he could not live without her, that she was the only one he wanted and needed.

And so now, here he is driving down the unpaved streets of Naledi Township, hungry and anxious but determined to find her. He knows she's not at the university because he's already called her friend, Zola, at her boyfriend's place. Also, he's already made a stop at her mother's house in Tembisa Township. There was no one at home, but the next-door neighbour had poked her head over the fence and told him, 'If you're looking for Nandipha, she's not there.' He hadn't stopped to wonder how the woman had guessed it was Nandi he was looking for, but Bafana politely asked her if she knew where the person that he was looking for might be.

'Try the grandmother's,' the woman had replied, then turned and walked back into her house. Thank God he knows where the grandmother lives. He's dropped her off there a few times before. It is actually near where he and Dumo had first met her. She was walking from school with her two friends. It takes him a mere twenty minutes to get to Naledi because he's driven above the speed limit and ignored all the robot lights. At one crossing, he almost ran over a vendor. Anyway, he's here now, knocking at the door and waiting. There is no answer, but he will not go away because he's noticed a tweaking of the curtain at the window. He thinks it is her. Maybe he is wrong. Perhaps it's someone else. Still, he will not leave. Whoever is in there will have to come out and speak to him. He knocks again and waits. Still no answer. Then he hears the gate rattle behind him. He turns and sees Bheki, the brother, approaching.

'Where have you been?' Bheki says to him. 'I waited and waited for you. Where have you been all this time?' He demands in a voice just short of a whine. Bafana is not sure what he is talking about. He does not remember making any plans to see the boy. He does not know what to tell him, but Bheki appears to be waiting for an answer. Bafana watches him as he tucks a football under his arm and shifts from one barefoot to another. Bafana remembers buying him the football for his twelfth, or was it his thirteenth birthday?



'How about *sawubona* Bafana? How are you?' He finally says, flashing the boy what he thinks is a friendly grin. Bheki shrugs his skinny shoulders but does not reply and remains sullen.

'Okay,' Bafana gives up a smile and frowns. 'What's your problem?' He asks.

'I wrote to you,' Bheki maintains the grumpy look. 'Two letters I sent. Did you even bother to read them?'

'You wrote to me? *Eish*, shame. Sorry, but I was away,' Bafana tells him, hoping his apology and explanation will improve the boy's taciturn mood. But it doesn't. If anything, Bheki sounds even more irked and asks him in a suspicious voice where he'd been.

'Angola,' Bafana tells him.

'I don't believe you. All this time?' Bheki says.

'*Ja*, man. All this time.'

'I don't believe you,' Bheki tells him again. Bafana is beginning to feel weary. His patience is starting to wear thin. He doesn't think he should be standing here explaining his absence to the boy.

'*Eish*, man,' he says. 'You don't believe me? That's tough. Nothing I can do about that, is there? So, let's just leave it like that, shall we? Where's Nandi?'

But Bheki refuses to leave it alone. 'You want me to believe that you don't know what happened?' he says in a condescending tone that reminds Bafana of the voice his mother used to resort to when she was trying to browbeat her children into admitting a lie that she'd caught them in. Bafana almost feels chastised.

'What happened where? To whom?' He quizzes his interrogator.

'You know what I'm talking about,' Bheki isn't going to make it easy for him; this is becoming clear. 'Don't pretend you don't. You know exactly who I'm talking about.'

'No, man, I have no clue. Now, do you mind filling me in...'

'Fill you in? You want me to fill you in on what you did?' Bheki is yelling now, almost hysterical. Bafana is puzzled. Of course, it is evident to him by now that Bheki's chagrin and anger have to do with more than just unanswered letters. But what? What outrageous offence could he have committed from thousands of kilometres away to piss off the boy so much, Bafana wonders? Surely, he isn't mad about the breakup, is he? That wouldn't make sense, of course, because he, Bheki, had been there when it happened so, He knows for a fact that it was Nandi who'd walked away from the relationship. She'd dumped him, and he, Bheki, had been

there to witness it all. He'd even sat in the car and consoled him after he'd been discarded like old trash for crying out loud! So why is Bheki, the boy who only three months ago had been so supportive, now standing here and treating him like he's committed a grievous, unforgivable crime? He tries to appeal to the boy, and, putting on the most pleasant tone he can master, he tells him, 'Listen, *mfo*. I've been on the train for eight hours and haven't slept a wink or eaten a thing since yesterday. I'm tired and hungry as hell and want nothing more than to go home and jump into my bed right now. But I need to see Nandi. I must see her. So, where is she?' *Uphi uNandi?*' The desperation in his voice is crystal clear. But Bheki ignores it and commences bouncing the football on his knee. 'Listen,' Bafana continues. 'I've already been to your house, so I know she's not there. Now, is she here?' Still, he gets no answer.

'Listen to me, Bheki,' he tries again. 'I need to see her. *Uyangithola?*'

'Maybe she doesn't want to see you,' Bheki, still bouncing his ball, finally replies.

'Maybe she can come out and tell me herself,' Bafana shoots back. Then he reaches into his wallet and retrieves the last two rands he has in there. He hands them to Bheki. He knows this tactic always works with the boy. It's probably what he's been holding out for. Bheki lets the ball bounce away. He takes the money and quickly shoves it into his khaki shorts. The sour look evaporates from his mug, and his voice has lost that testy edge when he faces her.

'Wait here. I'll see if I can get her to come out,' Bheki tells Bafana before disappearing around the back of the house. Bafana picks up the ball and bounces it against the wall as he waits. It is still relatively early in the morning, yet the sun is already scorching hot. He sits on the doorstep, which is so hot it burns his bum through his jeans. But he can't be bothered to get up. So instead, he watches as school children in various uniforms start to fill the street. Soon, Bheki reappears around the corner and delivers her message.

'She said, go away.'

'Go back and tell her I'm not leaving. Not before I speak to her.'

'Do I have to?' Bheki moaned. 'I've already done what you paid me to.'

'Like hell, you have,' Bafana wants to yell, but a better idea comes to his mind. 'Fair enough,' he sighs and gets up from the step. He walks towards the gate, then turns around and says, 'By the way, Bheki, did you hear that the Orlandos are

playing against the Highlanders next Sunday?' Just as he knew it would, this piques the boy's interest.

'Where?' He says, his eyes brightening.

'Jabulani Stadium,' Bafana says and continues striding towards his car.

'Are you going?' Bheki is a step behind him.

'Of course. Wouldn't miss it for anything.'

'Can I come? Please, please,' the boy pleads. 'Please, I'll do anything. I'll go back in there and beg her to take you back. Please, please...'

'Well, I was planning to take Ndo, but...'

Bheki doesn't let him finish. 'She's in the bedroom. You can go through the back. The door is open. I have to go to school now,' he says and starts to sprint towards the gate. When he gets there, he turns around and shouts, 'See you Sunday, hey?'

'See you,' Bafana calls back.

'The Indian's,' Bheki says.

'Sharp, *mfo!* The Indian's it is then!' he confirms with a thumbs up before heading towards the backyard. He's never been this far before; has never made it past the gate. In the past, Nandi would always ask him to drop her at the top of the street. The backyard is small but immaculate, no unsightly weeds anywhere. A galvanised tin tub sits against the greyish wall with a few rows of baby cabbage and green tomatoes. He wonders who tends to it. As far as he knows, the grandmother lives here alone. Then he remembers Nandi telling him that her Gogo worked as a gardener, tending to white people's yards in Sandton.

He pushes the door. It squeaks. The tiny kitchen is as orderly and neat as the backyard. There is barely any furniture, a stove and a small, wood table with two mismatched chairs. He crosses to the next room, the sitting room. It is just as scantily furnished, with only a brownish sofa with a crocheted yellow blanket over the back and a long, tea-stained coffee table in front of it. The floor is bare concrete. Adjacent to this room is a door. It is closed. Bafana gently knocks on it.

'What is it now?' An exasperated voice answers. It was her voice – the voice he's been desperately longing to hear. He doesn't answer.

'Wena Bheki!?' She calls. He opens the door. Slowly. She is lying on the bed, Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* up close to her face. Then the book hits the floor, and she is sitting up on her elbows, looking straight at him.

'What do you want? Ufunani?' She asks. Her voice is barely more than a whisper.

'You. Ngifuna wena. I want you,' he answers, sotto voce. He can hear his own heart beating with excitement.

'Didn't Bheki tell you I didn't want to see you? Kakutshelanga uBheki?'

She looks straight at him but avoids his eyes. He looks deep into hers. The rage is still there, he can see. Wrath still shines from her eyes as if no time has passed at all. Though now there's something else. Something he'd missed the last time—repulsion.

'Ja, he did. And I told him I wanted to hear it from you.'

You've got some nerve, Bafana. I'll give you that. What makes you think you can barge in here and... '

'Shhh,' Bafana hushes her as he creeps into the room and closes the door behind. Slowly he advances to the bed, 'whispering. 'I know you're still mad at me about that little argument, but please, Nandi, listen to me....'

'Ha!' she spits. 'Little argument. Is that what it was to you?'

'Nandi...baby... I'm sorry. I've already said it a dozen times. It was just a misunderstanding – nothing else. I know you don't want to believe me, but I also know deep down, you know I'm telling the truth. That arsehole, Dumo, was just trying to cause trouble between us. I would never do anything like that to you. Never. Please believe me. Please, I beg you... ' He kneels before her and tries to take her hands, but she quickly pulls away.

'That arsehole, Dumo, is your friend,' she screams. 'What would be his reason for lying?' What did he have to gain?'

'Ja, what a friend he turned out to be, hey! The man wanted you from day one. Everyone knew it. Even you could tell, I'm sure... ' Bafana tries to reason but becomes aware that his words sound like an accusation.

'What?' she cries and sounds genuinely surprised. 'What the hell are you saying? That's the craziest thing I've ever heard. Where on earth did you come up with that idea? That man's always been so cold to me. Even getting him to say hello was like....'

'Sounds crazy to you, but it's the truth. If you thought clearly, you'd see that Dumo's behaviour is just an expression of his anger and frustration over the fact that you chose me rather than him.' He says. 'Never mind about him,' he says, instead. 'It

doesn't matter now, does it? He doesn't matter. I'm here to talk about us, not Dumo. I want you back, baby. I want you to give me, no, I want you to grant us another chance. What do you say? Please say you will. Please, please, baby,' he pleads and tries to hold her hands again.

'No way. No way, Bafana,' she says, and he can see in her eyes she means it. Still, he presses even as she recoils from his touch.

'What do you mean? Baby, what do you mean by that?' He gets up from his knees and sits next to her on the bed. He tries to put an arm around her.

'Please don't touch me,' she says, bumping her head against the wall as she tries to move away. Well, at least she's not screaming or threatening you yet, he thinks. Encouraged, he pushes his luck and steps further. '*S'thandwa*, can we at least talk about it? Please? *Ngiyakucela s'thandwa sami.*'

'Talk about it? Ha! Don't you think you have said enough? You and your family? Do you have more to say? More insults you want to throw my way, hey?'

'Nandi, what are you on about? You know damn well I haven't spoken to you in three months. And what's this about my family?' He wants to remain composed, but he can feel his voice rising and knows he's about to lose it.

'Bafana,' she says, and he sees that her eyes are beginning to water. 'You may not have spoken to me in damn near three months, but you sure still somehow managed to get your point across to me, didn't you?'

'Look,' he sighs and tries to maintain a calm voice, even though he feels far from calm. I'm sorry, but I am still not following you. Can we stop talking in riddles, please? To be honest with you, I'm tired as hell!'

'I'm not following you,' she mimics, more indignantly than sarcastically. Then, suddenly, she's off the bed and on her feet. Then she throws off the sarong that she wrapped around her body and stands there stark naked. Bafana's jaw drops as he stares in disbelief. It is small, just a tiny, perfectly round mound where her flat belly used to be.

'This, Bafana,' she says, in a tiny, teary voice, 'is what I'm on about. Now, are you following me?'

He feels weak, as if someone has just knocked the wind out of him. And then, before he can catch them, three little words escape his mouth, 'Is it mine?'

## NANDI

- Diary Entry -

June 12th, 1975

I can't believe who showed up again today. I was outside in the backyard bathing Dingani in the zinc tub, getting the little rascal ready for the creche. I had just finished soaping Di's head, and we were mucking about, splashing each other, just being silly, you know, when I heard someone coughing behind me. I sensed it was him before I even turned around. I don't know anyone in this world with as much nerve as Bafana. He was standing next to the clothesline where Aunty Pri had hung the sheets and towels to dry. He was smiling, looking as carefree as the linen fluttering in the wind. I wanted to pick up a stone and throw it at him, knock those Colgate teeth out of his arrogant mouth. Some balls, the man has - coming back here, smiling for God's sake!

After the words we exchanged yesterday, I didn't think he would show his face here. Not any time soon, anyhow. But for the fact that Dingani was there, I swear I would have quickly wiped that disgusting grin off his face. But, anyway, I wasn't about to cause a scene and frighten my little cousin, so I played it cool. I'm still a lady, after all, despite his mother's opinion of me.

I wanted to ignore him entirely and pretend he was not there, but I knew he would not leave unless I spoke to him. Besides, I was curious to find out why he had come back. What did he have to say this time?

'Yebo, Nandi,' he greeted me. I pretended I didn't hear him, but when he repeated it and took a step closer to where I was kneeling, I mumbled 'Yebo,' then got up, pulled a towel from the clothesline, and started drying Di. 'Let me help you,' he offered when he saw I was struggling to lift the little bugger out of the tub, but I said, 'I can manage.' A lie. I don't know what Aunty Pri feeds this child, but I know a four-year-old shouldn't be this heavy. Carrying him into the house almost killed me. My little sister Za is nearly six, and she doesn't weigh half as much as Dingani.

As I lugged my load through Gogo's little garden, careful not to step on the cabbage heads and onion bulbs, I could hear Bafana's footsteps behind me. Just before we got to the back door, he touched my shoulder and said, 'Nandi, we need to talk,' and without missing a step, I turned around, looked him straight in the eye, and said, 'I know.' I could see he was surprised by my answer. What did he expect? That I would tell him to fuck off or go to hell like I did the last time we fought at his house? The truth is, it's what I felt like saying. But I didn't. As I said, I'm curious to hear what he has to say this time. Plus, I also felt it was high time I gave him a piece of my mind, let him know what I think of him and his snobbish family. I was tired of carrying around this rage since the visit from his mother and uncles. 'Come in,' I said, and he followed me into the house. He went into the sitting room while I took Di to the bedroom to get him dressed.

I was glad that Aunt Pri had the foresight to get up extra early this morning and clean the house before leaving for work. She'd polished the floors with Cobra wax, and the acrid smell still lingered about the place, reminding me of Gogo. Gogo was a neat freak, and I can now see that her youngest daughter, Aunt Pri, took after her. I delight in a clean home as much as the next person, but I'm not one for getting down on my knees and scrubbing floors. I will be sorry when she and Uncle Joseph make up, and she and Dingani return to their home. Not only do I appreciate her housekeeping skills, but I've started to enjoy her and Di's company. Anyway, I'm grateful that she decided to clean the house this morning because I don't want Bafana thinking we live like pigs. It's bad enough that his mother has formed an opinion about us already. I want him to know that even though we might be lacking, we're not filthy.

Dingani was restless, wouldn't stand still while I tried to put Vaseline on his face and body and comb his overgrown hair. I struggled to get him dressed and finally managed, but he took off before I could put his shoes on. I found him in the sitting room, hiding behind Bafana's back, 'Hide me, uncle, hide me,' he was mumbling through giggles. I grabbed his little legs, and pulled him off the sofa, and told him to go back to the bedroom and put on his shoes. Of course, that little devil fought me; he kicked and screamed, claiming he didn't want to go to the creche anymore; he wanted to play with 'uncle'. Kids! He'd only known the guy for five minutes. No wonder they are easy to steal. Anyway, I finally got Di to leave. And then it was just the two of us.

Bafana snuggled up close to me and took my hands in his. I could smell his Vogue Man after-shave, and I almost gagged. Not because I don't like the scent or because of his touch; it's just that any smell makes me gag now.

'Nandi,' he said, his voice soft, whispery. '*Uxolo*. Please forgive me. I don't know what came over me yesterday. I didn't mean to say what I said. Those words, I don't even know how they came out of my mouth, because...well, the truth is, I wasn't even thinking them. I swear to God, I wasn't....'

'*Ja*, of course, you didn't, you son of a bitch,' I thought as I watched his mouth move to form more lies. Is it mine? Those words had stuck in my head and kept me up all night since yesterday when he uttered them. So now he expects me to believe the question just popped out of his gob without entering his mind? Bafana must think I'm still that naive sixteen-year-old schoolgirl he met three years ago. I should have kept walking that day when he whistled at me. I should never have jollied with him. Never. And I told him so. But he didn't seem to be listening. He kept going on and on with his pathetic apologies.

'Nandi, I need you to forgive me, *s'thandwa sami*.'

I just looked at him and let him carry on.

'Yesterday, when I came to see you, it was to apologise for our last fight and ask you to give me another chance. And then when I saw you were pregnant, I don't know, the surprise threw me off, made me say the wrong words. I guess I was just shocked, and I reacted badly. I reacted without thinking, but I didn't mean....'

'Shocked?' I wanted to laugh. '*Ja*, I bet you were shocked, alright. What did you think we were doing in your bed all those months? I wanted to ask him. Where did you think it was all leading to, you idiot? But, no, sorry, I'm the idiot for allowing myself to get sucked in by your lies. All those false reassurances you whispered in my ear. Relax, *s'thandwa*, I know what I'm doing. Trust me. *Ja*, and like a fool, I trusted you.

Bafana continued expressing his regrets and begging for a second chance, but I stopped listening after ten minutes or so. I wondered if he was telling the truth about not knowing that his mother and her brothers had dropped in on us. After pondering over it for a while, I decided that he very well might be. Having met his mother and knowing what kind of woman she was, I wouldn't put it past her to have kept him in the dark. Also, he hadn't mentioned Uncle Caphus. It didn't make sense that he would know about the visit but not be aware of the accusations that my uncle had



made about him. I was sure that if he'd caught wind of the statutory rape allegations, Bafana would have brought it up. It would have been the first thing he'd bring up. Anyway, I was relieved he didn't seem to know. It spared me from having to explain that I hadn't planted that idea in my moronic uncle's thick head. Thank God for that, I thought. But why was my throat starting to feel constricted?

'I love you. *Ngiyakuthanda sthandwa sami*. And I know, deep down, you know it too.' Bafana was saying, and I wished that he would just shut up. His words brought up sensations I wasn't ready to deal with just yet - making me teary. So far, I'd done an excellent job keeping my emotions intact. I didn't want to lose it now - not in front of him.

Just then, Dingani came running into the room, holding his shoes by the string, one in each hand. 'What's wrong? *Ini uSis Nandi ekhala?*' He demanded, eyeing Bafana suspiciously.

'Nothing's wrong, Di. I'm fine.' I tried to assure him as I wiped away my tears. It took a bit of convincing, but once he was satisfied that I was indeed alright, Di allowed Bafana to help him put on his shoes and tie the laces.

Bafana offered to drive us to Di's creche, and I said yes because we were running late. But I didn't expect him to be still there, waiting by the gate, when I returned from dropping Dingani off at his classroom. Instead, he was sitting in his car, his arm sticking out of the window, looking as elegantly sharp as ever. O God, why did you have to make the man so irresistibly gorgeous, I grumbled silently. And why did he have to look at me like that - with those eyes, I thought.

