
Passion

and

Death

A short story

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Passion and Death by Fezekile Futhwa



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The first time I saw her, my heart raced like I had just run a marathon. It was my first day at work, my new job. She had an earthly brown smooth skin, black eyes with clear white pupils. Her mouth so well curved that you could not help but imagine kissing her. She was of medium build, curves, medium behind, very beautiful legs and attractive breasts. She had a soft voice and was a bit shy.

I introduced myself to her the very first day. “Hello, my name is Xola” I said. “I am the new guy.” “Pleased to meet you”, she said. “And your name is?” I asked her. She tells me but I don't quite register her name because I am busy concentrating at how beautiful this woman is. I especially notice what a beautiful body she has. Oh, she is so sweet!

My spirits were dampened by the realisation that she wears a wedding band on her left hand. This was a real issue.

My name is Xolani Mthunzi and I work as an engineer for TPS Engineering, an engineering consulting firm based in Sandton, Johannesburg. This is a rather small firm compared to my previous job, but quite promising and a highly talented one. The company is run by a group of friends, all black and well connected. Of course these guys are obviously good at what they do, but still, they are connected. You can attest to this by the number of government contracts they service.

I am always intrigued, fascinated and impressed by black people who are doing well for themselves. And this was the major factor that influenced my decision to join this company. You don't get that many companies started by black people and run successfully by them. This is not your typical black economic empowerment, BEE, company where a group of well connected darkies buys a stake in a white company. These guys started this company from scratch and know everything about their business. They still are involved in overseeing operational matters. This fact got my attention the most during the interview process. That I can sit face to face with these guys is a dream come true for a “wannabe” like me. And I love their unassuming attitude, despite their success. To me, this must be one of our black success stories that must be told to every black child. Our young people lack stories of black success in present times.

I am employed as a software engineer specialising in embedded systems, mostly working on micro chips for mobile devices. I graduated from the University of Cape Town about a decade ago with a BSc Hons in Computer Science. This is the third company I work for in my professional life. In my division, Systems Engineering, we are a team of about ten made up of: Head of Systems Engineering, Project Manager, Business Analyst and the rest of us are software engineers.

I am thirty years old, still single and have no children; not even illegitimate ones. Unless someone somewhere has a child from me that I don't know about, I don't have children. I live alone in Woodmead, a suburb of Sandton. I come from a very poor family of ten children in *Mqanduli* in the Eastern Cape. So I was fortunate to get good marks to secure

me a scholarship to study at University of Cape Town, UCT. Other than that, I am just an ordinary guy.

It turns out that Thandi, that is her name now that I remember, is in fact recently married. A couple of months tops, and she doesn't have any kids yet, that is a good thing right? Thandi Mthembu works as a legal advisor in our company. She is an admitted advocate in the Johannesburg High Court. She specialises in contract law with an LLM from Wits University. She also holds a BCom in Taxation from the University of the Western Cape. I understand she is currently reading for her MBA through Gibs! A very impressionable lady upon my senses.

Perhaps I should explain that by custom, I cannot get involved with a married woman under any circumstances. This is a strict Xhosa law that very few dare cross. And the price you pay for adultery is sometimes death at the hands of the offended husband. And he has every right to, by customary law. If a husband does not kill you, you will suffer the shame, humiliation of being disowned by the community and even your family sometimes. This serves as a reminder to leave other peoples wives alone, no matter how deep the feelings may run.

Not that Thandi has time for such nuisances anyway. She is a Zulu girl brought up in the strictest of tribal law. By looking at her, I can tell the thought of cheating on her husband has never crossed her mind. I pity whoever man will dare propose love to the married Thandi.

The way things are going, I think Thandi will make Director soon in the company. And with the need for gender parity so prevalent in Mzansi, TPS Engineering is not doing that well in that arena. I can almost guarantee that she will make it within the next three years, with a strong possibility of shareholding. That is how good Thandi is in her job.