I told Bafana he didn't have to wait for me, that I would have been happy to walk back home. He said he wanted to and then asked if I wanted to go to Wandie's with him, claiming he hadn't eaten a proper meal since he came back from Angola. I found myself saying yes without even hesitating. Not because I was hungry. After all this time, I still don't have an appetite. I guess I said yes because I didn't want to go back to that cold, lonely house. Also, to be honest, I suddenly felt a yearning for affection. Don't get me wrong; I haven't forgotten for one minute what he did. Anyway, I'm not going to fret about that right now. I have bigger things to worry about, like this baby growing inside me and my brothers and sisters, who've been on edge since the Uncle Caphus incident.

On the drive to Wandie's, Bafana continued beseeching me for a second chance - stating the baby as one reason we should get back together. I told him I wasn't

interested and, to change the topic, I asked him about his trip to Angola. He told me about the kids back there in the camp, how he'd bonded with them, and how difficult it had been for him to leave. Finally, he explained that he had no choice but to return home as he was expected to speak at the ANC meeting tonight.

'About the protest march?' I asked.

'Ja,' he said. 'We still need to clear up a few things, like the best route for the march. And we can't involve all schools - that'd be too many kids.'

'Do you think marching will achieve anything, Bafana?' I questioned him doubtfully. Don't get me wrong now; I'm not condoning the government's idea of forcing black school kids to be taught in Afrikaans - a language they know nix about. I think it's pretty ridiculous, to be honest. But neither am I crazy about the idea of kids marching to protest. But, unfortunately, in my experience, protest marches, no matter how peaceful they are meant to be, never end well.

I first became aware of the planned demonstration march two weeks ago when my exuberant sister Busi burst into the house and announced that her school would be one of the ones marching. Of course, I wasn't delighted with the news. And my brothers and sisters know how I feel about these demonstration rallies. But, I think, in her excitement, Busi forgot I was home. I warned her then that I didn't believe marching was a wise idea, that challenging the government could backfire, and we'd see a repeat of Sharpsville. I didn't feel comfortable with it, and I told my sister I didn't want her to get involved. But I knew, even as I said it, that I was wasting my breath. Since when does Sibusiso listen to anyone? Anyway, I hadn't heard any more mention about the march, so I'd assumed it had been called off. Until Bafana this morning, that is, when Bafana brought it up. Sitting at the booth, waiting for our food, I was seized by a strong feeling of foreboding. I know I'm not going to be able to stop my sister from participating in this rally. I'm not concerned about Mandla because, from what I hear, he's stopped going to school altogether. Bheki, however, is another one who worries me. Whether his school is taking part or not, I'm sure my curious little brother will not be left out of an adventure of this kind.

I expressed my apprehension to Bafana, but he brushed me off, explaining that the SASM has been busy making plans to ensure nothing goes wrong.

'Stop fretting, *'sthandwa*,' he said. 'There's no need to be anxious at all. We're planning to make the protest as peaceful as possible. Eat your pap.'

But I had lost all my appetite. 'Just because you plan it to be peaceful doesn't mean you'll get the same reaction, Bafana. Look what happened in Sharpeville.

'*Lalela, s'thandwa*,' Bafana put down his fork and looked me square in the eye. 'This is what's going to happen. Kids from different schools will gather at West Orlando Stadium and march as they voice their objections over the introduction of Afrikaans as a teaching medium. That's all. So, stop all this fretting and enjoy your breakfast. Nothing dreadful is going to happen.'

I pray he's right. Still, the idea of my siblings getting involved doesn't sit well. And knowing that Mama is also powerless to stop them doesn't help.

Last year, Busi' managed to sneak out while Mama was sleeping, and she and her pals trekked to Pretoria to attend a Steve Biko rally. When she came back the next day, Mama and her sjambok were waiting. But all the beatings in the world could never stop Sibusiso from doing whatever the hell Sibuso wants to do. A week after that, she started talking about crossing the border to join the guerrillas in Luanda. Mama again brought out the whip and tried to thrash the idea out of her, but it didn't help. I had to beg Bafana to talk some sense into my sister. I never found out exactly what he said to her, but whatever it was, it seemed to have worked. She didn't stop talking about politics and the need to fight for our country, but Busi never mentioned crossing the border again. Anyway, I've been thinking about the rally since Bafana brought me back home and have decided that since I can't do anything to stop it, the least I can do is attend this meeting tonight to hear for myself what the plan is. I need to be clear of what exactly it is that the SASM is proposing to the kids.

18

BAFANA

'Bafana! Bafana!' The urgent banging on the door wakes him up. It's the familiar hammering he's come to associate with the police from the security branch. He's been rudely woken up by them on many nights. But for the fact the banging is

accompanied by the shouting of his name, he would have thought they were paying him another visit.

'*Vula, mfo*. Open the door. I know you're in there.' The caller pounded on the door. Bafana gets up, grabs his jeans from the floor, pulls them on, and marches to the corridor. The banging and the shouting continued, and as he gets closer to the kitchen, he recognises the voice.

'I'm coming, Ndo,' he yells. 'No need to wake up the whole bloody township, *mfo*.' When he unlocks and opens the door, Ndodana almost falls in. 'Ndo, what the hell is going on, man? Why are you banging on my damn door like you're the bloody police?'

Bafana watches with wonder as his best friend of eighteen years tries to take a breath. He has known Ndodana since primary school. They'd discovered each at the gates of Vulikazi Primary. Thanks to their irresponsible older siblings, they'd both found themselves stranded at the gates after the end of their first day in school. Bafana's mother had instructed his sister, Lethu, to pick him at 1 pm sharp. But Lethu had either forgotten or chosen to ignore those mother's instructions. She'd gone, instead, to the park behind the Teach and Learn Centre. Ndodana's older brother, Zenzo, had been charged with the task of fetching him from the school, but, for reasons unknown, he too had failed to show up. By the time Lethu remembered her mother's orders and showed up at the gate, Bafana and Ndo had become fast buddies. They'd kept themselves entertained by showing each other the scars on their bodies, old and new, and regaling each other with stories of how they'd got them.

'What's the matter with you, man?' Bafana asks as he ushers his friend into the kitchen.

'Me? What is the matter with me?' Ndo, still panting, managed to say. 'Do you know what time it is? Or even what day it is?' Bafana looks at his wristwatch. It says 8.47. 'Goddamit, not again!' he moans. He's been struggling to wake up at his usual time since his return from the bush. That's why last night, he meant to set the alarm to ring at 6 am. How could he have forgotten to do that?

'What happened to you? Are you hungover or what? *Ibhab'laz, ne mfo?*' Ndodana quizzes, peering deep into his eyes as if he expects to find the answer there.

'I should be asking you that.' Bafana replied as he lets the door swing shut and walks to the sink to pour himself a glass of water. 'What are you doing here, anyway? Shouldn't you be at work?'

'You're a funny one to ask. Sam is mad as hell, *mfo*. He says you did a disappearing act on him yesterday. He says he sent you to check out what was happening at Dube Hostel with those migrant workers, and I don't remember you returning. Is that true, *mfo*?'

'Sort of.' Bafana gulps down his water.

'Sort of? Is that all you can say? Man, do you know how many people you had worried about? I mean, last night, when we heard that the Zulus were attacking people with swords, we were worried sick, *mfo*. We thought maybe you were one of the victims and....'

'And what, Ndo? You came running here to see if I was safe at home? Or did you decide it's better to head to Sis MaBree's and drink away your concerns?' Bafana says this only to shut up his friend, and it works.

'Anyway, I'm fine, as you can see. I didn't go back to work because there was nothing to report. Those rumours about the Zulus were just exaggerated, *mfo*. When I got to the hostel, most of the men who were supposed to be responsible for these attacks were at work. So, I left and went to look up the addresses some of those kids in the bush gave me.' Bafana tells him. It is all true, but he's left out the bit about stopping at Naledi to see Nandi again.

'Anyway, the boss is stomping around the office complaining that you've only been back three days and already you're causing him grief. If I were you, I'd stop messing around with him. I mean, you are lucky he didn't fire you when you came back from the bush. I know for sure if anyone else had pulled that stunt, gone AWOL for that length of time, they'd have been out on the street without a job.'

'All right, Ndo, thanks for your advice. I'll stop fucking around with the boss from now on. Okay? I promise.' He doesn't mean to be sarcastic but wants Ndo to leave so he can get ready for this momentous day. It's obvious his friend has forgotten about it, or he would have mentioned it.

'All right,' Ndo says. 'Get ready for work. I'll make myself a cup of coffee while I'm waiting. Do you have anything to eat?' Ndo asks without waiting for an answer. He opens the little fridge and peers inside it. 'Mfo, why is this thing almost empty? Didn't

Nandi teach you anything while she was here? Like how to stock your house with food in case of visitors?'

Bafana ignores the comment and informs him, 'Ndo, I'm not going to work today.'

'What?' Ndo spins around to face him.

'I said I'm not going to work, mfo.'

'Bafana,' Ndo gives him a solemn stare. 'You don't want your job anymore or what? You tired of it?'

'Of course, I'm not sick of my job,' Bafana pulls out a chair and sits down at the small round table.

'Ndo, did you forget what day it is, man?' Ndo returns his question with a puzzled look.

'It's the 16th, man. The day of the march,' Bafana finally tells him.

'I know what day it is, *mfo*. But what does that have to do with you missing work?'

'It's got everything to do with it. Someone has to be there with the kids. To support them and make sure everything goes according to plan.' Bafana feels a little irritated explaining this to his friend, who's been present throughout the planning process and should know. Ndo sighs as if he, too, is getting exasperated.

'Bafana. I thought our duty was to help plan the route of the march for those kids. We've sat with their leaders and gone through it step by step with them. We've done all we pledged to do, man. Our responsibility is done, *mfo*. Finished.'

Bafana wanted to tell his friend he sounded just like Dumo but thought better of it and said, 'Well, you thought wrong. Our duty to the kids is far from done. It's just beginning. Now, if you'll excuse me,' he got up from the chair and started towards the bedroom. 'You can let yourself out when you've had your coffee,' he called back to Ndo. He could have used a cup of coffee himself, but he didn't want to argue with his friend anymore. It was evident the two of them didn't hold the same view on this matter. Bafana wasn't about to sit there and try to win somebody over to his side when he could be doing something more productive.

He'd just finished shaving and is about to run a bath when someone lightly taps the door.

'*Lalela, mfo*.' Ndo's voice shouts. Bafana is surprised he is still here. 'If you're going to the march, I am coming too.'

'No, Ndo,' Bafana yells back. 'That wouldn't be a good idea, man. You need to go back to the paper and let Sam know I'm alright. Tell him I'm working on the Dube

Hostel story and planning to come to work this afternoon. There's no need to get him mad at both of us. Neither one of us can afford to get fire, but if we both do, who's going to pay for our pints at Sis MaBree's?' He jokes, but Ndo does not respond. 'Take the car. The keys are in my jacket pocket on the sofa.' Bafana hopes offering his wheels will work like a charm on his best mate. One thing Ndo loves more than his mother and sisters is sitting behind the wheel of a car. As expected, Ndo takes the bait.

'Ja, you're right, mfo,' he bellows. 'Besides, my asthma is acting up these days. If those bloody Boers turn up and decide to throw tear gas, *hayibo*, that will be me toasted! *Finito!*'

19

NANDI

- Diary Entry -  
June 14th, 1976

So, last night I went to Moroka Township to get to the bottom of this planned demonstration. I made it on foot, and trust me, the walk was no picnic. It took me a good fifty minutes. Two streets from Regina Mundi church, I spotted Bafana's car parked behind a spaza. Why he chose to park that far from the church, I'm not sure. Maybe he wanted to remain inconspicuous. Perhaps he was afraid the Special Branch stooges would recognise it if they decided to raid the meeting. I guess it would be easier for him to escape through the back with the rest of the crowd if that were to happen. Anyway, even before I got there, I started regretting my decision to come. I'm huge now, over seven months gone.

The other day, Zola came and had a good old laugh at my size. She said I'm bigger than a house now and has nicknamed me Loziba. *Ja*, Loziba, as in Lobengula's rotund wife. Anyway, as you can imagine, I'm no longer swift on my feet

at seven months pregnant. I started fretting over the possibility of the Special Branch police catching wind of this SASM meeting. What if they decide to raid the church hall? What with my slow-footedness and my luck these days and, I'd be the first person they'd nab, that's for sure. Well, I won't stay for long. I'll stick around long enough to get the gist of this protest.

It was almost dark by the time I got there. The church's front yard was overflowing with kids of all ages, boys and girls, some of them still in their school uniforms. They were mostly teenagers, but some looked as young as my little brother, Bo. Even though I felt out of place with my belly sticking out, I was relieved to note that I wasn't the oldest attendee. A few in the crowd looked like they could be in their twenties - too old to pass for high school kids. People were shoving each other, fighting to get to the front of the line. Luckily, I was spared that hustle. Maybe my condition compelled the kids to be polite and let me through to the front of the line without me even having to ask.

Inside, the church hall was packed full. It was standing room only. Although people tried to make way for me, I chose to remain at the back. I knew all the members of the SASM (they were all his friends), and I preferred not to be seen by any of them. I could not see the speaker on the stage from where I stood, but I could clearly hear him. It was Nkosi. 'Yes, exactly, that's what I mean, little brother,' he was saying into the microphone.

'But that doesn't make sense, *mfo*. Why should the Junior High schools be left out? That kaka language is being forced down our throat too.'

'*Ja, ja*, man.' The crowd chorused.

'Suppose,' another boy put in his two pence. 'Suppose they cancel that stupid law in high schools, but we juniors still have to learn our subjects in Afrikaans because we didn't protest. What then?'

His query invited more questions to be shouted out from the excited kids. I've heard Nkosi give a public speech before; he is usually a competent speaker, confident and poised. But these kids were not giving him a chance. Every time he tried to answer a question, they'd boo him or talk over him. I felt very sorry for him, standing there stammering and mumbling words that made no sense. It was at this point that Bafana jumped to his rescue. He took the mic from his friend and asked the kids to hush. But they did no such thing. His presence on stage seemed to have the effect of exhilarating them even more like he was the big star they'd been waiting



to see all along. They started to chant his name, 'Bafana! Bafana, *boet* Bafana,' like it was a household name.

'Shh, please,' Bafana tried to speak over them.

'Shh.' Someone else in the crowd shouted. 'Let *boet* speak. We want answers, don't we?' 'Yes,' the throng chorused.

'So, let him speak.'

'Speak *boeti*. *Thetha, mfowethu!*' A voice behind me called, and this invited cheers and whistles from the hall.

'Thank you,' Bafana said when the noise had simmered down. 'I will. I'll respond to your questions as soon as you all calm down and stop acting like you are in a beer hall. This is a church – God's house for fuck's sake!' He said, and the whole auditorium broke into raucous laughter.

Patiently, he waited for the tittering to subside before continuing in a sombre voice. 'Now. I will answer your questions. One by one, please.' No sooner had he said that than a dozen hands simultaneously flew up into the air.

'Yebo, Nomaqhawe.' Bafana said her name with reluctance, and I detected a little exasperation in his voice. I had a funny feeling that he and this Nomaqhawe had butted heads in the past.

'*Boet* Bafana,' Nomaqhawe began. 'What I and some people want to know is this...why were you guys in the SASM trying to keep this meeting from us? I mean, the plan was for you guys to have a private conference where you would decide which schools were going to march and which were to stay away, weren't you?' She paused to give him a chance to answer but as soon as Bafana began to speak, she cut him off and continued her ranting. 'We were supposed just to sit back and let you make a decision that affects us, hey? Sit back and allow you to take your time to tell us what that decision was. By the way, when were you planning to inform us? On the day of the march?'

'Yes, man. We want to know. Why the secretiveness, *mfo?*' A drunken voice slurred from somewhere in the middle of the hall.

'First of all,' Bafana very calmly addressed the man who had spoken. 'If you have a question to ask, please raise your hand and wait for your turn. Secondly, no one was trying to keep this meeting a secret from anyone. Yes, it was meant to be a closed meeting, but all the leaders from your school – leaders who you elected – were invited to attend. We did not plan to keep anyone in the dark; we just wanted to

keep the crowd to a minimum. Now, I've been told that you were all invited to the previous meeting. You were also granted the opportunity to express your opinions ab....'

'Hey, Bafana, *mfowethu*,' the same drunken voice interrupted. 'Where were you at that meeting? We missed you, *mfo*. We had to listen to that retard Dumo talk, man. And he made as much sense as this arsehole Nkosi, hey. A waste of time, man. I could have spent the night listening to the drunkards at MaDlamini's; it would have been no different,' the man finished, and the crowd started laughing again.

I couldn't help but be amused by how ruthlessly blunt the man was. Bafana did not bother to answer the question or explain his whereabouts that night. Instead, he jokingly apologised for his friend's shortcomings and sympathised with the man. Then a hand shot up in the air, and before he could acknowledge it, its owner spoke.

'*Boet* Bafana. Some of our teachers might not allow us to leave the classroom on the day. It's not that they disagree with us. They do. But some of them are afraid for us, and they will not want us to go on the march. What shall we do then?'

'You must listen to your teachers, of course,' Bafana began to tell the girl, but Nomaqhawe butted in by shouting in a piqued voice.

'Why should we? Why should we listen to them? If they want to act cowardly, then that's their problem, not ours. We'll still go. Some of our parents aren't going to like this one bit, but I say we must still go. This blasted law affects our education, our future, not theirs.'

'I agree,' Someone deep in the middle of the crowd said loudly. 'We can't be pussies just because our teachers and parents choose to be. Most of them are just old anyway and used to taking kaka from the Boer. We don't have to. We must stand up for ourselves.'

'Yes, we must,' everyone else in the room started cheering, raising their fists and yelling, '*Amandla! Ngawethu!*' like they thought this had turned into a political rally of some sort.

I'd heard enough. I was about to turn around and make my way to the door when a familiar voice stopped me in my tracks. It was my sister, Busi.

'We've been here for nearly an hour listening to everyone beat around the bush. What we came here to find out is which schools are going to be marching, and, so far, you haven't named one goddamn school.'

Yes, that's my sister, I thought. The rally girl. No mincing of words for her. No arse-kissing either. It would have been out of character for her to follow others and address the speakers by the polite 'boet.' No, not our Busi. She doesn't play that game. When she has a point to make, she gets right to it. Some people view her abruptness as rudeness. I've heard some grown-ups advise Mama that she needs to beat the arrogance out of the girl before it's too late. But I love my no-shit-taking sister the way she is.

I think anyone else would have been taken aback by Busi's statement, but not Bafana. He's been around my sister long enough not to be alarmed by her offhanded manner. In fact, when he spoke, he sounded like he'd been anticipating her words.

'That's what I was getting to, Busi,' he said, calm as a cucumber. 'This meeting was supposed to discuss the route of the march and see which schools fall along that route. The march is still three days away. There is still enough time for your leaders to inform you if your school will be one of the ones demonstrating.'

'Well,' Busi said. 'You all go ahead and plan the route and decide which schools are marching to the stadium on the sixteenth. I'm letting you know that whatever you determine, I am going to be at that rally. No one is going to stop me. No teacher, no parent, no SASM leader is going to get in my way,' my sister declared, and her bold proclamation was echoed by the rest of the hall.

The kids went crazy after that. The chanting was too much for me. I couldn't stand there and listen to Bafana to calm them down, so I made my exit. By the time I got home, my feet were so swollen, I looked like I had elephantiasis. Even soaking them in salted water for an hour didn't help one bit. Anyway, going to the meeting didn't do anything to alleviate my anxiety about this protest march. And hearing my sister voice her determination to take part hadn't helped matters. I went to bed with a heavy heart, feeling on edge.