Having being married for only three months when I met her, she is doing quite well for a black woman from the outskirts of *Shobashobane* in deep rural KwaZulu. Thandi, I hear, has been a star student since her primary school years. Her parents have never had to pay for her education since high school due to her brilliant nature. She has won many scholarships and awards. And I believe every word I hear about her.

Her husband is a Chief Financial Officer in a parastatal, a South African term for a government owned business. He is a Chartered Accountant by profession. Mandla Mkhize is his name. The couple owns a wonderful house in Killarney, north east of Johannesburg. Mandla comes from a family of successful entrepreneurs. Every black person knows the Mkhize family from Ixopo, that's how successful they are.

By all means, Thandi is my senior at work by rank, although our jobs mean we quite don't work together, not directly anyway. Her spacious office is located a floor above our

department. But she spends so much time in our department due to the nature of our work. We develop a lot of products that require patent and copyright oversight. We also deal a lot with contracts which must be cleared with the legal department first. This is how I came to meet her.

I was walking towards the kitchen for a fresh brew of strong coffee as my mind was spinning with all the things I had to do to get going in my new job. So I decided a good coffee should fix me up. TPS Engineering has a really wonderful coffee spot for a kitchen. It is an open enclosure with beautiful coloured cushions in black, brown and beige. So you can have your coffee right there in comfort. The coffee spot even has a tv with Dstv! They serve all kinds of coffees, from cappuccino to filter coffee. Quite impressive.

I was seated while enjoying my coffee with a worried look on my face. I think I had a worried look because the first thing she said was “*Bhuti*, you look so worried.” When I looked up, there she was. The most beautiful African woman I have seen in a long time. Her beauty was hundred percent natural, the real thing. Let me tell you, you haven't seen a beautiful woman until your whole being is stunned. She wore a stylish grey two piece suit, a black blouse with matching black pencil hills. Her head was immaculate with fine platings that actually made her face look even bolder.

“Do I?” I asked in a stupid tone. So many things came to mind that I could say to her at that very moment. But I opted for the simple “I am Xola, the new guy.” After some little sweet chit chat, she left to do whatever it was that was waiting for her important job. I was speechless though I was seated alone. I think my mind froze and my heart jumped. It was around ten in the morning.

Don't you just hate the first hours at a new job? You are handled with such care like you are a delicate substance. Everyone tiptoes around you and people are so fake-nice. Then comes the dreaded rounds around the office when you are being shown around, or is it really you being shown off? I just hate that moment, especially because ninety five percent of the names I will hear on those rounds I will never remember. Not that I care to remember anyway. My torture with these rounds started shortly after my brief meeting with Thandi in the coffee spot and lasted a good one hour. This, followed by a brief departmental meeting, which was quite nice, in which I was informed I must attend another meeting at two that afternoon. Great, I had tons of reading to do yet already I was booked into meetings back to back on the first day.

I spent my lunch hour at my desk reading and eating at the same time. For me this was a good way to be left alone to the sanctuary of my thoughts. I wanted to relive that moment when I met Thandi this morning. I wanted to see every detail of it in my mind, and being left alone is the perfect moment for such an indulgence.

Let me explain something to you that you must understand. A man can tolerate many

things, and being ignored by a beautiful woman is one of them. But meeting a dream woman like Thandi, and she noticing you, let alone she taking time to chit chat to you, is things happening on another level! That bothers you to the core. Because usually chances are that I would have chickened out anyway and let her be. Or with my paraffin steam courage I would make an attempt to chat her up but she would brush me off, that is acceptable. But being greeted and talked to poses a challenge to manhood. A man in such a position knows he must be man enough, if only to appease the gods of manhood. Not doing anything about such a situation is taboo to manhood. And the soul will suffer in perpetuity for this sin. And such a man loses his status among men.

I was awoken from my half-dream half-work state by the PA to our Head of Department. She cordially informed me that the Director of Engineering himself had wanted me to attend the two 'o clock meeting. I must say I felt a little important to be told twice about the same meeting. One of the people telling me being a Director of all people!

I was lost in my reading when my phone rang and I jumped a little from shock. It was a reminder that I was late for the meeting and the Director had asked for me to be reminded. Not a good impression I imagined. So I dashed to the boardroom where everyone was waiting for me before the meeting would start. I was obviously embarrassed when I walked in. As fate would have it, there was only one vacant seat left, meaning I was the last person to arrive for the meeting. As if that was not enough embarrassment, the vacant seat happened to be on the right hand side of the gorgeous Thandi Mthembu. And she was smiling lightly at something, or someone.

I had worked for one of the big three of the construction industry before I joined TPS Engineering. I worked as a Systems, cum Electrical, Engineer. I had worked there for four long years, and for the most part was happy with what I was doing. I was already earmarked for growth in the company in an effort to meet their BEE targets. This would have meant that my career would be accelerated in the next few years to executive level. I was kinda fascinated by the idea. That in about five years I would be an executive of some sort. Quite flattering indeed.

It is exactly for this reason that Motlatsi and I had a bitter fight which resulted in us nearly breaking up. Or maybe we have broken up, I just don't know yet. I haven't seen Motlatsi, my girlfriend, in about a month now. When Motlatsi had heard about my being earmarked for greater things in the big three firm, she was elated. She had called every person important in her life to tell them the good news. She, Motlatsi, daughter of Tsilo, would probably be married to an executive at a big three construction firm in the near future. I probably would have married Motlatsi.

Motlatsi Tsilo is a management consultant at a big five consulting firm. She is an MBA graduate contemplating doing her doctorate. Motlatsi and I have been going out for two and a half years now, and our relationship was something of a serious and solid type. So

no one could really blame her when she started spreading the news of her future husband being a future executive at a big three construction firm. You see, with the MBA types, appearances are quite important. The fact that I worked for a big three was a significant statement in her life. She herself worked for a big five of consulting firms. So my announcement to her one day that I had supper with the people from TPS Engineering regarding a job offer was plain unacceptable. Working for a firm that does not fall within the top five in its sector was laughable to her. When had I started looking for a job, she had asked. What was wrong with my current job, she asked again. In truth, I wasn't looking for a job, neither was there really anything wrong with my then current job.

A friend of mine had uttered a word to his friend about this friend, me, who was really a promising upstart in the engineering field. The fact that the big three firm had placed me on the accelerated programme was proof to this. So the friend of the friend had talked to some people and before I knew it my name was doing rounds on the lips of some interesting people. Background checks were done on me without my knowledge. My work was scrutinised without my knowing. And then one day I got an email dinner invitation from a group of guys who wanted to chat with me. "About what", I asked. They said they would explain when we met and that it would certainly be worth my while. Since Motlatsi had cancelled a dinner appointment with me at the last moments, I had nothing to do so I agreed to see them, out of curiosity than anything else.

We met on a cool evening with the clouds promising some rain. Protea Hotel at the Gold Reef City Casino. No matter how many times I go there, Gold Reef City Casino restaurants always do it for me. I must commend these guys for having known that this place is special to me. Perhaps because it is here that I met my lovely Motlatsi. I had gone out with my visiting family to the theme park and we were debating whether I should be riding on the train or not. I was arguing against it when this beautiful lady comes along and settles the argument for us. She says she couldn't help but listen to our argument and she had a solution for us. I must take the ride firstly because I am the eldest of the siblings, but also because she is challenging me to ride! And should I agree to ride, she will agree to one date with me!!!

Of course I rode with everybody and left Gold Reef City Casino that afternoon with her number and the promise for a lunch tomorrow on Sunday. I called her late in the afternoon to joke about the events of the day and to decide where to take her. She preferred Chinese food and since I know nothing about Chinese food, I let her choose the place. We drove all the way to Tshwane to appease her taste buds in what she assured me would be an eye opener for me. I left home to have lunch with Motlatsi but I ended up spending the night in her apartment in Hyde Park, leaving my visitors puzzled about my manners. I had to rush home first on Monday morning to change clothes before going to work. This was to be a very beautiful friendship between two people.