He hears them as soon as he opens his front door. The voices sound so close they could be gathered in his front yard. They sing their hearts out, chanting *Morena Boloka Sechaba Sa Heso* in Sotho, his favourite version of the national anthem. Coffee mug in hand and camera strapped over one shoulder, he steps onto his red veranda and listens, smiling. So, it is happening, he thinks. He swallows the last drops of his coffee, lays the mug on the stoep, and strolls to the gate. As he unlatches it, he hears his neighbour, MaNgwenya, calls out a greeting to him from her front stoep.

'Yebo, boef?'

'Yebo, Mama,' he returns. 'Livukekahle?' he politely enquires as he turns back to face her.

'Kahle, kahle, nganeyami. As well as can be expected, my child. *Kwenzakalani lapho?* What is happening there?'

'It's just school children, Mama. They are demonstrating against being taught in Afrikaans.' 'I hope there's not going to be any trouble. We don't need that right now.'

'Eish, that's true. Don't worry yourself about it, though, Mama. There's not going to be any,' he assures her as he continues out of the gate, adjusting the camera strap on his shoulder. As he walks up Vilikazi Street, he finds himself offering the same reassurance to other curious neighbours who suddenly appeared at their gates. The children's singing voices carry him up the small hill to Phefeni Junior Secondary School. They have moved from the Sotho to the Zulu national anthem, *Nkosi Sikeleli iAfrica*. As he neared, he joined in the chorus feeling as joyous and spirited as he had done back in those carefree days as a schoolboy at assembly.

*Woza moya,*

*Woza, sikelela,*

*Woza moya,*

*Oyi ngcwele,*

*Usi ukelele,*

*Thina usapho lwakhe*

When he is at the top of the hill, he can see clearly the enormous crowd of children. There are thousands of them, from five or six schools. He can tell from their uniforms which schools the kids came from. The green blazers represent Phefeni Junior Secondary, the school he once attended. The blue blazers stand for Orlando West

Secondary, the maroon ones for Lindani, the grey for Qhubekani, and the black for Thandazani Secondary School. The girls are in their black or grey short skirts and the boys in trousers. All of them are attired in white shirts, dark knee-length socks, and black shoes and ties representing their schools' colours. A satisfied smile curls Bafana's lips. The plan has gone well so far. The kids have followed the program to the letter T. All the schools that should be here are here. He makes his way to the jacaranda trees on the left side of the school gates, where some reporters have stationed their tripods. He recognises two of them, Josia Phule and Sifiso Nyathi from the World Press, and approaches them.

'Gentlemen. How's it going?' He greets them.

'Nix, mfo. Just got here too.' Josia informs him.

'Did you know this was going to happen?' Sifiso queries.

'Cha, mfo. Not a clue,' he lies. 'Why?'

'Well, I sort of heard a rumour that the SASM is behind this and....'

'Wouldn't know anything about that,' Bafana cuts him off. 'Been out of the country for months. Came back a couple of days ago.'

He doesn't want to discuss anything with Sifiso because he knows it will lead to an argument. The man has a habit of distorting information and has, once or twice, got his arse beat up for putting words in people's mouths. Bafana often bumps into him at either Sis MaBree's or MaDlamini's but always tries to keep his distance.

'Come on now. You're still the leader of the organisation, aren't you?' Sifiso isn't about to let it drop. 'And from what I hear, they don't make a move without your say so.'

Bafana retrieves a packet of Rothmans from his shirt pocket and busies himself with offering the cigarettes around to the other reporters, deliberately skipping Sifiso. Then he wanders off to the other side of the tree, where Roger Phillips, a correspondent for the British Independent, is stationed. From here, he has a better view of the children and is disturbed by what he sees. The children at the front, carrying placards and saluting their tiny fists, are very young and in primary school uniforms. He estimates some of them to be as young as seven or eight years old. The banners they are struggling to hold up bear words like 'Away with Afrikaans', 'We do not want Afrikaans', 'Afrikaans is a killer', all scribbled in childish handwriting. Bafana doesn't like this out-o-the-blue improvisation one bit. These youngsters should be in their classrooms, learning their alphabets and rhymes, and whatever it

is they teach in standard one and two classes these days. This is no place for these babies. Junior High Schools shouldn't be here either, but his decision to exclude them from the march had been vetoed by the other SASM members at the last meeting. He's got to get those little ones out of here now. If something were to happen...no, he doesn't want to think about that. He'll just go over there and round them up, send them back to their schools. He'll escort them himself if he has to.

'Rog,' he says, taking the camera bag from his shoulder and handing it to the white journalist. 'Hold onto this for me, my man.'

'Where are you off to?' Roger, accepting the bag, inquires. 'You're not going to join them, are you?

'You bet.'

'I wouldn't do that if I were you. Look,' Roger gestures with his shaggy mane. 'Over there.'

Bafana turns his head and sees the first police car approach. Seconds later, another follows, then another, and another. In less than five minutes, there are at least ten police vans lined up in the street. He watches as armed policemen, most blacks, get out of their vehicles, approach the school, and surround it. Even the little ones, the students act as if they do not see them and continue singing the national anthem. Bafana is impressed by their unruffled attitude but still feels uneasy about the little ones' presence and continues rushing towards them. He hopes to be able to cajole them into returning to their classrooms. From the corner of his eye, he catches a glimpse of Lulu, one of his neighbours' daughter, who lives across the street. She is waving him to her. At first, he quickens his pace, pretending not to see her. He doesn't want to stop. He wants to get to the little ones fast. But then she calls out his name, and when he turns his head, she is running towards him.

'What's going on, *boet* Bafana?' Lulu inquires after greeting him with a quick embrace. 'What are they bloody doing here? I hope they're not here to cause any trouble.' She nervously eyes the uniformed men whose numbers seem to be growing by the minute. The white ones have pistols for their weapons, and the black ones, batons.

'They won't,' Bafana assures her with a confidence that he's not really feeling. 'The kids are not doing anything wrong. It's just a peaceful demonstration. See. They're not harming anyone.'

'I can see that. It's not me you've got to bloody convince. Look at those bastards. They've even brought dogs, for God's sake.' Bafana looks where she is pointing and sees them. Two police canines are barking viciously at the children at the front of the crowd. The students counteract by snarling back and threatening with their clenched fists. Perhaps taking courage from their numbers, the students are not intimidated one bit by the dogs or their masters. But the louder the dogs howl, the more the students taunt them.

'Listen, like you, I don't like this,' Bafana turns his attention back to Lulu. 'I need to get these little ones out of here fast. Now can you...?' He is about to ask for her to assist him when a loud blast resounds in the air. He does not have to turn around to know what has happened. He knows the sound and smell of tear gas well enough.

'What the bloody hell...' he starts to say but chokes on his words. The fumes from the blast sting his eyes, but he fights to keep them open. There is a second blast, but the kids are already screaming and running in every direction by now. Bafana sees one of the youngsters fall and speeds towards her and scoops her from the ground. He has just thrown her over his shoulder when he hears another eruption. 'Run,' he screams. '*Gijiman!*' He cries to the kids around him. Then another blast rings in the air. This time the explosion is not tear gas.

Still running, he looks behind him with the little girl in his arms and shouts, 'don't shoot! Please don't shoot.' But no one is listening. More shots split the air. He is sweating with panic, worrying he will drop the girl or trip over another child. But he does not stop. The shots now seem to be coming from every direction. 'Don't shoot, don't shoot. Don't bloody shoot. They're just kids. *Zingane nje!*' He continues pleading amidst the kids' screams and gunshot.

At first, Bafana thinks the shots are being fired in the air to warn everyone to disperse. At first, he assumes that some kids are falling because they are frightened or tripped up by others. Then he sees the girl on the ground with blood spreading from the back of her head and into her starched white collar and Naledi High School jersey. He thinks it's the chubby girl he caught a quick glimpse of running beside him before picking up the fallen little girl. Now she is on the ground, and he almost trips over her. Instinctively, his hand reaches out for another student, a tall boy zooming by, and pulls him back by the shirttail. He hands over the little girl to him without a word, and tacitly, the boy receives the moaning child into his arms and continues running. Now, for the second time in just five minutes, Bafana is down on one knee,

picking up another child off the ground. This time, though, it is with a lot of effort. He has to use both arms and engage all his strength because this girl is older and much bulkier. This time the child is no stranger. He doesn't notice right away, though. Only after he has lifted her into his arms and resumed running does he look down into her face. All he can do is shake his head in disbelief and cry out, 'No. No, no, no....'

## BOOK 3

20

Bafana

He is curled up in a tight ball in the corner of the dark, airless room. The putrid smell of urine, shit, and rotting food jolt him back to reality. He has not moved an inch. Not since he regained consciousness. Something massive is leaning on his shoulder – Someone's head. Whose? Nkosi? Ndodana? Dumo? He can't tell. It's too dark to see. Or maybe it's not the absence of light that makes it impossible to see, but the fact that both his eyes are still swollen shut. Or are they? Slowly, reluctantly, he tries to move his left hand to his face. It feels too heavy.

'Bafana,' a voice whispers from somewhere nearby. He wonders who it is. 'Uright, *mfo?*' Ndodana? Of course. Who else but Ndo would ask such a stupid question? Who else would be concerned about Someone else's wellbeing at a time like this? Bafana knows – he doesn't need to see or be told – that his friends have gone through the same battering and torture he's endured in the last God knows how many days. What he doesn't know is how many of them have survived. There were



seven of them when they were picked up from the Teach and Learn Centre, where they'd been rehearsing for the Friday night performance of Macbeth. They'd gone there from school, still in their Isaacson Morris High School getup. When they were brought here, there had been ten of them. Nkosi, Ndoda, Musa, Dumo, Jaha, the two boys from Naledi High, Petro and Melusi, and himself. Five of them had survived the first six days of interrogation and torture. The last time he was conscious, he'd counted four heads around him. Or was it five?

'Say something, *mfo*. Please tell me you're still there.' Ndodana presses. Bafana would like to answer his best friend, reassure him that yes, he is, indeed, still here even though just barely, but he cannot move his swollen lips. He tries to cough but only manages to reignite the excruciating pain in his ribs. An image of Kruger's army boots swinging at him flashes in his head.

'Ndo, I'm here, *mfo*,' he finally manages to force his mouth open and say something to Ndo. Still, Ndodana, apparently, doesn't hear him because he keeps begging him to say something, even screaming, '*Khuluma mfo!* Speak up, my friend, if you can hear me.'

'SHURRUP! SHUT YOUR BLOORY KAFFIR MOUTH!' An angry Boer's voice screams from the other side of the iron door before it is kicked open. '*Wharayu* making all that *bloory* noise for? You want me to kick you in the *bloory* mouth again, hey?'

'No, Baas. No...!' Ndo whimpers, reminding Bafana of his little brother, Roy, whenever their father took off his belt to discipline him or one of their siblings. It didn't matter who the whipping was directed at; Roy always broke into a sobbing mess, embarrassing Bafana, who generally took his punishment like a man, without a sound.

'Well, shut your fucken mouth then. Or I'll *shurrit* up for you. You want me to do you like I did all your *bloory* friends? Shut your mouth for *fucken* good? Is that what you want?'

'Na bass. I'm sorry, baas....'

'*Yer fucken* will be if I have to come back here. Hear me?' 'Yes, bass...'

'*Berrer* not make me. *Berrer* not, or I swear to God you'll be one sorry kaffir when I'm through with you.' The iron door bangs shut. The cement floor he is sitting on is cold as ice, but that's not what chills Bafana. It is not what makes him shiver but the

heavy sound of the door as it clangs shut. Bafana listens to the retreating, heavy footsteps in the corridor. He listens for more noise from the other side but hears none. He wonders when they will return to fetch him or Ndo for another round of tormenting and grilling. He wonders if this time he will survive the beatings, the kicking, the electric shocks... If only he knew how to answer their questions, tell them what they wanted to hear. He did not understand any of their questions or know exactly what they wanted to hear. Last time they'd just confused him, made him feel like he was going crazy.

'So, you and your gang are the organisers, hey? Answer me, kaffir?' 'No, sir...'

'Don't lie to me, boy.' A kick in the stomach follows.

'I'm not lying, sir... Organisers of what?'

'You tell me. What is it you really do at that club of yours, the *fucken* Teach and Learn, when you're pretending to be putting up plays and that kind of nonsense? What is it you're getting up to, organising, hey?'

'Nothing, sir. We just...'

'I said, don't lie to me, boy.' Then a punch in the face.

'What about that rally you were seen at?'

'Which one, sir?'

'Which one? So, you've been to many, hey? I'm talking about the Steve Biko one. You know that fucken kaffir, Steve Biko?'

Bafana had been to a couple of Steve Biko rallies but had only met him once, briefly. Did that mean that he knew the man? 'Yes, sir...no sir.'

'You his sidekick, hey?'

'No, sir.' Kicks and punches rain down. That first interrogation had left Bafana crying for his Mama. He wonders if or when his parents or Someone will come looking for him, rescue him from this nightmare. The second interrogation, where they'd hooked him up with electric wires and pulled the switch each time he answered a wrong question, had left him pissing in his pants.

'Ndo, let go of my bloody neck, man. You are choking me, mfo...'. Bafana coughs and splutters. This time the sound makes it out of his throat. And maybe out of his lips too. Yes, it must have because now Ndo is hugging him, kissing his head, and thanking him for not leaving him alone with 'these fucken crazy Boers.'

'Thank God. Ah, thank you, *thixo wami!* I thought I was all alone. We're the only ones left, man.'

The only ones, you know....' Ndo weeps and weeps.

What his friend is telling him does not make sense to Bafana. If the others are all gone... If they are the only ones left, then who's head is this? Who is this person leaning heavily on his right shoulder and making it hurt like so?

'*Awu...*' the piercing scream jolts him. Bafana opens his eyes to a strange face hovering above him. A young woman in a nurse's cap is standing by his side, holding his right arm tightly.

'*Uxolo, bhudi*. Sorry, but look,' she assures, showing him the long needle that she's just pulled out of his arm. 'It's all done now. Finished.'

'You alright, Jerry,' an all too familiar voice sounds from somewhere to his left. Bafana tries to turn his head sideways, but the woman with the needle stops him. 'Don't move. Stay still, *bhudi*,' she orders in a stern but friendly voice. He doesn't want to listen to her; he wants to see the face of the person on his right side who was talking to him. He knows the voice. He tries to twist his neck again but finds it impossible. Then Sam's face comes into focus. 'Welcome back, Jerry,' he says. 'Had us scared there for a minute, son.'

'Where am I, Baas? Where's Ndo? Who is this?'

'Shhh... Don't try to speak too much just yet. You're in the hospital. And this is nurse Langa. She's been taking good care of you....'

'But why? Why am I here?' Bafana is still puzzled. 'What is this thing around my neck? What happened to me, Sam...' This is all too confusing. What the hell is he doing in the hospital when he should be...

'You're here because you're a bloody stubborn son of a gun, that's why. You were where you had no business, and now you're in hot soup, my friend. You're lucky to be alive, you know.'

'Sam, I don't follow. My head hurts, and I have no idea what you're talking about. Please just tell me what's going on without fucking around with my already messed up head.'

'You mean you don't remember anything? Not a thing?'

Bafana started to shake his head but realised he couldn't. Frustrated, he mumbles, 'No, I don't.' 'The march? The shooting outside the school? You don't remember any of that?'

'No. Tell me, man. Just tell me what happened, Sam.' Bafana wants to scream at his boss, tell him to stop dilly-dallying, cut the bull crap, and get right to the point.

'Of course not. Course, you wouldn't remember. What the hell's wrong with me! You got your stubborn behind shot. They got you in the back at that bloody march they say you organised while you were running, carrying that girl. Got you right before you reached the hospital...just a few yards from it, actually.'

Bafana is no longer listening to Sam. It is slowly coming back to him. The girl... 'What happened to the girl, Sam? What happened to Busi?' He asks with a sinking heart.

'She didn't make it,' Sam told him matter-of-factly, with no emotion at all in his voice. 'The girl didn't survive, Jerry. And don't go blaming yourself now because she was already gone, mate. Probably dead before you even picked her up from the ground....'

'No, baas,' Bafana moans and again tried to shake his head. 'No, man, she can't be dead. She can't be gone...God no...Nandi... Does Nandi know?'

'I should think so,' Sam says in a very calm voice. 'I should think she knows, son.' 'I need to see her. Take me to her, Sam. Please.'

'Take you to see who, son?' Sam sounds perplexed, and Bafana can't understand why. Why doesn't he see how urgent it is?

'Nandi,' he tells her. 'I need to tell her before she hears it from somebody else. Sam, please, I'm begging you, take me to her.'

'Jerry,' Sam said in the gentlest voice Bafana has ever heard him use. 'She already knows, son. They buried her sister and the others two days ago.'

'No. How do you know?'

'Because it's been eight days. That's how long you've been gone, son,' Sam is leaning close to his face, his pitying eyes searching for something in his. 'At one point, we, everyone, believed we'd lost you, but I knew you'd come back. Told them all that you would because I know you, Jerry, you son of a gun. I know you weren't going to give up just like that.'

'Sam... ' Bafana feels as perplexed as his boss looked a minute ago. What is the old man going on about? All right, he was shot. That he understands now. He doesn't recall it happening, of course. He remembers clearly the sound of the first shot cracking the air. He remembers or thinks he remembers the day when all this happened. Well, parts of it, anyway. When he closes his eyes, Bafana can hear the crackling noise of the tear gas piercing the air like fireworks. He can see the dogs' barking madly and the frightened children fleeing and screaming. He can almost see

them scattering every which way like beheaded hens and smell the choking fumes of the tear gas. Then he catches an image of himself running towards a little girl, scooping her up in his arms and yelling to others, 'run, run,' as if they are not doing so already. Then he hears the first gunshot, then the next and the next. He remembers turning his head for one split second and seeing it. The green car. The green Mazda, the barrel of a shotgun sticking out of the driver's window. He hears his own desperate voice screaming, 'don't shoot! Please don't shoot! Zingane! They are just children. They are just bloody kids, man.' But nobody stops. The hysteria continues. He feels hot sweat prickling his skin. Then the blood, mingling with his sweat. Her blood. The other girl he's just picked up from the ground. Was it his sweat? Who is this girl? He knows her. Busi?

'Sam. I got to get out of here, man. Please take me to Nandi. Please.' He is no longer pleading but screaming hysterically and trying to get up out of the iron cot bed. He has to get to Nandi, explain how he attempted; tried to get Busi to the hospital in time. God knows he had. And he would have. Didn't Sam just say that he had almost made it- that he was only a few yards away from help when they gunned him down? Yes, he did try. Dammit, he did! And he must tell her. Nandi needs to know that he tried.

'Oh, God, Sam. Nandi must hate me. She'll never forgive me. And her mother... O *thixo wami!* They'll blame me. I've got to talk to them. Right now, man, please take me to them.' Bafana is on the verge of tears. He can't understand why Sam is just standing there, not saying anything or doing anything to help get him out of this godforsaken bed. Desperate, he tries to kick the blanket off his legs and finds he can't. Panicked, he looks at Sam, then at the nurse, who is now busying herself with rearranging a tray of medicine. 'Goddamn it, what is going on here? Why can't I feel my bloody legs?' he wails.

The nurse jumps but does not look his way. Then Sam takes his hand and holds it in his own freckled hand. Bafana wishes he would just stop looking at him with those pitying blue eyes.

'I'm afraid I can't do that, Jerry. I wish I could, but...'

'What do you mean? Is she dead, too? No, don't tell me, man. Don't tell me Nandi's dead too, please don't.'

'Relax. Nandi's okay.' Sam reassures him. 'She's fine.' 'Thank God,' Bafana sighs. 'Thank God,' he says again. He is so overwhelmed with relief he wants to grab Sam's head and kiss it. But he restrains himself and just squeezes his hand hard.

'Now, just take me to her, please. I know you think I'm badly hurt and need to be here, but I'm all right, man. Believe me, I feel just fine. I just need to see Nandi. Talk to her, tell her I did try my best. I didn't just let her sister die. You know that boss, don't you?'

'I know,' Sam says, squeezing his hand back. 'And she knows. You couldn't have saved her, son. You couldn't have saved any of them.'

'Any of them? Sam, how many?'

'Twenty-three that day. Last I heard, the number's now in the three digits.'

'Sam, you're fucking with me.'

'I wish I was, my friend. Eight days ago, when we left South Africa, we had 123 reported deaths and still counting.'

'When we left South Africa? What do you mean by that, Sam? Where the bloody hell am I?' 'Bulawayo, Rhodesia. We're in bloody Rhodesia.'

'Ag, no, man. No,' he moans, wondering if this day could get any worse.

21

NANDI

— Diary Entry —

November 2nd, 1976

So, why didn't anyone warn me that becoming a mother would change me so much? I mean, sure, everyone talked about how hard it would be, about the sleepless nights and the chronic fatigue that naturally comes with that. Maybe I spoke to the wrong people, but nobody, I mean nobody, ever mentioned that becoming a mother turns

you into a completely different person. I used to pity those women who spend every waking moment fussing over their kids because I thought they had no lives. But now I've become one of them. Yes, I have sleepless nights, but it's not because Nakedi is a difficult baby or anything like that. The opposite is true. She's an equable baby, very content, hardly cries, and sleeps throughout the night, even at this early stage. Everyone says I'm fortunate. But that doesn't stop me from worrying about her. I get up three to four times a night just to check she's all right. I want to make sure that she's breathing, that she hasn't choked or something like that.

Sam, Bafana's old boss, bought her a crib, came and assembled it himself a few days before she arrived. But I'm afraid to put her in there. I've read about sudden infant death syndrome. Mama says I'm silly and claims that stuff only happens in the movies and to white people. But I don't care. For now, the baby is sleeping right next to me, where I can keep a close eye on her. We've taken over Mama's bed, so now she and Za have to bunk on the floor. I thought Za would create a big fuss about that, but she didn't protest at all. The way she took to the baby right away surprised me. I thought she'd be jealous cause she's used to being the baby of the family and getting spoilt. But no. My baby sister jumped into the role of little aunt like she'd been born for it. When I came home from the hospital, Za begged and begged me to let her hold the baby. I said no about a million times, but Za was persistent. So finally, the other day, I sat her on the sofa and placed Nakedi on her lap.

I stood over her the whole time to make sure she didn't move a muscle. Afterwards, Za was as chuffed as anything. She ran outside, screaming her pleasure for anyone who cared to listen. The boys seem more curious than excited about the new addition to the family. They hover over her when she's sleeping like they've never seen a creature like that before. Once I saw Bo caress her face with the back of his finger, but then the baby yawned, and he quickly pulled away like he was afraid she was going to bite him. Once I was cooking in the kitchen when I heard the baby cry. I ran to the bedroom only to find Bheki leaning over her and cooing to the baby like he was attempting to soothe her back to sleep.

I was touched and stood at the door, smiling, but when he saw me, he recoiled with embarrassment and quickly brushed past me. As for Mama, she's turned out to be an interesting grandmother. I thought she'd be as impatient with her as she is with all of us, but she's been surprisingly stoical. She seems to take pleasure in holding Nakedi and talking to her as if she believes the baby understands. My little brothers

and sister each have their way of interacting with the baby, whom they've nicknamed Kadie. The other day, I watched little Za fuss over her the other day, and I couldn't help but think about Busi. I wondered if she would have taken to Kadie the same way everyone else has. I smiled smugly to myself, picturing my whimsical sister cradling my baby and humming a lullaby to her - a revolutionary melody she would have picked up at one of her political rallies. *O thixo*, how I miss that girl! Anyway, I'd better stop thinking about Busi before I start tearing up again.

So, I got a special visit from the SB when I was in the delivery room. I guess they've been watching me like a hawk and followed me to the hospital. There were two of them, the same two who've been showing up to interrogate me about Bafana. They didn't say a word to me at the hospital, though. Just took turns guarding the room I was in. Stayed there for the whole three days I was there. Though I can't say for sure if they followed me when I was wheeled to the theatre, I was in so much pain that if God himself had descended and stood by my side. I probably wouldn't have noticed him. They must have been very disappointed when Bafana didn't make an appearance. Anyway, I hope they leave us alone now. We have enough problems to deal with as it is.

Mandla, for instance, is driving us all crazy with worry. As expected, he took Busi's death badly. I mean, who could blame him – she was his twin. After the funeral, he clammed up -wouldn't say a word to anyone. Then he started disappearing for days at a time. Once, I looked for him at his friend's house and was told that he was at MaDlamini's. I was heavily pregnant, eight months, but I was determined to find my brother. I walked back home to get Bheki and ordered him to take me to the shebeen. It was the first day I'd been out since my sister's funeral, and the riots were still going on. There was evidence of it on every street, like burning tires, which I guessed people used to defend themselves from the police. Some houses show signs of vandalism, broken windows, and words like 'traitor' spray-painted on the walls. A couple of places have even been burned down to the ground. I'd heard that students had taken it into their hands to avenge the deaths of their fellow students by turning on the black policemen. It made sense to assume that these burned down houses belonged to some of these policemen.

We walked past Bheki's school, which had remained closed since the riots like all schools in the township. 'Don't you miss it?' I asked him, gesturing at the desolate building. He shrugged indifferently. We continued silently, side by side, past the



shacks and the city dumpster, which was overflowing with weeks of rubbish. The stench was nauseating. I felt the bile rising in my throat, and I braced myself and tried to hold my breath for as long as I could until we reached the familiar street with rows of identical houses. Then Bheki stopped and pointed to one of them. 'This is it.' he said.

'Are you sure?' I asked doubtfully. I'd never been to a shebeen, and I'm not sure what I expected it to look like, but I was surprised by how ordinary the house looks. I guess I just thought it would be different to stand out from all the rest. But the place was as unremarkable as they come in Tembisa Township – a drab little thing in the middle of a shoddily fenced yard.

'Bheki. Are you certain this is it?' I repeated.

My brother responded with a sigh of exasperation. I instructed him to stay put before opening the gate and crossing the unkempt yard. I knocked on the front door. It was opened by a chubby, light-skinned woman with an animal print sarong wrapped around her heavy hips and a bright yellow scarf covering her head. This must be MaDlamini, I surmised, the infamous shebeen queen I've heard about.

'Yebo,' she said. I guessed her to be around Mama's age. She flashed me a phoney smile but did not invite me in. I could hear laughter and music behind her. I returned her greeting and told her I was looking for Mandla.

'Who are you?'

'His sister,' I told her.

'Wait here.' She closed the door and disappeared. Moments later, she returned to report, 'he's not here.'

'Tell him it's vital and that I'm not leaving till he comes out,' I said. MaDlamini sighed and turned away. This time, though, she didn't bother to close the door, so I pushed it with my foot and followed her in. The room was dimly lit and cloudy with cigarette smoke. There were several people in the small room, sitting on beer crates, drinking, and tapping their feet to the mbaqanga music blaring from the gramophone in a corner. I spotted my brother, who seemed to be struggling to balance a beer bottle on one knee and a big Afro-haired, mini-skirted woman on the other.

'Mandla!' I called, surprising him into almost dropping the woman.

'Nandi! What the... What are you doing here?' he stuttered after recovering from the shock of seeing me.

'Mandla, who is this?' The woman demanded, getting up and straightening her skirt. Her face was heavily made up, but even that and her youthful attire failed to disguise the fact that she was no spring chicken. I estimated her to be twice my brother's age. 'Who is she, *Ngubani lo?*' Her voice had risen an octave, causing everyone in the room to stop what they were doing and stare.

'Sit down. *Hlala phansi wena!*' Mandla ordered roughly as if the woman was a dog he was trying to control. Then he turned to me and snarled. 'What do you want?'

'Let's go home,' I told him.

'You go home, Nandi,' he said and waved me away. I could tell by his slurred voice that he was drunk and wondered just how long he'd been sitting there drinking. I didn't want to cause a scene, but I'd told myself that I wasn't leaving without him, and I was not about to.

'Not without you,' I said, looking down on him. 'Come on. Get up.' I nudged his knee. 'Eish, Nandi, leave me alone, man. *Ngiyeke!*'

'*Ja, wena*, leave him alone. Can't you see he's having a good time?' Big Afro slurred and planted herself back on his lap.

'You leave him alone,' I snapped, losing my patience. 'Can't you see he's just a boy? Aren't you ashamed?'

'Who do you think you're talking to?'

Big Afro jumped up again, her red eyes wild, and her fists balled like she was ready to fight. But I didn't feel intimidated at all.

'You,' I spat. 'I'm talking to you, and I'm telling you to leave my little brother alone. You're old enough to be his mother, for God's sake!' She raised her fist as if to swing at me, but Mandla bounced up and stood between us. 'Let's go home,' he said, taking my hand and leading me towards the door.

'Mandla!' Afro-head called after him, but he ignored her. Outside, he let go of my arm and hissed. 'What the hell did you come in there and embarrass me for? What's wrong with you?'

'You are asking me what's wrong with me?' I shot back. 'You're the one sitting in a shebeen with a woman old enough to be your Mama when the rest of us are mourning your twin and going crazy looking for you all over the township. What's gotten into you?'

'Eish, Nandi,' he grumbled, turning his eyes from mine. 'Did you come all this way to nag me, man? Jesus!' He started walking away, and I followed him. Bheki was still

at the gate, and his two best friends, Thuli and Sipho, had joined him. 'Now, can I go?' He screamed when he saw Mandla and me approaching. I started to tell him that he could go home and see if Mama needed any help, but he and his friends were already sprinting away in the opposite direction. 'Little bastard!' I mumbled to myself. 'I'll get him.'

'What is it you want from me?' Mandla took out a cigarette from his shirt pocket and lit it.

'I want you to act like you have some sense and come home. I need you to take care of Mama and the children.'

'You're doing a fine job of it,' he said, his voice syrupy with sarcasm.

'In case you haven't noticed, I'm almost eight months pregnant. There's only so much I can do.' 'Eish,' he sighed and took another drag from his cigarette.

'Seriously, though, what's gotten into you, little brother?' I pressed when we resumed walking. 'I know Busi's death has been hard on all of us – especially you....'

'Nandi, please! I don't want to talk about it,' he cut me short.

'I heard MaMlotshwa tell Mama you've been seen hanging around Panic's gang? Is that true? *Usungu tsotsi* now?' I asked him.

'I'm not a gangster,' Mandla snarled, his voice full of irritation. 'MaMlotshwa that old bag needs to shut her big gob. She doesn't know what she's talking about.' He drew phlegm and spat into the dirt.

I watched him and suddenly felt sad and nostalgic for my little brother of a few months ago – the brother who used to play practical jokes on the family and keep us all in stitches with his witty tales.

'You've changed, Mandla,' I said, my voice as soft as could be. 'And not just since Busi....'

He didn't let me finish but yelled, 'Dammit, Nandi! What part of I don't want to talk about that didn't you understand?' His raised voice draws the attention of three girls crouched on the ground nearby, playing hopscotch nearby.

'I hear you've been talking about going underground,' I said to change the subject.

'You've been hearing a lot of things about me, haven't you?' Mandla pulls out another cigarette and lights it. 'And what if I have?'

'You'd better not even think about it,' I said, pulling him to a stop by his shirt sleeve and giving him a sharp look. 'Do you hear me? *Uyangizwa*? Mama has already suffered enough from losing one child!' I shouted in his ear when he didn't answer.

'Those fucking Boers murdered my sister, and you expect me to sit back and do nothing about it?' Mandla's voice was thick with scorn.

'Exactly,' I said.

'You're fucking mad, *wena!* I think being pregnant has softened your bloody kop.'

'Do you think,' I said, ignoring the insult, 'that running to Namibia and becoming a guerrilla fighter will bring back Busi?'

'*Cha*, but it's what Busi would want me to do.'

'Bullshit!' I cried, grabbing him by the shirttail and forcing him to stop. For a long minute, Mandla and I stood in the middle of the road, facing off each other.

'You think you know everything, *angitsho*, my learned sister?' He hissed. 'Well, let me tell something, Miss Brains, you don't have a fucking clue. No one knew Busi the way I did.' Mandla turned his back and started walking away.

His statement sent my blood boiling. 'Dammit, Mandla, she was my sister too! Just because she was your twin doesn't mean that you knew her better. I loved her too!' I screamed at his retreating back. Ignoring me, Mandla kept on walking. Then, before I knew it, a tear ran down my cheek, and I didn't bother to wipe it away. The three girls had stopped their game and were staring at me, but I didn't care. I didn't move, even after Mandla's figure had disappeared around the street corner. Instead, I crouched on the ground and bawled like a baby. People walking by stopped to ask me if I was alright, which only made me cry harder. It was the first time I'd allowed myself to mourn my sister.

I did not see Mandla again. And then, two days later, just when I thought things couldn't get any worse, policemen burst into Mama's house in the middle of the night and nailed her. Now, it's only five days before Christmas, and our mother is still missing. I was still staying at Gogo's then, so I did not witness the arrest. I only found out about it when I was woken up by Bheki's tumultuous banging on the door.

'They've taken Mama,' he screamed as soon as I opened the door.

'Who?' I asked drowsily.

'*Amaphoyisa!*'

My brother's answer stirred me up, and I screamed, '*Ini?*' loud enough to rouse Auntie Pri and little Dingani. Bheki related to us how everyone in the house had been fast asleep when the police barged in out of the blue. They'd done this several times in the past, so this part of the story didn't alarm me. Mama always had, somehow, managed to evade them. This time, however, my brother explained, she had failed to

act fast enough. They'd snared her in the backyard before she could make it over the fence and into Mthethwa's yard.

This was precisely how they collared our father that fateful night, five years ago, and we never saw him again. By the time Bheki finished telling the story, I was sizzling with rage - furious at the government and whoever it was up there in Pretoria who insisted on keeping this senseless Pass Law alive and madly angry at the ruthless men in charge of enforcing it. As crazy as it sounds, I was also mad at Mama for allowing herself to be brought. Then, after exhausting my vexation at everyone and everything, I turned my fury at God. For perhaps the millionth time in my life, I looked to the man upstairs and asked him why he kept letting this unfairness go on. Needless to say, I didn't get an answer.

Half an hour later, I was home, venting some more in Mama's bedroom. I didn't want to do it in front of my siblings because they were already shaken up. Later, I returned to the sitting room and found them all huddled up on the lone orange sofa, so quiet and still as if posing for a family portrait. The silent aura felt eerie to me because our house always has been live with noise and movement.

'Okay. Listen to me all, of you...' I began, as I perched myself on the armrest next to Mandla. 'Here's what we're going to....'

I didn't get far before all heads turned to me and their mouths started moving simultaneously, firing question after question.

'Nandi, what are we going to do?'

'When can you go and get Mama?'

'Nandi, why did they take Mama? Where did they take her?'

'Nandi, I'm afraid. What if those policemen come back tonight and...?' 'Nandi, who's going to fix the door they kicked in?' 'And who's going to cook supper for us tonight?'

'Nandi, why are the police always bothering us?'

'Nandi, is Mama in jail?'

'Thandeka at school told me if they take you to jail, you never come back. Is it true, Nandi? Are they going to kill her like they did Baba?'

'Nandi, why are the policemen so mean?'

'Nandi, are you afraid too?'

'What if they come back? I'm afraid to go to sleep, Nandi....'

'What if Mama never comes back? What if we never find her? Like Baba. What are we going to do? Who's going to...?' This last one was fired by Bo, who immediately broke down and started crying. And, predictably, Za followed suit.

'Stop it. Stop it, you two,' I warned, trying to sound stern. 'We are going to find Mama. Now stop crying because that isn't going to help anything.'

'But we couldn't find Baba,' Bo insisted, still sobbing.

'That was different,' I shouted, a bit too harshly because I was annoyed at him for bringing Baba up.

'How?' Bo wouldn't let it go.

'Because...because...'

Because what? What could I say? Because when they came to get Baba, I was away at boarding school, and no one bothered to write and tell me what had happened? No, that didn't sound right. I could just hear Mandla challenging me. So? What would you have done, Nandi, if you'd been around? Could you have stopped those Boers from taking Baba? And if we'd written and told you, would you have come home, forced your way into every jail to try to find him? You really do believe you are superwoman, don't you?

'Listen, Bo, we will find her. Don't worry. Okay?' I said, trying to sound calm, which I did not feel. 'Today, I will go to Number Four.' Then I turned to my left and said. 'Bheki. You'll come with me.'

'I don't want to stay here alone,' Za jumped up from the sofa and ran to me. I sat her on my lap, and she flung her arms around my neck. 'What if those horrible men come back?' She sobbed onto my shoulder.

'Shhh. *Bangeke*,' I tried to assure my baby sister.

'How do you know?' Bo challenged me. 'And what if you all go there and they arrest you too. What is going to happen to us?'

'They are not going to arrest me,' I told him. 'We haven't done anything wrong.'

'Did Mama do something wrong?' My baby sister, still keening on my neck, wanted to know. I was lost for an answer. How could I explain to a six-year-old what I could not understand myself? What would she make of my baffling explanation that Mama had broken the mlungu's law by choosing to live and work in this part of her country - this corner where she had toiled for two decades, birthed six children and lost one plus a husband? Before I could even attempt to articulate an answer, Bheki jumped

in and challenged me. 'We don't know where they took her, so where are you going to start looking?'

I had no answer for him either - no clue where the policemen would have taken our mother. My guess was that she was sitting in a slammer somewhere or, worst, she'd been transferred back to the Transkei where she was originally from. I prayed that wherever our mother was, it was not Constitution Hill - the jailhouse notoriously known as Number Four. I learned most about Number Four from a story Lerato's mother once told me when I was visiting.

Like many others, for many years, MaWillie had been surviving in Johannesburg as an illegal. Just like my mother and the multitudes who'd come from various homelands, she'd never managed to acquire the 'pass' - the elusive document would have validated her status in the big city. MaWillie was barely twenty when she decided to leave her two young children with her parents and set out in search of greener pastures. She'd descended on the city of gold with nothing but hope and a head full of dreams. Fortunately for her, she was not one to shy away from any kind of work, and work in white people's homes was plentiful at that time. Shortly after her arrival, she'd found a job as a nanny for a family in Sandton with three boys. A few months into her new position, the family's chef was fired, and MaWillie found herself doubling as a cook and nanny for an extra four rands a month. When the gardener had a day off, MaDewu was expected to take over his duties in addition to hers.

As time went on, her responsibilities kept piling, but her wages stayed the same. Eventually, MaWillie got fed up and found work with another family. And when she started feeling taken advantage of by that family, she moved on. For her, finding jobs was a piece of cake. Keeping them was the problem. And because she never stayed with the same for long, she'd managed to find an employer who could vouch for 'pass' application. A decade after she arrived in Johannesburg, MaWillie still lived as an outlaw in the golden city. However, that did not deter her from her goal: to send for her children, Willie and Lerato.