Since that afternoon at the casino, Motlatsi and I hit it off and we never looked back. She was a well mannered girl from a decent family. Her father is the strictest of fathers I have

met, but a very dignified gentleman whom I became fond of. Mr Motlatsi really liked me and I really really liked him too. Motlatsi and her mother were even jealous of how well the two of us got together.

I was impressed that these gentlemen would choose to meet at my favourite spot instead of their plush offices in Sandton. When I walked in by seven 'o clock, they were already waiting for me. They had already ordered my favourite drink, orange juice, placed an order of well done ribs for me, my favourite again. And even ordered malva pudding for desert too! They were that good. They seemed to know a lot about my eating habits.

So when my lovely Motlatsi learned about my betrayal of her loyalties by meeting people from TPS Engineering for supper, she stormed out and I haven't seen her nor heard from her in a month. That is how serious the big something firms are to my Motlatsi. She had not waited for me to explain what the outcome of the meeting was or why I had actually agreed to meet these people in the first place. She didn't want to hear whether I was leaving my job with the big three firm. She just stormed out looking really hurt, and something told me that things would never be the same again between me and my Motlatsi. I loved her dearly. But she took things too seriously, especially this big something firm stuff. It was like it was all that mattered to her about a job, that it was a big something firm.

So after a month of not seeing or talking to my sweetheart, I really don't know if we are still together. She refuses to take my calls. I once went to her office hoping to see her, but she gently ordered me out. I have spoken to her old man about it, after he had called to ask what was wrong with her daughter. I have sent her numerous emails, all of which were never answered. It is hard to believe you can loose a loved one over a mere job, but I guess these things do happen.

If you really love someone, it is tough not seeing them for a few days. A week is a drag. Not seeing Motlatsi for a month was the most difficult thing I have faced in my adult life. I had never really known how deep my feelings for her were until this incommunicado happened. It really hurt not seeing or hearing from her. I guess in the fourth week I was sort of getting used to the pain and not seeing her around.

As if all forces were cohorts against me, I accidentally flipped Thandi's legal pad and dropped it on the floor! I went on the knees under the table to pick it up, and had to brush against her once or twice to get it. She didn't seem to mind bits! Or at least I was not scolded by her, not there and then anyway. When I finally resurfaced on the table, with all eyes on me, she gave me a sensual smile and gently poked me by the ribs. That gave me some relief of the stress and tension. She concluded her presentation by announcing that since I had given her so much trouble, I must redeem myself by making

her “a nice cup of coffee!” My luck must have changed that morning.

The twenty or so minutes she spent presenting was a good time for me to really check her out. To affirm what I thought I saw in her in the morning. Sometimes eyes can lie. They can think they saw beauty, yet when you look closely you realise there is no beauty to be found. Sometimes it is the deceiving of the eyes. You may not have noticed the make-up applied and when you finally get to see the real owner of the face, without make-up, you want to run away. My thoughts and feelings were instantly validated by what I was seeing. Indeed Thandi Mthembu was a goddess sent to torture my feelings. What a beautiful person.

In the four weeks that I had not seen or heard from my sweetheart, Motlatsi, it was for the first time that I got attracted to another woman, s’true.

The first thing I did after the meeting was send Motlatsi a very short email:

Dear Motlatsi. Pardon my direct use of your name, I am a bit, no totally, at a loss as to what is happening and therefore what I may or may not call you. The job thing seems to have hurt you more than I could have imagined, I am sorry for that. But I don't remember ever promising you never to leave the big three firm, nor do I remember you asking me not to. So your reaction is quite shocking to me. Please do me one favour dear, would you kindly advise me on what is the status of our relationship. If this is what it seems, you may not bother replying. Missed you lots, hurt lots. Xola.