Over the years, MaWillie had managed to avoid the can by bribing the police. Until one fateful night when they barged in the door, and she happened to be flat broke. Her father had passed on a few days earlier, and MaWillie had just sent home all the money she had. When the policeman kicked down her door, all she had to her name was two shillings. That night would be the first she'd be forced into the kwela-kwela for a trip to Number Four.

MaWillie described Number Four as a shithole that would make hell look like paradise. The prison was segregate, so the white offenders and the black prisoners were locked up in separate wings. The whites' cells were nowhere near as crowded as the blacks. They slept in bunk beds, complete with sheets, blankets, and black pillows. Black inmates had to kip on the concrete slabs they sat on during the day. They were offered no pillows, only thin blankets to keep them warm.

According to MaWillie, not only were the white prisoners' cells more comfortable, but their diet was also superior to the blacks'. The white prisoners had their own menu, which included rice, bread, meat, fish, eggs, coffee or tea, milk, and jam. 'They ate like they were at a restaurant where you look at the menu and choose what you want. They ate better food than the owners of the country.' MaWillie remarked. 'There was nothing like that for us blacks. We ate rubbish. Our diet was so bad that we would refuse the food until hunger got the better of us. Supper was a mixture of old, rotten, bellied fish whose stink would permeate from the prison's kitchen long before the food arrived.'

While their white counterparts ate their meals with silverware cutlery in a comfortable dining room, black prisoners' food was served on tin plates, which were unwashed and encrusted with dried food. There was no dining room for them. Whatever the weather, they had to eat in an open courtyard and sit on hard benches facing the latrine.

When MaWillie described the punishment dished out to black prisoners, her eyes watered. If a prisoner broke a rule or offended a guard, he'd be forced to strip naked in the courtyard, in front of everyone.' MaWillie related to us. 'He'd be ordered to stand totally still while a guard struck his back with the sjambok. After that, he would have to stand there for the rest of the day. *Eyi, wena!* You don't know what that does to a person's dignity. You just don't know what it does to your soul.' MaWillie finished. Her final words had made an impression and stayed with me ever since. They echoed loud and clear in my head as I sat with my brothers and sisters, trying not to imagine the fate that had befallen our mother.

Anyway, to make a long story short, Bheki and I trekked to Number Four later that morning. Our visit to the infamous pen produced no results. We sat outside the jail for four hours with a dozen others who were also trying to locate their loved ones. We were then told that we'd have to come back another day when all those who'd



been nabbed that day were booked in. We went there the next day and the next, only to be told the same thing.

Fortunately, on the fourth day, Bafana's boss came by. A few days after Busi was killed, the man had surprised us all by turning up at our house. After introducing himself, he'd taken me aside and whispered in my ear that Bafana had been badly injured but was still alive. Then he offered to pay for my sister's funeral expenses. Later on, he astonished us further by turning up for the service. After that, we got used to Sam's weekly visits and his gifts of food. Each time he came, he'd update me on Bafana's condition.

One day Sam told me that Bafana wanted to see me. According to him, Bafana had threatened that if Sam didn't bring me to him, he would take the risk and come to Soweto. So, on the fourth day after Mama's arrested, Sam had come over to tell me that he was making plans to sneak me across the border to Rhodesia. I told him what had happened to my mother. Sam ordered Bheki and me to get into his car, and the three of us drove us to Number Four. Within minutes of Sam introducing himself to the jail warden and flashing his Rand Daily Mail badge, we found had all the information we'd been seeking. Indeed, Mama was at Number, and we would need two hundred and fifty rands to get her out. She'd been booked on the same day she was picked up and charged with pass violation. I told all this to Bafana when I saw him in Rhodesia a few days later. But I didn't mention anything to him about Mandla because he was already feeling bad enough and blaming himself for Busi's death.

Yesterday, I wrote and told him that he's now a father. I addressed the envelope to his sister, Lethu, for apparent reasons. It is a known fact that the SB is in the business of intercepting letters. I gave him some news about what was happening here, but I wasn't honest about some things. For instance, I informed him that the money he sent last week had gone a long way to ensure the baby had everything she needed and that there was enough left over to see that my family didn't starve for a while. That was a fib. The money is gone.

I used most of it to pay for the kids' school fees. Their school re-opened a month ago, and all their friends had returned, but since Mama hadn't been working, she had no money to send my little brothers and sister back. I felt horrible watching them hanging around the house, so when Sam came over and handed me the money Bafana had wired, I went straight to the school and paid the fees. Then I went to

town and bought them uniforms because their old ones were either too small or worn out. We were also three months behind in rent, so I had to pay for that also. I did buy the baby's stuff with the rest, though, and food for the house. But after I was done, there was nothing but eight rands left. I didn't want to share this with Bafana because I didn't want him to feel pressured to send more. After all, it's not his duty to provide for my family. I know that I will have to go out and look for some sort of job soon. The eight rands won't last us more than a week, and Mama isn't well enough to go back to work. The responsibility of taking care of the family is now on my shoulders.

## 22

### BAFANA

'You don't need to fill anything in. It's all been done for you. You just need to sign at the bottom of the statement on page eighteen, that's all,' Lethu says, pushing the two-inch stack of paper towards him.

They are sitting at the kitchen table, and she is dressed in her scrubs, ready to zoom off to the hospital where she is doing her residency training. For the past couple of weeks, Bafana' been avoiding being around her. He's sick of listening to her go on about this political asylum application. Today, she's finally managed to corner him and make him hear.

'Lethu, I'm running late for my interview. Do I have to do this now?' He moans.

'Yes,' Lethu firmly insists in a stern voice. 'Your visitor's visa expires in less than a month, so we need to apply for political asylum now. Stevo already filled in everything on there; all you need to do is sign it, for Christ's sake! It's only going to take you a couple of seconds.'

Stevo is one of Lethu and Mbuso's friends, an exiled lawyer who now practices immigration law.

'You mean I don't even have to read what the statement says?' He asks, and this annoys his sister even more.

'*O thixo wami!*' She exclaims, rolling her eyes. 'I'm late for my shift, Bafana. I have to give these documents back to Stevo today. Okay, read it if you must. Quick, you have ten minutes. You could have read everything two weeks ago when I tried to give you the forms,' she snaps, glancing at her wristwatch.

Lethu gets up and walks to the counter to refill her coffee mug. Bafana takes the stack of papers, flips to page eighteen, and starts reading. I, Bafana Gerard Mkwanzani, am a native of the South African Republic. I was born in Johannesburg on November 21, 1952. I lived in Soweto and attended school there until 1969, when I was arrested by the Special Branch Police and accused of being involved in subversive activities. I was detained at Vorster Square for three weeks, where I was tortured gruesomely. During this detention period, I was denied food, water, and sleep. I was beaten every single day, forced to admit to crimes I didn't commit. When I refused to comply, I was stripped naked, electric wires were hooked to various parts of my body, like the nipples and fingers. When I failed to answer a question the way they wanted, they'd turn on the switch. On a few occasions, two policemen held me by an open window on the twelfth floor and threatened to push me out if I did not cooperate. Sometimes, after beating me, they'd throw my unconscious body into a cold room, then later, they would wake me up by throwing a bucket of cold water over my body. I was finally rescued from this torture when my parents found out where I was and hired a lawyer to get me out. As soon as I was released, my parents sent me to England to live with my sister, Gugulethu Mlambo, and her husband because they feared for my life. In 1972, I graduated from university and to South Africa. I found employment with the Rand Daily Mail newspaper, where I worked as an investigative journalist for the next three and a half years. Shortly after returning home, I became affiliated with SASM (South African Students Movement), an organisation I'd been a member of during my youth in Soweto. At the end of last year, the government announced its intention to implement changes to the Bantu education system. These entailed introducing Afrikaans as the medium of teaching in black secondary schools across the country. The idea of being taught in a language they were not familiar with did not sit well with the students.

So, a protest rally planned to allow students voice their grievances. At the SASM, we held a meeting to help student leaders from several schools agree to a route for the march. We planned to make it as peaceful as possible. Unfortunately, on the day of the rally, a dozen or so policemen showed up with dogs and weapons and, without provocation, opened fire, killing some students and injuring many. I was one of those shot and injured. I had come to support the students and cover the story for the Rand Daily, the paper I worked for at the time. Because of my involvement, I was later accused of being the instigator of the march and became a wanted man. I escaped to Bulawayo, Rhodesia, where I spent a month recuperating in the hospital and another month in hiding with friends. I could not return to South Africa because it was no longer deemed safe. The Special Branch was after me. They harassed my family, my friends, and my boss. Some of my friends from SASM were captured and accused of the same crime I was. The interrogators tortured my friends and killed one of them. The Special Branch police have also hounded my girlfriend and her family. I remained in hiding in Rhodesia until the end of August when, with the help of my sister, I managed to flee to the United Kingdom. I am applying for political asylum because of the threat of persecution in my country for my political beliefs. The government has placed a price on my head, and I'm in fear of my life. If I returned home today, I'd be dead by morning.' Bafana can't help but grin when he reads this last bit. Stevo was getting a bit carried away here, he thinks.

'What's so amusing?' Lethu asks, giving him a peevish look.

'A price has been put on my head! Isn't that going too far? I'm not that special, you know. Those Boers wouldn't put a lousy shilling on my knucklehead skull,' he laughs. Lethu smiles and gives him what he interprets as a pitying look. Bafana doesn't like this. It reminds him of when he was a young boy and afraid to go home because he was in trouble with one or both his parents. Lethu, who was already a teenager then, would coax him out of his hiding place, which was usually Ndo or Dumo's house, promising him that everything would be alright, she'd protect him if their mother or father tried to sjambok him. But as soon as they got home, Lethu would announce, 'Here he is. I found him!' before disappearing, leaving him to take his punishment. She always managed to fool him with that same pitying look.

'You might as well have, little bro,' she says. 'Anyway, nowadays, you've got to stretch the truth a little if you want them to grant you asylum. They are very strict and won't let you stay if they don't think your situation is dire enough. Lately, they've been

getting many bogus claims from people from Nigeria who come here claiming to be refugees from South Africa or Rhodesia. So, when you go for the interview, be prepared for some intense scrutiny.'

'Sure,' he says, pushing the papers back to her. He is curious to see what else Stevo wrote about him in the application but knows that Lethu will go off on him if he insists on reading all twenty-something pages of the document. She'll remind him that he's had ample time to read it, and he could have filled out the bloody forms himself if he cared so much about what was written on them. So, he lets it go and goes up to his room to get ready for his interview.

There is no interview. Bafana has plans to meet a chap named Mark Einstein at the Embankment for lunch. Mark is interested in the book he plans to write. About a month ago, he came up with the idea to write a book about the students uprising, about the events that led to that fateful day and the devastating aftermath. His decision came after he read the Commission report that the government plans to publish. It was Sam who sent him a copy. How he managed to get his hands on it, Bafana is not sure. He was not surprised by what he read, but it left him feeling angrier and even more bitter at the South African government. He had expected they would try to cover up what happened for the rest of the world. It was a given. But the story in the Commission report was so distorted that it might as well have been a work of fiction. There was not a drop of truth in it. In this fictionalised account of that day, the students were the instigators of the violence. They provoked the policemen and their dogs, so the policemen had no choice but to shoot and kill.

The first time he read it, Bafana wanted to tear the whole thing up and burn it. But, instead, he howled and put a fist through Lethu's kitchen wall, injuring his hand. He later had to lie to his sister about how the hole had suddenly appeared. Then, standing at the kitchen sink and rinsing his bloody hand, it was there that he decided to write a book and set the story straight. He didn't tell Mbuso or Lethu about his idea because, on his second day here, they sat him down and made him promise he'd stay out of trouble. And so, he's kept his plan to himself because he knows very well that those two would view writing a book that contradicts the government's claims as, indeed, asking for trouble. And he would agree with them, but that doesn't mean he shouldn't stand up for the truth. Busi and all the murdered kids deserve to have the fact known for crying out loud! And he was not going to let their deaths be in vain if he could help it.

The only person he'd told about his idea was Themba. Although nearly a decade older, they had become close friends again since the night of the braai. Bafana had elected to let him in on the truth because he knew Themba, who was also a journalist with a few books under his belt, would understand. Consequentially, Themba later introduced him to Mark Eisenberg, the editor at Dalston Books.

Upon his request, Bafana had sent the man a fourteen-page letter, telling him his life story and pitching his book. Then, five days later, he'd received a call at Mbuso's garage from Mark Eisenberg, inviting him to lunch to discuss his proposed text further. That had been a week ago, and since then, Bafana hadn't slept much from excitement.

Although Mark hadn't said anything to suggest that he wanted to publish the book, Bafana had already started crafting the outline, telling himself if Dalston Books didn't like it, he'd find someone else to publish the book. He wishes he could share his excitement with someone. Nandi would be just as thrilled for him. She'd encourage him, for sure. How he missed her, he thought as he sat on the bed to tie his shoelaces. Yesterday, he'd written a letter to her, telling her he wanted to name their child Mbalenhle. He loved that name. Not only did it have a beautiful meaning – flower - it was also his favourite sister's name. He still hadn't seen a picture of his baby daughter, but he imagined that she was just as delightful to look at as a flower.

He had an hour and a half to kill before his lunch meeting at 1 pm. He decides to run to the off-licence around the corner and get a calling card to call Ndo at the Rand Daily Mail. He knew the call would give the poor guy the shock of his life. According to Sam, who calls him once a week, Ndo, or anyone else in the office, still doesn't know Bafana is alive. He tries to imagine the look on his best friend's face when he hears his voice. He runs back down the stairs and out of the front door, which Lethu has left wide open. Her little Peugeot is gone from the front of the house. The pavement is full of young mothers pushing prams and their toddlers running noisily behind them, trying to catch up. He assumes they are rushing to the nurse's at the corner of Sherrif Road, near the primary school his nieces attend. As he strolls behind the little kids, Bafana can't help but think about his infant daughter. He is impatient to see what she looks like and is pissed off at Nandi, who still hasn't sent him a picture. Bafana wonders how long it will be before he sees her in the flesh. Will she be as big as these kids here, running and talking? Or maybe even older? In high

school, perhaps? No. He's not going to let that happen. No way is he going to wait that long to see his child. Not if he can help it.

The off-licence on West Lane isn't busy around this time of the day; he's out with his calling card within minutes. Back at the house, he unplugs the phone from the living room socket and takes it up to his room. He's not sure why he's doing this. It's not like anyone is around to invade his privacy. But you never know. Lethu might pop back in, having forgotten her purse or something. And the last thing he wants to do is explain to her why he is communicating with his friends back home. He still knows the Rand Daily Mail number by heart, and in his excitement, almost calls it directly, forgetting about the calling card in his pocket. It seems forever before he hears the phone click and a woman's voice, with a twang of an Australian accent, sings, 'Rand Daily Mail, may I help you?' It's Melanie, the secretary. So happy to hear her, he almost me. Bafana.' But he catches himself in time. Bafana is not sure how much Melanie knows. He has no idea if Sam has confided the truth to her or if she, like everyone else, believes he's dead. But Bafana can't afford to take a chance. So, to disguise his voice, he pinches his nose and politely tells her that he urgently needs to speak to one of the printers, Nnodana Ndebele.

'Who's this?' Melanie barks bluntly.

'Madam, I'm his uncle. This is an emergency, please; I need to speak to my nephew urgently,' he adds before Melanie can say, 'I'm sorry, we don't allow personal calls here,' as she typically does when she's in a sour mood.

There is silence on the other end of the phone. Then Bafana hears the noise of heels retreating. He cradles the phone to his ear and studies his profile in the wardrobe mirror across the room. He wonders if the outfit he's picked to wear for the lunch meeting with Mark is appropriate. The black denim jacket and the black t-shirt might be too casual to wear to a meeting to discuss a book deal. Book deal? Slow your roll, mfo, he berates himself, smiling in the mirror. Aren't you getting a little ahead of yourself?

'Hallo. Nnodana here,' a husky, breathless voice speaks into the phone.

'Ndo. *Yimi u*Bafana. Whatever you do, *mfo*, stay calm. Don't act alarmed. Is Melanie standing beside you?' There is no answer, and, for a moment, Bafana worries that his best friend has dropped the phone. 'Ndo,' he says again. '*Yimi, u*Bafana.'

'Ini? Who is this? Ngubani wena? Is this your idea of a joke? If it is, I'm not laughing, you sick son of a bitch.' Bafana has never heard his friend sound this ticked off.

'Ndodana, listen to me...It is then he realised he is whispering in a nasal voice. You idiot, he berates himself. No wonder Ndo doesn't recognise his voice and thinks someone was playing a joke on him. Quickly, before Ndo has a chance to hang up, Bafana says, '*Khandalakho, wena sidakwa!*' – sure that Ndo will recognise their private joke.

'Bafa...'

'Shhh. Don't say my name,' Bafana cautions him. 'No one there except Sam knows I'm alive, *mfo!*'

'*Mara...Mara* how? Where are you?' Ndo is stuttering as he often does when he is drunk or confused.

England. It's a long story. Maybe I'll live to tell you one day.'

'But they said...they said you....'

'Never mind what they said, *mfo*. I'm alive and well. Now let's speak in Zulu. I know Melanie is snooping on us. I told her I'm your uncle, so keep saying Malume, okay?'

'*Ja, Malume,*' Ndo replies

'How are things with you, *mfo?*' Bafana asks in Zulu.

'Not good. *Ziyabheda, Malume.*'

'I figured. *UNandi* told me some of it.'

'*UNandi uyazi?* She knows you're alive?' Ndodana sounds even more dumbfounded.

'*Ja, mfo. Uyazi. Njalo,* she's seen me since...since this whole thing. She told me you went to see her and the baby.'

'*Ja,* I visited a couple of times after she had the baby. Twice.'

'How is she, man? I mean, how is she really? I haven't spoken to her since I left, but she's written. She tells me some things, but I think she's holding stuff back. The stuff she thinks I may not like to hear.'

'Well,' Ndo begins, then abruptly stops.

'*Ini, Ndo?*' Bafana's heart is racing as he presses his friend. What is Ndo afraid to tell him? That Nandi has moved on? That they picked her up? Well, that would explain why she hasn't written again since the first letter, almost three months ago.



'Well, *mfo*, the last time I went to see her, things did not look so good at her place.'

'What do you mean, *mfo*? What are you talking about?' Bafana can't hide the panic in his voice. 'Is she alright? Is my baby okay?'

'Nandi's fine. And so is the baby. But the family...her family... they seem to have hit hard times. Very hard, *mfo*. Nandi didn't say anything or complain, but their electricity had been cut off the last time I went there. She was embarrassed because there was no food in the house to offer me, not even a cup of tea. To make matters worse, I hear her brother has disappeared. They don't know where he is, but there's a rumour he's crossed the border.'

'Shit!' Bafana swears. 'Why didn't she tell me all this?'

'I suppose she didn't want to worry you, *mfo*.'

'Listen, Ndo. Can you do me a favour, man?'

'Of course. You know, I will.'

'Can you go back to her house and tell her I need to speak to her. Tell her to go to The Rand on Friday at noon, and I will call her there.'

'Sharp, *mfo*. But the baas...?'

'Ndo, don't worry. Sam knows everything. You just go and tell Nandi that I need to speak to her urgently come I.'

'Sharp, *mfo*. I'll do it,' Ndo promises before telling him he had to hang up because Melanie was eyeing him suspiciously. Bafana hangs up the phone feeling unsettled and confused. The phone call dampened his mood, and he now wishes he hadn't made it. He can't believe that Nandi has kept so much from him. In the letter, she'd talked about everything else but what was going on in her house. How can her family be destitute after all the money he's sent her? A million questions run through his mind. What the hell is Nandi up to? What the bloody fuck is she squandering his hard-earned money on? Had she been lying when she wrote that the money was enough to take care of the baby and keep them all fed for a while? Or was his best mate, Ndodana, exaggerating – blowing the whole situation out of proportion? Nevertheless, Bafana is hopping mad. The thought of his baby living in squalor incenses him so much he is tempted to call Ndo again and order him to go to her house and tell Nandi to come to the phone pronto. He wants some answers right now, dammit!

## NANDI

- Diary Entry -November 30, 1975

So, surprise, surprise! I'm living on Vilikazi Street again. Back in Bafana's old house. How did that happen? Well, it was Ndodana who got the wheels turning. About three weeks ago, Bafana called him, and Ndo told him everything; the truth about our family situation, which I'd been trying to hide from Bafana for a while. At first, I was mad at Ndo for failing to mind his own business. But later, I felt relieved the truth was finally out, that I didn't have to lie anymore. Ndo had told him about the lights being out in our house and all that. So, Bafana sent him to come and inform me he wants to speak to me. He'd set up a date and time he would call the Rand Daily Mail, and I was to go there and wait for his call. So, I left the baby with Mama, took the train to Park Station, and then walked ten minutes to Jacaranda Street.

When I strode into the office, everyone stopped what they were doing and came out of their cubicles. They eyed me like I was a curious creature from out of space. I'm sure they were all dying to know what I was doing there. I waved to a few I'd met through Bafana, then hurried down the hall to Sam's office to wait for the call. I didn't have to wait long. I'd just finished greeting Sam when the phone rang. God, I was dying to hear his voice; it took all my self-control to stop from jumping out of my seat and grabbing the phone on Sam's big, old, oak desk. But I willed myself to sit still and wait for Sam to finish saying what he had to say. It may only have been a couple of minutes, but it seemed like hours before he finally handed me the phone. I don't know why, but I thought he'd sound different and far away, but Bafana's voice was just the same and as close as if he was speaking to me from across the room. I could not believe I was talking to him. I told him how much I missed him. He said he missed me too. I wanted to say more but felt shy with Sam being there. Then Bafana asked me about the baby. I let him know she was doing fine, and so was everyone

else. Then he was silent, and when he spoke again, it was in a lowered voice, almost a whisper.

'Nandi, why are you lying to me?' He said. 'Girl, then why the fuck have you been deceiving me all this time?'

His question took me by surprise. For a moment, I thought I'd misheard him.

'Excuse me,' I said. 'What did you just ask me?'

'You heard me. I said, why the bloody hell have you been fibbing to me all this time?' He hollered, and I was embarrassed because I was sure Sam heard every word.

'Bafana,' I whispered into the phone. 'What are you insinuating? Man, if you want to accuse me of something, stop going around the bush and spit it out...'

'I know the truth Nandi. Ndo told me everything.'

'And what exactly did Ndo tell you?' I said, sounding just as miffed now.

'What the bloody hell have you been doing with the money I've been sending you? I'm busting my arse here, girl, trying to make sure that my kid is cared for. Then I'm hearing stories that you've got my kid living in a house with no bloody electricity or food. So, what the fuck is going on? And you better not lie to me this time, or I swear to God...'

'Bafana,' I cut him off. 'Please calm down.' I was seething, but I didn't want to get into a shouting match with him in front of Sam.

'Don't tell me to calm down,' Bafana snapped. 'I want to know what the goddamn hell you've been up to. What have you been blowing my money on? Are you screwing around on me?'

'Alright. Enough already!' It was my turn to snap. 'You want to know what's going on? I'll tell you. First of all, I have not been blowing your money or screwing around on you. If your friend had bothered to find out the truth, he wouldn't have been so fast to go running his mouth. If he'd asked, I would have told him that my mother's been arrested three more times since first time; that I've had to pay bail to get her out each time; and that I've been struggling to scrape together money to pay a lawyer who might, somehow, manage to keep my mother out of jail. So, there you have it, Bafana! There's your truth! Are you happy now?'

I didn't bother to wait for his response. Instead, I slammed down the phone and got up, and stomped away. I heard Sam follow me and ask if I was all right, but I ignored him and kept walking. I was livid; tears stung my eyes as I ran down the

flights of stairs. By the time I got to the bottom, my heart was pounding furiously. I couldn't believe Bafana's galls. How dare he question me like that? In months, our first conversation had to go and ruin it with his accusations and innuendo. And that Ndo of his! I used to think he was a decent guy. Out of all Bafana's friends, he seemed the most genuine and cordial. But I was fooled. A snake in the grass is what he really is.

I didn't have a penny on me, so I made it back to Naledi Township on foot. However, the long walk did not alleviate my rage; it fueled it. By the time I got home, I was ready to burst a vessel. My feet had swollen to double their normal size, and my breasts, now leaking with milk, felt excruciatingly heavy. Kadie was screaming her head off, and Mama was struggling to calm her.

'Why did you take so long?' she snapped as soon as I walked through the door. 'Didn't it occur to you that she might be hungry?'

'Mama, not now, please,' I retorted. I didn't bother to explain I'd had to walk back from Johannesburg. I just took the baby and started feeding her. For the next few days, my mood remained sour. Then one day, I was in the backyard, hanging nappies on the line, when Ndodana showed up and announced that Bafana wanted to speak to me promptly.

'Cha,' I said in a clipped voice. 'Go tell your friend I'm done talking to him.'

'I think you should come. I don't know what Bafana wants to speak to you about, but he made it sound urgent.' Ndodana insisted. I ignored him, turned my back, and continued hanging the washing. 'Please, Nandi,' he begged.

I sighed and coldly asked him to leave. 'I've a lot of work to do, so please...'

'*Ngiyakucela*, Nandi,' Ndodana continued beseeching. 'I have the work van. I can take you to the office right now.'

Finally, tired of listening to his pleas, I relented. 'But first, I have to change and feed the baby.'

'I'll wait.'

I fed Kadie and changed her nappy, then boiled my bathwater and took my time to wash. Almost an hour had passed when I stepped out joined Ndodana in the Rand Daily Mail van. We sat side by side, but no words were exchanged between us throughout the drive to the Rand Daily.

Sam was not in his office when we got there, so I sat alone, waiting for Bafana's call. Finally, ten minutes or so later, the phone rang, and I picked it up.

'Nandi?' His voice was calm and collected.

'Ja?' I answered stolidly.

'How are you? How's my baby girl?'

'All right. We are all right,' I said.

'Listen, *s'thandwa*. I was out of line the other day. *Uxolo*.'

I didn't respond or acknowledge his apology.

'I didn't mean anything I said. I was just upset and... Can you please forgive me?  
*Ngiyacela s'thandwasa...*'

'Bafana,' I cut him short. 'I have to get back home for the baby. What is it you want this time?'

Bafana hesitated momentarily, then started rambling animatedly. '*Lalela s'thandwa*. I've come up with a plan. Now, before you say anything, hear me out. I want you to go back to Vilikazi Street. Ndo has the spare key to the house, and I've told him to ....'

'Wait a minute,' I interrupted his gabble. 'What makes you think I'd want to move back into your house?'

He ignored my question and carried on. 'I need you in the house so I can call you anytime. It frustrates me that I can't just pick up the phone and talk to you whenever I want. I know the line at the house has probably been cut off by now. Maybe the electricity too. But don't worry, I'll send you money to get everything turned back on.'

'*Mara* Bafana. What about...?'

'Don't worry about your family. I'm not asking you to abandon them. I'll send enough money for them too. I just need you to do this for me, *s'thandwa*. *Ngiyacela*.'

I realised he was serious. 'But...Bafana...I...I don't...?' I stuttered, lost for words. I had come to the phone prepared for another screaming match, so this out-of-the-blue proposal completely took me by surprise.

'*S'thandwa*, please say yes. *Ngiyacela*.'

'Ja. Alright,' I finally said.

A week later, I packed our clothes and Kadie, and I, against Mama's wishes, moved into the house on Vilikazi Street. Ndo drove us there in the Rand Daily Mail. At first, I was concerned that the place would be too quiet and lonely with just me and the baby living there, but it's been the opposite. MaNgwenya spends so much time here she might as well be living with us. The other neighbours also have taken

to dropping in every chance they get to check on the baby and make sure I'm following all their unsolicited maternal advice.

## 24

### BAFANA

It's nearly midday, and he is still tinkering away at the typewriter. He has not eaten anything but toast and coffee since he woke up at half-past five this morning. His stomach is growling. His armpits are sweaty. He knows he should get up, go downstairs and eat something; Bafana knows he needs to shower and change from these funky pyjama bottoms and old t-shirt he's been wearing for five days in a row. But he can't stop; he can't pull himself from the typewriter. Two weeks ago, he'd received a call at the garage from Mark Steinberg, inviting him to another meeting to discuss 'the book'. The first meeting, a month earlier, had gone relatively well. Mark seemed very excited about his proposal. He claimed he'd heard many conflicting stories about the Soweto students' protest march and the killings. But until now, he hadn't met anyone who'd actually been involved in the whole thing. After ten minutes into their meeting, Mark wanted to know if Bafana had guessed something about him. Could Bafana tell that he, too, was South African? Did his accent give him away?

'No,' Bafana had lied.

'Well, I guess not. After all, I hardly lived in the country. Left the place when I was about seven or eight. Parents immigrated – actually, we were forced out after Sharpeville. They were publishers as well, you see, and anti-apartheid campaigners. They produced books and pamphlets that decried the whole thing. Most of the books were by blacks, and half of them were later banned. Anyway, to cut a long story short, after Sharpeville, the publishing house was burned down. We woke up one morning, and the building was gone. Perished in a mysterious fire during the night. Our family home followed about a month later. Luckily, we were all in Durban, visiting my grandparents. After that, we packed and left. There was no other choice, to be honest. And now, here we are.

Mark went on to explain how his parents had arrived in England almost penniless and how they'd worked hard and scraped for a decade to start up another publishing house called Dalston House Books. The operation had started in their basement flat in Dalston, their first home in London. His parents were retired, so now, Mark and his older sister were running the business.

Mark proceeded to tell him about various authors and books whose fame was attributed to Dalston House Books. But Bafana's mind had wandered. He'd blown off a meeting with Stevo, the immigration lawyer, so he could have lunch with Mark. Lethu had set up the meeting with the lawyer, and Bafana knew his sister would blow her top when she found out he'd bunked it. She was probably throwing a fit right now, he thought. Even though Bafana felt like a dickhead for standing Stevo up, he felt he had no other choice. How could he have turned down the opportunity to meet Mark and discuss his book?

It was Themba who'd introduced him to Mark. After Lethu's party, Themba had taken an interest in rekindling their friendship. He kept showing up at the house, wanting Bafana to accompany him to the pub or a party going on somewhere. Each time Bafana had to come up with an excuse to make the man go away. Finally, he got tired and decided to tell him the truth. He confided to Themba that he was busy writing a book. Bafana hoped that Themba, as a writer, would understand his need for space and leave him alone. However, after that revelation, Themba's visits became more frequent. He immediately took an obsessive interest in the book, Bafana soon regretted telling him about it. Every night Themba would show up and ask question after question about the book.

One day he called him at the garage and told Bafana that someone was interested in his book and wanted to meet him. Bafana was flabbergasted. He had no idea that Themba was talking to other people about his book, and at first, this annoyed him. However, as time went by and Themba became more persistent, Bafana started coming around to the idea. After all these months in London, he still wasn't sure about which direction he wanted to go. The only thing he knew for sure was that he had to write this book. He owed it to the Soweto kids - the ones who perished and those who survived. He owed them all. And so, eventually, he agreed to let Themba set up this lunch meeting with Mark.

When he'd tired of gloating over the company's achievements, Mark turned his excitement back to Bafana's book. Would he need an advance while he was writing

it? He wanted to know how long Bafana thought it would take him to finish it. Did he believe he could write faster if he didn't have to work at his brother-in-law's garage? Would an advance help? Because the book really needed to come out while now, while the topic was still hot.

Mark didn't wait for an answer. 'Let me talk to my sister and find out how we can help you get the time you need.'

Bafana wasn't sure what he meant but was optimistic that he would go into a long, exciting tirade about what he had in mind if he asked Mark. So, he picked up his fork and changed the subject to rugby.

Two weeks later, another call came from Mark, asking Bafana to meet him again. They met at his office at Dalston Books this time, and he wasted no time getting to the point.

'We like the book,' Mark said before Bafana had a chance to sit down. 'My sister, Kate, and I think it is a must book, and we want you to get on with it right away. So, here's what we're prepared to do. We are offering you an advance of twelve thousand pounds so you can quit your job and start writing. You said you believe it will take you a year to write?'

'Yes.' The word barely came out of Bafana's mouth.

'Well, twelve grand is sufficient to live on for one year, don't you think?' 'Uhm,' Bafana nodded. He could not believe what he had just heard. Had this white man, sitting across from him, only offered him twelve grand. Twelve grand to write a book, which will fulminate against a regime run by his own people, even if that same system had run him and his family out of their country. And what made this guy, this young editor, who looked to be no more than a couple of years older than him, the trust he could write this book? Bafana wondered. He hadn't asked to read any of the articles he'd published in the Rand Daily Mail or the Drum. Maybe Themba had assured Mark that he was a damn good writer, he reasoned. Or perhaps he'd done his homework. Surely, no sane man would offer a stranger twelve grand on blind faith alone?'

'So, any questions?' said Mark as he reached over his desk for the tray that contained a jug of water and two glasses. Bafana watched him fill the glasses. He had a lot of questions but didn't know where to start. The shock of the offer dried his mouth, leaving him unable to speak. Mark settled back on his chair and took a sip of his water.



'Are you happy with the offer? Will you take it?'

'Where do I sign?' Bafana wanted to scream. He picked up his glass, took two big gulps, sat back, and looked Mark square in the eye, as calm as if such offers came his way every day.

'That's a reasonable offer. Have your secretary draft and send me the agreement and I will read the terms and conditions and get back to you.'

'There's no need for that. I already drafted the contract myself, and I have it right here.' Mark said as he pulled out his desk drawer to retrieve a blue folder. 'I will give you a few minutes to read it, and if you are happy, you can just sign right there at the bottom.'

And with that, Mark got up and strolled out of the office. Bafana now remembers sitting alone in an oversized room, staring at the two pages in front of him. He remembers reading but not quite registering the words on the page. He was still in disbelief, was sure that, any minute, the door would open again, and Mark would stand there laughing his blond head off and say, 'Got you! Almost fell for that one, didn't you, matey!' Half an hour later, Bafana was strolling down Fleet Street, his face beaming and his heart pounding. Tucked under his arm was a brown envelope, which contained the signed contract and a cheque for four thousand pounds. Mark had explained the advance would be paid in three instalments. After submitting the first draft, he'd receive the second cheque, and the final payment would be made after the completion of the book, 'Just like it says in the contract,' he'd finished before getting up and shaking his hand. In the elevator, he couldn't stop himself from smiling at serendipity. Whenever someone entered, he wanted to nudge them and say, 'Guess what just happened to me?'

Bafana had told Mbuso that he would come straight to the garage after his appointment (he hadn't said it was for a job interview) but changed his mind once he got to the underground station. He had better things to do than spending this day – the most fantastic day of his life – tinkering with greasy car parts. Then it dawned on him -, standing there on the platform of Temple tube station, Bafana realised that he no longer had to set foot in Mbuso's garage. From now on, the only thing his fingers would fiddle with was a typewriter. He couldn't wait to share his news with Nandi.

Lately, he'd been fighting the temptation to tell her about his plan to send for and the baby. He wanted it to be a surprise but keeping it to himself was getting harder and harder.

When he reached home, the first thing Bafana did was ring Nandi. He listened to the phone ring, wondering why she wasn't picking up. Was she too busy with the baby to come to the phone? The last time they spoke, she'd told him that MaNgwenya and the other women on Vilikazi Street had started dropping by frequently. Was one of them in the house right now, distracting her? After a few more rings, Bafana hung up, waited ten minutes, then tried once more. Again, no answer. Frantic, Bafana dialled the Rand Daily Mail, and Sam answered right away.

'Baas. How are you doing?' Bafana said, trying to sound normal even though his heart was racing.

'Jerry,' Sam sighed into the phone. His voice sounded unusually flat.

'What's the matter, Baas?' Bafana could no longer disguise his panic.

'I'm afraid I have some terrible news, son,' Sam said.

'What is it, Sam?'

It's Ndodana. He's in detention. They picked him up as he was leaving the office three days ago. I went to see him up in Vorster Square yesterday, and he's in bad shape. First, they wouldn't give me access, so I went and got Voight, my lawyer, and they allowed us to see him for ten minutes. I could barely recognise him. They messed him up pretty bad, son.' Bafana is stunned. For a moment, he can't open his mouth to speak. A picture of his best friend's beaten-up body lying motionless on a cold floor flashes through his mind.

'Jerry. Jerry, are you still there?'

'Yes, Sam. I'm still here. What's going to happen to him? What are they accusing him of?' He heard himself ask.

'Treason. Voight is doing all he can to get him out. But, to tell you the truth, if he makes it out. And, Jerry, I'm sorry to have to tell you this, son, but Ndodana is not the only SASM member they arrested. They rounded them all up, well, the ones who are still there, and they have them all up at Vorster Square.'

Bafana listened with a sinking heart as Sam went on to list the names of his close friends. When he finished, Bafana only had one more question for him.

'Nandi. When did you last hear from her? I have been trying to call her, and she is not picking up.'

'I haven't spoken to her since the last time she came here to take your call.'

'Sam, can you do me a favour? Please, sir. Can you go and check on her for me?'

'Of course, Jerry. I can go straight there after that work.'

'No, Baas. I don't think that this can wait. Can you go now, please? Or send someone. Please,' Bafana pleaded.

Two excruciating hours later, Bafana is still waiting by the phone. Then, eventually, it rings, and it's Sam calling to confirm his worst fears. They've finally got Nandi. They picked her up last night, Sam reports. He's been told this by the elderly neighbour next door, who is looking after the baby. Special Branch Police surprised her in the middle of the night while she was sleeping. The neighbour has no clue where they've taken her. But Bafana does. He knows precisely where the bastards have taken his girl.

'Sam, I'm coming home,' he says.

'No, son. That would not be a good idea,' then Sam starts to list all the reasons why it would not be a good idea, but Bafana is not listening.

'I'm taking the next flight,' he tells him.

'NO! Dammit, no!' Sam's scream jolts him back. 'They'll kill you, Jerry. You coming back here is not going to save Nandi or Ndodana. They've already killed one of your friends. God knows what they'll do to Nandi but showing your face isn't going to change anything in her case. You'll just be a bonus kill to them. Now, do you want your kid with two dead parents?'

25

NANDI

— Diary Entry —

February 18, 1977

I'm in Baragwanath hospital with this thing on my face. It looks like a muzzle they use on vicious dogs. It's a breathing tube, supposed to help me breathe, but it makes me feel suffocated. I also have a feeding tube sticking out of my throat. I can't chew

anything because they broke my jaw pretty bad at Vorster Square when they were interrogating me. They also broke my collarbone and six ribs, the doctors say. I'm lucky to be alive, they tell me. Very lucky. Two more days in that place, and I would have been gone.