An hour later, my tormentor called and asked if I would be kind enough to step into her office. I instantly concluded I must be in trouble. This must be her opportunity to reprimand me about my behaviour in the boardroom. When I got there, there were two cups of hot coffee waiting. She asked me to close the door so we could have some privacy. “I have been told a lot about you Xola”, she began to say as soon as I was seated. “And what I have been told about you is quite impressive, I must say. But you will understand my difficulty in believing these stories because what I have seen in you so far is nothing like what I have been told. So I thought maybe you could fill me in a little about yourself”, she concluded.

We sat by the nice couches in her office seated too close to each other for my liking. I loved every bit of seating next to Thandi, but under these circumstances I was feeling uneasy. “I mean, you were in dreamland when I met you in the morning”, she continued. “And what just happened now in the meeting, what was that all about?” She continued to tease me raising her eyebrows. And then she burst out laughing, and laughing revealed even more beauty in her. Right at that moment, I wished I could hold her in my arms. But something had changed in her, she was no longer that tough corporate lawyer, but a very warm and welcoming person. A woman above all things.

So I smiled a little, looked her in the eyes and folded my arms. She stopped laughing and looked inquisitively at me and said “what?” “You are enjoying this, aren't you?” I asked

her. We both laughed and the ice was forever broken in my heart. Ten minutes later we still hadn't said anything meaningful to each other, nor have I had the chance to explain myself. Not that it mattered to me anymore. We spent fifteen minutes talking about everything and nothing in particular. Until we were interrupted by her secretary announcing the arrival of her guests for a meeting. "I would still like to put the record straight", I said standing up to leave. She gave a soft sexy smile and waived me to the door.

That evening, all I felt and smelled was Thandi Mthembu. I have never fallen for a woman so much before even saying a word to her. In all this excitement, I still had no idea how to approach the most important subject of my heart, proposing love to Thandi.

Getting back to my desk, I found an email from Motlatsi. I thought to myself that my email must have done the trick and brought her to her senses.

It read:

Xola my love. Please forgive me for having acted so childish. I really can't believe I acted the way I did. I am sorry for putting you through all this. I hear what you are saying my darling. Be advised that this is to be the last time you and I talk. We really loved each other, pity it has to end. LOVE ALWAYS, Tlatsi.

My world was turned upside down instantly. My eyes suddenly full, like wells full of water. How I wish Motlatsi could have given me the slightest warning about the contents of the email. I would have saved to read it later when I got home. With about an hour still to go before knock off time, I decided to call it a day.

I was truly anguished. Why does love hurt so bad when it is time to let go? Why can't a person stop to love another at will? Or at the very least, to gradually stop loving someone. Just to ease the pain of feeling what I am feeling right now. I cried as soon as I got into the house. The wells of my eyes were emptied dry and I felt an unusual longing of the soul. I fell asleep and woke up three hours later feeling quite refreshed. To be honest, it was only Thandi on my mind when I woke up. I don't know what happened to my anguish about Motlatsi while I slept, but it seemed I had slept it off. Or maybe I had already suffered the pain for four weeks without really knowing.

Loving someone is amazing, for we choose not to see or think about certain things about them. Here I was, alone in my apartment in the evening, and all I was thinking about was Thandi; a married woman. Who knows what Thandi and her husband could be doing at that very moment? Do I even make it into Thandi's thoughts? Yet here I am finding solace in the memories of Thandi Mthembu. The human mind indeed works in mysterious ways.

Motlatsi is a very driven woman, and quite fun to be with. We had gone through so much

together in the two and a half years we were together. It was a foregone conclusion on both sides of our families that we would marry. But by fate, here now unfortunately not. Whatever her real reasons for breaking up with me, she had a special place in my heart. Perhaps the saying by my people was right after all, that a grown man cannot go out with a woman for more than a year and still hope to settle down with her. Such is the fancy of love but will never move beyond boyfriend and girlfriend status.

The next morning when I got to work, I got a message to join the plenary team in the executive suite. It was both excitement and shock to me because the plenary is attended only by executive members of the firm. Among other things discussed there are projects and company finances. To say I felt out of my depths is to put it lightly.