Well, I guess I am lucky, but I don't feel it. My body hurts all over, and the five grams of morphine the nurses shoot into my arm every four hours does little to help. I've been here for two days, but it seems much longer than that. Don't ask me who or how I was brought here because I was out of it. Before waking up in this bed, the last thing I remember was slumping against the wall when a massive steel-toed boot kicked me in the chest. After that, it was stars and then all lights out. Mind you, I'd been in there for many days, maybe a week, and I'd taken a heap of beatings. I had managed to withstand a week of torture, but what with not eating and the lack of sleep, my body finally succumbed. I don't think they intentionally set out to starve me. No, that wouldn't have worked because they wanted me alert so I could answer their questions. But I refused to touch or even look at the filthy tray they left inside my door every morning. Then, later when they'd come and get me for another interrogation session, they'd hold my hands and try to force-feed me and make me drink from this slimy mug. But I fought them. I fought them all the way. I'd spit at them and bite their hands when they tried to force my mouth open. I can't tell you how many slaps and punches I received for my rebellion.

I reacted the same when they'd yell, 'We know you bloody well know where he is. Now stop being a cunt and tell us.' Sometimes, they'd pour cold water over my head to make me speak, but that didn't break me. Then they'd move to punching and kicking, but I held my ground. This went on for seven or eight days – I'm not sure; I lost count of the days. Finally, when they got tired or bored with me, they'd throw me back in the dark cell and lock the door. I'd crawl to the corner and cry. I would fall asleep at times, and they'd come and throw a bucket of cold water over my head to wake me up. Then it would be back to the interrogation room, and we would start all over again.

'Ready to talk now, bitch?' One of them, the beefy one with curly brown hair and a thick Afrikaans accent, would say. 'My, my, but you're such a cute girl,' he'd taunt. He seemed to enjoy dishing out torture more than all the others. 'Could have had any boy you wanted. What the hell were you doing with that cunt?' He'd say, walking around the room. I'd ignore him. Look down at my feet and try to think of something

else. I thought about Bafana. I imagined us sitting in the sun and sharing a beer like we used to back at Vilikazi Street. I'd tell him about these imbeciles who tried but failed to break me. And he'd grin and say, 'That's my girl. You showed them. They didn't know who they were dealing with, baby.' Thinking about this made me smile and almost forget where I was.

I guess I gave the beefy one the impression that I was mocking him because he slapped me across the face.

'You think this funny, ey? I'm talking to you, bitch. You better look at me when I'm talking to you, ey?'

I wouldn't take my eyes off the floor, so the beatings began again. Soon the others would follow his lead. It would start with slaps to the face, followed by punches to the head or arms or wherever they could land them, followed by kicks in the ribs. By then, I'd be lying on the floor, crying helplessly.

After the first beating, I stayed up all night crying because of the pain. The following day, I couldn't move my limbs. When they came and ordered me to get up, I couldn't move. I stayed doubled up in the corner. So, they grabbed me by the feet, dragged me out of the room, down the corridor, and threw me into the interrogation room. After the fourth or fifth time, I no longer felt the pain from the assaults or the chill of the cold water. Sometimes a punch would land on my arm, and I'd feel like laughing in the face of whoever had delivered it and say, 'Come on, is that the best you can do?'

One day, after kicking me in the knee, the beefy white man took my face in his hand, forcing me to look into his marble eyes.

'Pretty, girl. Is he worth all this to you? Come on, don't you want to get this over with and go home to your baby? That precious little thing, don't you want to see her cute face again? Don't you think she needs you, honey? Look at your tits, so swollen with milk that your little one should be drinking. Do you reckon it's fair to her, hey? What kind of mother are you?'

I looked away. My tormentor moved to my other side, bringing his face so close to mine. I thought he was going to kiss me, and I started preparing to bite. But I was wrong. What he actually did was spit in my face. A glob of saliva landed on the bridge of my nose. I was stunned, speechless because I hadn't seen that coming. I'd expected anything else – a knock to the head, a punch to the eye – but not that. And for some reason, him spitting at me hurt more than any pain they'd inflicted so far. It

offended me far worse than all the names I'd been called in the last few days. I was fuming. Had he looked me in the eye, he would have seen the fire and maybe stepped away. But his attention was on his friends, standing nearby. He eyed them with a satisfied grin on his face as if to say, 'Did you see that? See what I just did?' I drew my phlegm inwards, waited for him to turn his face to me, and when he did, I opened my mouth and let it fly. The thick, viscous substance landed flat on his chapped white lips. The fist he swung at me sent me flying off the chair and across the room. I fell at the foot of one of them, who kicked me unconscious.

Perhaps you could say that it was my insolence that saved me. Had I not spat at my interrogator and caused his partner to kick me in the chest and render me unconscious, I'd probably still be at Vorster Square. Instead, I ended up in the hospital because they couldn't revive me and panicked. They waited until nighttime then carried my unconscious body outside and left it next to a rubbish dumpster. Why they didn't just finish me off, I have no idea. Maybe they thought that by the time someone found me in the morning, I'd be dead. Instead, they poured red wine over my dirty dress and placed the empty bottle next to me to make me look like an alcoholic who'd simply drank herself to death.

The nurse who comes to clean me every day is very chatty. Her name is Ayanda, and she likes to talk while she changes my bandages. I learned what happened to me, mostly from her. She tells me that it was an old man who found me and called the ambulance. Apparently, I was still unconscious. Because of how I stank, even the nurses believed I was just an alcoholic who'd passed out after one bottle too many. It was only after they undressed me and saw all my injuries that they changed their view. A bunch of doctors came to examine me and were all shocked by what they saw. Still dead to the world, I was wheeled to the x-ray room. The results revealed that I had six cracked ribs, a fractured jaw, and a broken collarbone.

The doctors tell me I will be here for a while. I know they are correct, but I just want to go home and see my baby. When the SB police burst into the house, I was sleeping with Kadie in my arms. I guess maybe they'd been staking out the house for a while, and when they saw signs that someone was living there, they must have thought Bafana was back. It makes sense it was him they'd hoped to snag that night because if they had wanted me, they could have picked me up at Mama's house a long time ago. But anyway, there were three of them, one white and two blacks. I was wearing nothing but one of Bafana's shirts, which may have convinced them

further he was in the house somewhere. They tore the place up, screaming, 'Where is he? Where the bloody hell is he?' I'd picked up Kadie, who was still sleeping and stood to watch them from a corner in the bedroom as they pulled out drawer after drawer as if they believed their culprit might be hiding there. They even turned the baby's cot upside down.

When they were satisfied that he was nowhere in the house, they ordered me to get in the kwela-kwela. I said I couldn't possibly go with them. Who would look after my baby? I begged and pleaded with them to leave, promising that I would come the next day and answer their questions, but I just needed to take my baby to my mother's first. Then the white one got impatient with me, threatened if I didn't go into the van right away, he'd burst my head open with his gun. So, I turned my attention to one of the black ones, the elderly one, hoping that he would be sympathetic.

'Just let me take the baby next door then. Please. She's only four months old. I can't just leave her alone in the house. Surely, you understand.'

He hesitated, looked at the agitated white man and mumbled, 'Sure we can let her do that, boss, hey?'

'All right then. Make it quick. We don't have all night,' the white man grumbled. I picked up the baby's blanket from the bed and was about to run outside when he pulled me back by my shoulder and said, 'Changed my mind. Bekezela,' he barked to the younger of the two black men. 'You take the little bugger next door. I don't trust this bitch. Looks too conniving for my liking, this one. She might just be running out there to warn her bastard boyfriend.'

Bekezela followed the order without pause, snatching my baby and her blanket and marching out of the door. They wouldn't let me change or put on shoes, so I arrived at Vorster Square in Bafana's shirt. Luckily, I had chosen one of his long ones to wear that night, so at least my bum was covered. I'd sat in the back of the kwela-kwela with Bekezela, and his pitiful eyes kept glancing at me. At one point, I guess feeling sorry for me, he'd leaned over and whispered in my ear.

'Don't worry. The old lady next door seemed like a kind woman. I'm sure she'll take good care of your baby.'

That had made me feel a little better. It relieved my anxiety a bit. I'd been fretting because I had no idea which neighbour he'd gone and dumped my child with. At least now, I knew she was with MaNgwenya. She'd be safe with her until I returned, whenever that would be.

Two days after I regained consciousness, Sam came to see me. I am unsure how he found out I was here, and I couldn't ask because I couldn't talk. I could just barely nod and shake my head to the questions he was asking me. He told me I was a celebrity now. That I had made front-page news. Then Sam opened his briefcase and pulled out a copy of the Rand Daily Mail. He showed me a blown-up picture of a woman lying in bed with tubes sticking out from all over her face and body. The headline underneath the photo read, '20-Year-Old Woman Found Beaten Half to Death Next to a Rubbish Dumpster. Suspects: SB Police'. Tears started running down my face as I studied the woman's face. Her bruised face was unrecognisable – but I knew it was me.

'I had to publish this. I was quite angry when I heard what had happened to you. Totally angry. But I acted impulsively, and now I regret it.'

I wanted to know why. I tried to pull the breathing mask from my face but couldn't. Sam must have seen my distress because he opened his briefcase again, pulled out a notebook, and pen and handed them to me.

'WHY?' I printed on the notebook.

'Why do I regret publishing it? Because I know how upset Bafana is going to be when he reads it. I can't imagine what it will do to your mother.'

'BAFANA KNOWS?' I wrote.

'Yes,' Sam nodded. 'He knows. I spoke to him the day after they arrested you. He was mad as hell. Wanted to get on the first flight here. But I begged him not to. Called his sister and brother-in-law and pleaded with them to talk some sense into him. But now...I don't know. Now, if he sees this, I don't think anyone will be able to stop him.'

'MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T SEE IT,' I penned.

'Too late now. This picture – your photo – is circulating in the UK and the USA as we speak. I sent it to my old friends and colleagues in the newspaper business overseas. Like I said, I acted impulsively, and I apologise. I guess I just wanted the rest of the world to know what was going on here. It's been swept under the carpet for too long. I know you're very much aware you're not the first person this has happened to. And until we do something about it, you won't be the last.'

I nodded.

The next day Sam returned. With my mother, this time. I looked into her eyes and immediately wished he hadn't brought her. The pain in those eyes was too much for



me to bear. I'd been trying to be courageous and was proud of myself for surviving the torture I'd endured. But Mama's tears broke me. As soon as she started crying, I crumbled. Mama sobbed on my chest, moaning, 'O *thixo wami!* My child, what have they done to you? What have they done to *nganeyami?*'

Until Sam showed me the picture of me in the newspaper, I hadn't looked at my face. So far, no one in the hospital had had the heart to hand me a mirror. But, even before Sam's revelation, I had a pretty good idea of how bad I looked. I knew my jaw had been knocked out of place, and my eyes were swollen almost shut. From the stinging pain I felt whenever Nurse Ayanda tried to clean my face, I knew I had bruises and open cuts all over. So, I knew what my mother was seeing. I knew what was making her weep as much as she did at my sister's funeral. I wanted to tell her to stop crying, that it wasn't that bad, I'd be okay. But I didn't. Because I'd be lying if I did. Later, I wrote in the notebook that Sam had let me keep. 'HOW IS KADIE?'

Mama wiped her face and nodded, like she, too, had lost the ability to speak. Then she started bawling all over again. Finally, the nurse asked her to leave. 'Sorry, Mama, but you're upsetting the patients,' she told her as she escorted her out. She's come twice since. Now she seems better at controlling herself, she doesn't burst into tears as much, but she has a hard time looking at me. I wanted to ask her to bring Kadie with her when she comes again but thought better of it. I miss my baby terribly, am dying to hold her in my arms, but I know it would probably traumatise the poor thing to see me like this. So, I have to be selfless – put my needs aside and think about what's best for my baby. For now, I will concentrate on getting better so I can go back home to her.

26

BAFANA

He is in Stevo's law office in Stratford, east London. This is his first face-to-face with the immigration lawyer. A copy of the News of The World sits on Stevo's

cluttered desk, front page facing up. The lawyer winces at the picture of Nandi's bruised and broken face then looks back up at Bafana.

'Yes, it's by far the worst case I've seen. But you say she's still in South Africa?' 'That's right,' Bafana answers, his voice full of emotion.

He has looked at this photo over a hundred times and has read the article repeatedly where now every word is embedded in his mind, but, like Stevo, Bafana still winces every time he catches sight of the picture.

'How soon do you think you can get her out?' Stevo asks.

'I don't know. I'm trying. My old boss is trying to get her a passport. A fake one, of course, because obviously, there's no way they are going to grant her a passport. That's out of the question.'

'I know,' Stevo nods. 'But right now, where is she? Is she safe?'

'Ja. She's been hiding at my father's place in Cape Town since she was released from the hospital. My brother took her and the baby there. We have a six-month-old girl.'

'That's good news, at least,' the lawyer says. 'The important thing is to keep her safe from the SB until we can get her out. You know the next time they catch her, she's not going to make it, right?'

'I'm very much aware of that, *boet*.'

'Good. Now, there's not much I can do right now. I can't start the asylum application until Nandi gets here. But I'm glad you brought me this newspaper. I'm glad your old boss decided to publish it. There's no way they're going to deny her asylum with this story and these pictures. No way.'

'I believe you, and I'm thankful that you're my sister's good friend. I also thank you for helping me with my own application.'

'No problem, *boet*. I am glad to help, and I am happy that it worked out. We're all family here, and we must do what we can to help one another. All we have is each other in this strange place. Lethu told me you're writing a book. How's it going?'

'It's going very well, *boet*, thank you for asking,' Bafana lies. The truth is he hadn't written a single word since the phone call, a month ago, when Sam informed him about Nandi's arrest. He hadn't even thought about the book since that afternoon.

'Well, I want a signed copy when it comes out,' Stevo says and smiles for the first time.

'Of course, *boet*. Of course.' Bafana says as he gets up and shakes his hand. 'Yours will be the first I sign. Thanks again.'

Outside, walking down Broadway Street, he feels light without the newspaper. Bafana gave it to Stevo, so he didn't have to look at it anymore. He could have hidden it somewhere in Lethu's house, out of sight, but he knew as long as it was within reach, he'd keep going back to the article and that picture. It was better to leave it with Stevo. Now, of course, he knows that out of sight doesn't necessarily mean out of mind. He can't kid himself into believing that. Even though Stevo now had the newspaper, this wouldn't stop him from worrying...

It was Lethu who first got hold of the story. She was on her way to lunch at the hospital canteen when she decided to pick up a newspaper because she'd forgotten the book she usually carried in her bag. She read the story about the girl pictured on the front page, shaking her head and thanking her lucky stars that she'd managed to get out of South Africa in time, she later told him. This girl who'd just barely escaped being murdered by the SB could very well have been herself. Unfortunately, Lethu didn't connect the girl in the picture with her brother's girlfriend. It was only later that evening when she and Mbuso were in bed, and she was showing him the story that it all clicked. It was Mbuso who'd put the pieces together.

'Wait a minute!' he'd exclaimed after reading the article for the second time. 'This sounds like Bafana's girl.'

'No!' Lethu leaned over and snatched the paper from her husband. 'It can't be!' 'Lethu. The name is written here. It says Nandipha.'

'How many girls in South Africa are named Nandipha?' Lethu had cut him off. 'Hundreds if not more.'

Neither of them could remember Nandi's last name, but the age fit, Mbuso insisted, seizing back the newspaper.

'The severely injured woman is a native of Soweto and the mother of a five-month-old baby....' He read out loud. 'It says somewhere the story was first published by the Rand Daily Mail. That's the paper Bafana used to work for. He speaks to his old boss all the time. So surely, he would have told him if he thought that girl was Nandi.'

Lethu stood her ground even though she was beginning to doubt her conviction that the pictured girl wasn't the same Nandi they'd heard her brother go on and on about. The picture in the newspaper didn't resemble the image of the lovely young

woman with dimples, which Bafana carried in his wallet. However, the girl's face was so severely disfigured it would have been hard for anyone to recognise her.

'Do you think we should show Bafana this?' Mbuso finally asked the question they'd both been thinking. Lethu said she wasn't sure. She thought there was no point in upsetting her brother if this girl turned out not to be his Nandi. But, on the other hand, if she turned out to be his girl, it would be terrible if Bafana found out the news from someone else like one of their South African friends. He'd never understand why they'd kept this from him. Mbuso agreed with both points of view. But they both decided it would be best to show him the article. They would do it tomorrow. It would not be a good idea to wake him up now.

So that was how Bafana had found out -through the *News of the World* -the first newspaper to publish the story. Lethu had waited for Mbuso to take the kids to school, then she'd joined him at the breakfast table and placed the newspaper in front of him. He'd choked on his coffee when he read the headline. The distorted face pictured under it didn't look like anyone he knew, but he didn't have to read the whole story to know they talked about Nandi.

'Dammit! Dammit!' he cried, banging his fist on the table; coffee splattered over the newspaper.

'The bastards! The fucking bastards!' He managed to say even though his throat had tightened.

Lethu tried to calm him, pointing out the article said she was alive; they hadn't killed her. 'Not yet' he'd answered earnestly. 'Lethu, I have to get her out. Now!'

'I know,' Lethu whispered as he rubbed his shoulder. 'I know, brother.'

Bafana had spent the rest of the day making phone calls to Johannesburg and Cape Town. He'd made up his mind that Nandi couldn't stay another day in Soweto. He wanted her out of there as soon as possible. The article said she'd been left for dead. Now she was in the paper. The SB knew she was still alive. They'd come back for her and make sure that the job was finished. He wondered why Sam had published the story. What good was it supposed to do, Nandi? Why couldn't he have just kept the whole damn thing quiet, let the bastards believe they'd killed her. He tried the Rand Daily Mail number three times before someone answered, and by then, he was fuming.

'Baas, what's the deal, man?' He screamed.

'Jerry,' Sam sounded old and tired. 'I take it you've seen the paper....'

'Why, man? Why?' Bafana cut to the chase. 'You know I've been working on getting her out. Why couldn't you just wait until she was safely here?'

'I'm sorry, Jerry. I wasn't thinking right. But, I mean, the shock of seeing her like that...it...I don't know...I guess it just made me want to do something. Expose the truth.'

'But Sam...!' He began but stopped. Bafana wanted to vent, yell out all his anger and frustration, but he had to restrain himself. He didn't want to say anything he might later regret. So instead, he reminded himself of how good the man had been to him, Nandi and her family - how he'd gone out of his way and put his own life in jeopardy.

Bafana took a deep breath and said, 'I understand, Baas. I just saw the paper today, so I'm just upset right now. But I need to do something, right away, man. I needed to get her out of Johannesburg pronto before they nab her again.'

'I agree with you, Jerry,' Sam said. 'But I went to see her yesterday, son. She's really in quite a bad shape. I think she'll be in the hospital for a while. So, you might have to wait...'

'Sam, we don't have time. They'll grab her again as soon as she comes out of the hospital.' Bafana pronounced desperately.

'I'll see what I can do, son. Tomorrow morning I'll go down there and try to talk to the doctors. But I'm sure they won't agree with the idea of moving her. Not with her current condition. Where did you have in mind, anyway?'

'My father is in Cape Town. She can stay there until we've got the passports and all that sorted out. How is that going, by the way? Any news?'

'My source has found a woman in Pretoria who's willing to part with hers for a few hundred rands. Now the problem is the baby. Finding five-month-old black children with passports is hard. You know the common way to do it is for people to include their young children in their passports. But don't worry yourself about that, son. Let me handle it. We'll turn your little one into a white baby if we have to.' Sam added with a little chuckle.