TPS Engineering has about seven directors on its board, most of whom are engineers. Part of the shares are held by the families of the two founders as they had provided seed capital for the company. This makes about 35% of the issued shares. One of the founders, Makhosi, holds a 25% share while Tatolo had a 20% share. The remainder of the shares are held in escrow to be allocated to any new people the company employs and wishes to keep. Five of the seven directors were present that morning in the plenary. A plenary is such a big event at TPS Engineering that I wondered what was going to happen that day, with me in attendance of all things.

The meeting got started as soon as I was seated and this must have been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Besides the honour of sitting among these highly esteemed individuals, being there and observing how the business of TPS Engineering was conducted was beyond description. Among the things discussed that day were company finances, right in front of me! For the first time I knew that TPS Engineering might be small in name, it certainly wasn't small by revenue, or market influence for that matter. It turns out TPS Engineering was a two billion rand plus company in the past financial year! And they were already projecting turnover of around seven billion rands for the current fiscal year. I instantly knew I had made the best decision ever to join this company.

This is the meeting where projects are also highly debated and individual employees assessed and picked for whatever work was available. I was speechless to learn that every single director knew everything there is to know about my professional life. And, it seemed, they had all already made up their minds regarding what role I will be playing in the company, both in the short term and for the future. "So Mr Mthunzi, your role as a systems engineer will be short lived in this company", says Mr Diken; one of the brains behind TPS Engineering. "We all know that you are an ambitious individual and in keeping with that ambition, the board has decided that you will be on our first ever executive development programme. You have three years to learn every aspect of our business. Do you think you can do that?" I was momentarily dumbfounded and everyone was looking at me for an answer I suppose. "Wow!" that was the first thing I uttered.

“Well thank you very much and of course I can handle that.”

From there on I was given a brief on what the programme will entail. For the most part, the programme involved me playing a team lead role in various units of the company. This was to allow me a greater insight into the workings of the company. I would spend the third year mostly working as a project manager for the systems division.

“We know about your selection into the executive programme at the big three, so we thought it appropriate to put you in a similar programme of our own”, says Mr Sesi, the second brain behind TPS Engineering. “You couldn't have come at a better time because you have compelled us to look into creating this advancement programme for our company. The company has grown significantly lately and it can only be good that we have something like this in place. You will be given a full breakdown of what is expected of you in this regard. As part of this programme, you are highly advised to consider a masters programme of your choice, at company cost and time of course.”

The beautiful Thandi had been officially announced as been earmarked for an executive role in the company. I had exactly three days to get familiar with how TPS Engineering did things in the Systems Engineering division. This meant going through the pile of material placed on my desk the previous day!

I must say that this meeting reignited in me the spark of black pride. Seeing my people so energetic, building a company was motivation beyond bounds. While I had respected the founders of the company before, I held them in even higher stature after this. There and then, I knew both of them were my role models and would look up to them for guidance in my career. Misters Makhosi Dikeni and Tatolo Sesi.

The TPS Engineering geniuses. I call them geniuses because to find a black person successful in this country is quite liberating. Moreover, these are self made entrepreneurs. While they come from well connected families, politically that is, the individuals have gone all out to pave a niche for themselves without relying on the family name. Makhosi is an electrical engineer of note, with several awards from international institutions. He has worked both locally and internationally, giving him great exposure of what is possible. When he started TPS Engineering twelve years ago, he was offered a lucrative job in government, which he turned down. Tatolo is a structural engineer by profession and has over three decades worth of experience. He has worked mostly for the big five of construction firms in his career in various roles from engineering to project management. The two of them combined boast an experience spanning over five decades.

The day following my breakup with Motlatsi, after the plenary meeting, I went straight to Thandi's office. I just had to see her, even if it was to say nothing, my soul would be greatly relieved to see her. As luck would have it, we were both free that morning, and therefore not many people around. I didn't even knock, I just walked in and

sat down watching her. She looked up and gave me a smile that melted whatever anxiety I was feeling at that moment. “Good morning Mr Mthunzi”, she teased. “You don't look so well this morning, is anything the matter?” She really read me well, as if she knew all I needed was someone to talk to. She waved me over to the sofas on the side and made us coffee.