'Whatever you do, Baas, please make sure Nandi doesn't go back to her mother's place or mine.'

'I get you, son. Oh, and Jerry,' Sam said before hanging up. 'I know I made a mistake by publishing her story. But look at it this way, now that she's worldwide news, I think they're likely to be reluctant to make her disappear.'

'I hear you, boss. I get you.' Bafana replied before putting down the phone. Although he hadn't been able to vent his anger, he now felt a little better. Sam's last words had eased his fears. They made sense. He hadn't given himself time to think about what this whole thing would mean, but now in hindsight, he realised Sam's impetuous decision to publish the story and Nandi's picture would, after all, work in their favour. It was, indeed, likely that the SB would want to keep their hands clean until this thing died down. They'd attracted enough bad publicity when Steve Biko had been killed in their custody. Now, this victim making news worldwide was a young woman and the mother of an infant.

The next person he'd called was his father in Pretoria, who answered right away and was surprised but happy to hear his voice. It was the first time Bafana had called him since his arrival in London. He regretted he'd waited until now when he had a favour to ask him.

'They picked up Nandi, Baba,' he said, getting straight to the point.

'I know,' his father replied after clearing his throat. 'It's been in the papers, son.'

'You know they messed her up terribly. I need to get her out of Soweto, tata. Right away.'

'I know, my son. I thought that's what you'd want to do. I will call Roy. He can bring her here.' 'Thank you, tata. Thank you, sir.' He said, then hung up. Bafana went upstairs to his bedroom to look for Roy's work number. Ten minutes later, he was on the phone with his younger brother.

'Baba already called me,' Roy said before Bafana could get a word in. 'Eish, I'm sorry those bastards did that to Nandi, *boet*. When do you want me to go down there and get her?

'I will let you know tomorrow after Sam speaks to the doctors at the hospital and see if we can get her out. They'll probably refuse, Sam said, as she's in such dreadful shape.'

'All right, *boet*, I'll wait to hear from you.'

'Roy,' Bafana said before his brother could hang up. 'I need you to do me another favour.' 'Say it, my *boet*.'

'Before you get Nandi, I want you to go to Vilikazi Street and pick up the baby from MaNgwenyai. She's still with her.'

'And what do I tell MaNgwenyai? You know that old blabbermouth will ask a lot of questions.'

'Just say you've come to take her because you want to spend a few hours with your niece, that's all. Don't give her any hint of where you're taking her.'

'My brother, in some places, they call that kidnapping,' Roy jested.

'I know. But do it, anyway.'

'You've got it, *boet*.'

After that, Bafana put on his jacket and shoes and went in search of Themba. Thank God his friend was a creature of habit; he knew exactly where to find him at this time of the day. Themba was perched on his usual barstool, nursing his lunchtime pint and chatting to Joe.

'*Boet!*' He shouted when he saw Bafana. 'How's it going, Fitzgerald?' Themba had taken to calling him Scott Fitzgerald since he told him about his book offer. 'How's *The Great Gatsby* going, my friend?'

'It's going,' Bafana fibbed for the second time in two days. Yesterday, Mark had called to ask him how the book was going, and he'd given him the same fib.

'So, I expect I'll be reading the first draft soon, then? Mark had asked.

'*Ja*. Very soon.' Bafana lied, glad that he didn't have to face the right now.

The truth was he'd written one word in weeks. It had been more than three weeks since Sam told him about Nandi being picked up, and he hadn't been near the typewriter since. He'd sat down next to Themba and ordered a pint. He waited for Joe to start serving other customers before leaning into his friend and saying, '*Boet*, I've got a little problem. Actually, it's not little.'

'What is it?' Themba asked, his face creasing into a frown.

'The passports, *mfo*. My boss found one he thinks might work for Nandi. But it's the one for the baby that's going to be tricky.'

'Hmmm,' Themba nodded thoughtfully. 'How old did you say the bambino was now?'

'Six months.'

'Hmm... I may have a solution. My youngest sister back home is married to a Rhodesian and moved there. They have a little one. I suspect she was already knocked up when they got married. But the son of a bitch walked out on her soon after the kid was born. So now, my sister is struggling to support herself and the little one on her own. I sent her a few pounds to help her get on her feet. She's smart, that one. Always has been. She started a little business where she travels to South Africa, buys stuff like clothes, then sells them to Rhodesian women. So, she's got a

passport, and her little one's on it because she has to travel with him all the time. She's about the same age as Nandi, and her little bambino is about the same age as yours, seven or eight months. The only thing is the kid is a boy.'

'A boy! Well, *boet*, how is that a solution?' Bafana asked, flabbergasted. What the hell was this guy playing at? He wondered. Getting his hopes up like that and then waiting until the end of his ramble to deliver the blow. 'You know damn well that my kid is a girl.'

'I know, but the thing is, these white idiots at the border are blind as bats when it comes to us black people. All black people look alike to them. Dress up your little girl in a boy's outfit, and she'll pass through just like that. I'm sure of that. Plus, it's not like they are going to strip her down to see if she's got a little ding-a-ling,' Themba finished, laughing at his joke. Bafana grinned too, thinking that as crazy as his friend's idea sounded, it just might work.

'You might be right, *boet*,' he said and took a sip of his drink. 'After all, I still have no idea what my baby looks like. For all I know, she's a dead ringer for your little nephew.' They both fell about cackling.

After they'd drained their pints, Themba decided he didn't feel like going back to his job at the estate agents across the street. The sun had just come out, and he thought it would be a shame to waste such a beautiful day in a boring office, answering call after call. It was Friday, after all, and he'd already been paid for the week. So, they walked the mile and a half to his Camden flat, stopping at the corner shop to buy two bottles, a pack of Marlboro's. Bafana had sat in the living room, sipping his beer and pretending to watch the news on the television while Themba was on the phone in the kitchen, trying to convince his young sister to part with her passport. Twenty minutes later, his friend re-joined him, shaking his head. 'She drives a hard bargain. I told you she's clever; she wants four hundred rands.'

'I'll pay,' Bafana uttered without hesitation. Just like that, it was settled. Bafana scribbled down his father's address and handed it to Themba. 'Call her back, tell her to take the passport to my father. I will make sure he gives her the four hundred rands when she gets there. If she can do it right away – I mean within the next two days – I will pay her an extra hundred.'

That was ten days ago. Bafana had spoken to his father four times since then. First, his father confirmed Themba's sister had shown up at his shop with the passport and that he had paid her five hundred rands plus another fifty for travel



expenses. Then his father had called to tell him that Roy had just arrived with Nandi and the baby. Bafana was anxious to speak to her, but his father told her she was still in terrible shape and couldn't talk. She no longer needed the oxygen mask to breathe, but her jaw was still sore, and she could not move it.

'How soon, Baba, do you think before she'll be well enough to get on a plane.' 'I don't know, son. Right now, she looks pretty bad. So, it might be a while.'

'All right, tata,' he told his father. 'As long as she's with you and she's safe, that's all I care about. It's all I want right now.'

But that was a lie. What Bafana really wanted was his girl next to him-broken or not, he wanted Nandi in his arms. But he knew that was out of the question right now.

## 27

### NANDI

- Diary Entry –  
March 31, 1977

Last night, I took a walk around Table Mountain. What I really wanted to do, though, was to hike to the top of it -like we used to - Bafana and me. But, of course, with my shattered knee and sprained ankle, that would have been impossible. So, the best I could do was limp around the mountain. I walk with a crutch now, but sometimes I can manage a few steps without it. Yesterday, when Bafana's father asked if there was somewhere I wanted to visit on my last night here, the first place that sprang to my mind was Table Mountain. No, I'm lying; the first place that came to mind was Naledi Township. I wanted to see my family for the last time. But I knew that's not what he meant.

I've been here for five and a half weeks. I can't remember the trip from Johannesburg to Cape Town. All I know is that one moment I was dozing off in the hospital bed, out of my head on morphine, then the next I was being carried out into

the cold night and bundled into a kombi. There were other people inside the kombi, but I couldn't see much from the back seat where I was lying. I could hear them talking, but I couldn't turn my head to look at their faces because I still had the brace around my neck. I wanted to scream, ask what was going on, but I couldn't move my jaw. Then, eventually, the kombi began to move, and there was no other sound but the reverberation of the engine and the occasional car driving by. I must have dozed off at some point, but a baby's whimpering woke me up suddenly. I thought I was dreaming. The mewling seemed to be coming from the seat directly in front of me. Even in my drugged state, I knew right away, the crying baby was Kadie.

I hadn't seen her since the night the SB arrested me, but a mother never forgets the sound of her child's cry. Instinctively, I tried to sit up to reach for her, but of course, this was impossible. I could only listen to someone, a woman, soothe her with a lullaby. I thought I recognised this voice but wasn't quite sure. Then my lights went out again, and the next time I opened my eyes, there was no sound at all. Everything was still. I was now alone in the kombi, and my heart started beating fast with panic. I've been abandoned, I thought. I'm going to die alone in this van, in the middle of nowhere. Then I heard footsteps approaching, and the door was opened. A man's face peeked in, and although I couldn't see, I recognised his voice.

'*Ntombi!* My child, you have made it,' Bafana's father spoke in a soft, placid voice. Soon I heard more footsteps approaching, and the door on the other side of the van was opened. A gust of cold air blew in my face, and I felt hands push up under my shoulder blades and lift me up.

'Careful, Roy.' I heard Bafana's father.

'I know, Baba, I know.' Roy answered. 'She's still got that brace on her neck.'

Gently, they carried me out of the car by my shoulders and feet and brought me inside the house, into the brightly lit sitting room. I was laid down on the long sofa. Moments later, a woman's face came into my vision. It was MaMlilo, Bafana's stepmother. She had a teary look when she knelt down and smoothed my face with the back of her hand. Soon after, another woman appeared by my side, carrying a baby in her arms, my baby Kadie. This was Mbali, Bafana's sister, and I realised that she was the woman I'd heard singing a lullaby to Kadie in the kombi. She bent down and gingerly laid Kadie, who was asleep, on my chest. I looked down at my baby's innocent face and couldn't stop the tears. She'd grown quite a bit in the last month and a half. Her cheeks had lost their former chubbiness, and her lips were fuller now.

I touched her head and stroked the hair, which felt thicker than I remembered. Later I was carried into a room at the end of the corridor and settled onto a bed where I would lie for the next five weeks.

I spent the first three weeks at Bafana's father's house in pure agony. Without the morphine, the pain from my injuries became a constant reminder of my days at Vorster Square. I suffered day and night. The Panadol that Bafana's father brought from his shop did nothing at all to help. Sometimes, the pain would come shooting from all directions, my neck, back, knee, and jaw. The jaw was the worst because I was forced to use my mouth now that the feeding tube the tube had been removed. MaMlilo and Mbali would pry my mouth open when I refused to eat; the pain was unbearable. One would hold me down, while the other forced my mouth open and tried to spoon-feed me porridge or soup. They said I was fading away, that if I didn't cooperate, I'd be dead within a week. Finally, I gave in when they promised to bring Kadie to me. If I managed to eat half the food on my plate, Mbali would bring the baby and lay her on my chest. That was my reward. This went on for three weeks. By the fourth week, I could chew some soft food like pap and bread. I could also move my jaw enough to form a few words. I no longer needed a pen and paper to express myself. Most of my communications, though, were just requests to see or hold my baby.

Bafana had been calling from the second day after I arrived. When the phone rang, his father, or whoever was nearby, would answer it and then hold the receiver to my ear so I could listen. I couldn't talk then, so all I could do was listen. At the time, it was enough; I was happy to just hear his voice. It made things feel normal again. I would listen to him excitedly talk about his plans for Kadie and me to join him in the UK. His father had already shown me the passport he'd purchased for me, so I knew he was serious. Bafana was already looking for a place for us, he said and was sure that by the time we got there, he'd have found somewhere. It wouldn't be anything big or fancy because he couldn't afford that, but he'd make sure it was somewhere that Kadie and I would be comfortable. At the end of each one-sided conversation, he would ask, 'How are you, baby? I mean, how are you keeping?' Like he'd forgotten that I couldn't speak. I'd feel terrible because I knew that he really needed to hear me say I was all right. I mean, I wasn't okay, but if I could speak, I would have lied so that he could sleep well at night. He called at least four times a day. Finally, one day, I surprised him by answering his question with a grunt.

'What? Did you say something, *s'thandwa sami*? Can you speak now?

The excitement in his voice reminded me of my little brother, Bo. I tried to say yes, but another grunt was about all I could manage without screaming my wretched head off. Then, a week later, I was able to say his name, which thrilled him no end. Then a few days after that, I uttered my first sentence. 'When can I go and say goodbye to Mama and the kids?' Bafana didn't respond. I wasn't sure if he'd been stunned speechless by the number of words that I was able to get out or by the question itself. It had seemed like an eternity before I heard him say, 'You can't, baby.'

'Excuse me?' I said, thinking I hadn't heard right. You can't,' he repeated.

'And why not?' I asked, my voice turning sour.

'Nandi. Your mother doesn't know where you are,' Bafana explained in that phlegmatic voice of his. 'Nobody does.'

'I don't understand. What do you mean?' I said, almost sitting up, forgetting the pain in my back.

'I thought it would be best if she doesn't know. For now, anyway. It's safer for everyone right now. Once you and Kadie get here, we can write to her and tell her.'

'Bafana, you're not making any sense,' I said, feeling more puzzled than ever. 'How did Roy and Mbali get the baby without my mother knowing?'

'Easy,' he said. 'Kadie was still with MaNgwenya.'

This took me by surprise. So, the whole time I was in the hospital, my baby was still at MaNgwenya? So naturally, I presumed the old lady had taken her to my family right after my arrest. I remember asking Mama if Kadie was okay. I'd printed the question on the notebook that Sam gave me. My mother had nodded, yes.

Over the next few days, Bafana and I argued back and forth. Every time he called, I'd tell him that I needed to go and see my family. I asked him to imagine what they were all going through, not knowing what had happened to me. But Bafana kept insisting he didn't want the chance of my mother cracking under pressure if the SB arrested her and revealed my whereabouts. 'Mama wouldn't do that,' I told him, but he still he wouldn't budge. Finally, I accused him of not trusting my mother. He didn't deny or confirm my allegation. 'Let's just wait, *s'thandwa*. Please, *ngiyakucela*.'

I spent every waking moment agonising about what to do. I pictured my mother tossing and turning every night, worrying about what fate had befallen me. I could see her at the hospital, tearfully begging for any information on the whereabouts of

her first-born child. I saw her plead and explain she had already buried one child and had another one missing. Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. I decided that it was time to ask Bafana's father to intervene and talk some sense into his son. I waited until one afternoon when he drove me to the hospital to remove the cast from my neck.

'Baba,' I began, once we were on the motorway.

'Hmmm, *ini ntombi?*' Bafana's father asked gently.

'I'd like to go to Soweto, to see my family, let them know I'm okay, you know. As I'm sure you can imagine, my mother must be worried out of her mind, not knowing what on earth's happened to her daughter.' I waited for his reaction, but none came. 'As we all know, tata, no one who has gone into exile has ever returned home. So, I don't feel good about getting on a plane and flying off to England without saying goodbye to my family. I think that would be wrong, don't you think?' I pressed.

'*Ntombi,*' he mumbled, not taking his eyes off the road, 'it is not for me to decide. What does he say?' He asked after a moment's pause. Of course, I knew he was aware of how Bafana felt about this. I had no doubt that they had discussed it even before I was brought to Cape Town.

He disapproves,' I said, my voice taking on a wretched tone. 'In fact, he is adamant that I don't go.'

'I'm sure he has good reasons,' his voice had a final tone, so I knew, as far as he was concerned, the matter was closed.

Mbali and Roy had returned to their own homes a few days earlier, and I now regretted not having the foresight to appeal to their better nature while they were still around. The two were very close to their brother and might have been able to change his mind. Now, MaMlilo was the only one left to try, but I knew it would be a waste of my time bringing up the subject with her. She was one of those women who never seemed to have any opinion of their own. She'd probably tell me that Bafana was my man, and so I should trust his judgement.

The hospital removed my cast, and a few days later, even though my knee still hurt a lot, I was able to move around with the help of a cane. It was then I started fantasising about just running off— defying everyone and going to Soweto. Bafana had already sent the air tickets for the flight. I had a window of ten days to see my family for the last time. But I had no money, not one shiny penny of my own. I even thought at one point I could hitch-hike, but soon dismissed the idea as ridiculous.

For one thing, Bafana's father's house is at least three miles from the main road, and there's no way I could walk that distance. I'd have to ask for a lift from the man himself or his wife. And the likelihood of chancing upon a driver who happened to be going where I needed to go was very slim. It soon became apparent that the idea of running off would just have to remain a fantasy. So, I thought of another possibility. Perhaps I could call someone I knew and ask them to go to my mother and assure her I was alive and well. But I realised I did not know a single person in Naledi who has a telephone in their house.

Since my cast was removed, Bafana's father had started inviting me to come to the shop with him because, now that Mbali and Roy were gone and MaMlilo was back helping out at the store, he thought I was getting bored being home alone with the baby. I'd sometimes accept, even though I'd decided that hanging around a supermarket, watching customers going in and out, was just as dull as being at home all day. Sometimes he'd ask me to mind one of cash the tills for an hour or so while a cashier went on her lunch break. I'd forgotten how thrilling the sensation of holding money could be. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't ever tempted to let a rand or two accidentally slip into my skirt pocket. I was that desperate to get in touch with my family.

When there was nothing else to do at the shop and Kadie was napping in the back room, I'd grab one of the newspapers from the rack and read. The other day I picked up the Sowetan, and the headline on the front page caught my attention: 'Australian Editor of the Rand Daily Mail Facing Deportation'. I didn't need to read further to know who the Australian man was. I hadn't seen or heard from Sam since I left the hospital. The last time he visited me was a day or maybe two days (I can't quite remember because I was pumped up with morphine, and it was hard to keep count of the days) before I was smuggled out. He'd smiled and told me I looked very well, though his watery blue eyes let me know he was lying. I felt too weak that day to even pick up the pen and notebook and write THANK YOU, so I just blinked. He was about to say something else but seemed to change his mind. He tried to speak a couple of times again before leaning over and kissing my forehead and whispering goodbye. I had a feeling he wanted to tell me something important.

I also had an inkling that I would never see him again. Perhaps he'd known by then that the government was on to him. Maybe the SB had been harassing him and his family, threatening them with arrest or deportation. Whatever it was, I can't help

but think the man knew that the jig was up. His days in South Africa were numbered. I imagine that's what he wanted to tell me that day. Unfortunately, the article didn't state exactly why he was being deported. All it said was that he was suspected of participating in illegal activities and had violated his right to remain in the country. I didn't share this news with Bafana when I spoke to him later. I thought it was best not to.

Last night felt peaceful but sad and lonely. I watched the mesmerising red and orange sunset fall and settle upon the mountain top. How ironic, I thought, that this beautiful, picturesque place that drew so many people during the day – locals and tourists alike – would look so lonesome and forgotten at night, a time when it was most entrancing. I wanted to gaze at it forever and soak my face in the warm rays forever because I didn't know if I would ever experience this glorious beauty again. I wanted to amble all the way to the top and lie down for a few minutes like I'd dreamed of doing a million times because I knew that after tomorrow, I would never have another chance. After this night, I mused, dejectedly, my life as I have known it will be a thing of the past. It will be history. Gone but not forgotten. No, never forgotten. Not by a long shot.

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