By some unknown force, I found myself crying! I couldn't believe what I was witnessing about me. How on earth do I cry in the face of such a beautiful soul? What will she think of me after all this? But my feelings just didn't care much about these questions at that moment; tears just fell from my eyes. She jumped up to lock the door, and then moved closer to comfort me. I was just too overwhelmed by these events that it seemed like I was someone else. She just held me in her arms for what seemed like eternity. Finally, when the wells of my eyes dried up, only then did I have the strength to greet her. She just nodded and looked me in the eyes and said: “be straight with me, what is the matter?”

What do you do when a woman like Thandi asks you that question? I found myself telling her everything that had happened in the past month with Motlatsi, including yesterday. All she did after hearing my story was to take a deep breath and give me a hug. That was it. Then suddenly she straightened up and sat on the other couch, very businesslike. Much like the reaction I would expect from someone of her calibre. I really hated myself for having burdened her with my problems and crying of all things. What kind of a man does that make me? In a way she was deeply touched, and at the same time very cordial. I stood up and walked out.

By the elevators I realised I had left my phone in her office, so I went back to pick it up. Like earlier, I didn't knock but simply walked in. What I saw when I walked in really startled me. Thandi was sitting at the same position I had left her and she was crying. My Thandi crying! All I wanted to do was comfort her, if only to return the same courtesy she had shown me. But instead I found myself kissing her fully on her tender lips and not stopping. My kisses became wild and persistent by the moment. It was like I was dreaming this whole scene. Somehow, Thandi responded to my kisses with such force that we both nearly fell. What happened next was beyond my wildest imagination. Thandi was on the floor with only her bra on. It was like time had stopped and the universe stood to watch with admiration what two passionate people can do to each other early in the morning. Moments later, I lost track of time, we both sat next to each other without a word said and just stared on the floor before us. The minds were still processing what had taken place moments earlier. What I was feeling inside was both jubilation and regret. I couldn't believe I had taken advantage of Thandi instead of supporting her. But my reaction was neither planned nor expected.

We were awoken from our thoughts by her secretary announcing her arrival. She asked the secretary to cancel all her appointments for the day. She looked me in the eye with such seriousness I knew she was dead serious with whatever she was about to say. “Xola,

do you know what you are doing?” She asked. I squeezed her hand a little, and still looking her in the eyes, firmly answered “yes I do Thandi.” I stood up, took her by the hand and gave her a firm hug. She whispered in my ear, “let's go home.” When we walked into the foyer, it was like the green fly of gossip, read secretary, had whispered into the ears of most employees at TPS Engineering. Somehow everyone was there and I could tell from the way people looked at us that they knew. As if in rebellion, Thandi grabbed my arm and walked defiantly through all watching eyes. As we walked into the basement parking, she said “we will use your car to your place!”

I have never been so proud in my life. To have Thandi publicly holding onto my arm felt like I had graduated to the next life, whatever the next life feels like.

This beautiful turn of events was to be our worst phase in life.

I had skipped work on my second day of starting the new job. I had only been in the office for about two hours when we left with Thandi. We drove in silence to my apartment, with the beautiful Thandi curdled away on the passenger seat while we holding hands. We spent the rest of the day in-house, with Thandi in my long sleeved shirt that made her look so silly. Being with Thandi that day made me feel like I was a young boy who had just fallen in love for the first time. And I had never seen Thandi as carefree as that day! In her, the tough corporate lawyer was completely missing.

After lunch the tough talk began. It began while she was resting on my chest. We had been chatting and playing a little, out of the blue, she began to cry. For a moment I was worried at the way she was affected by the crying. When she stopped crying, she held me tightly and asked me a question that really made me think. It is not that I did not know the answer, rather the way she had asked it. She was lying on her back on my lap, and looking straight into my eyes she had asked the question with such a soft tone. “Xola, what do you want from me?”

You have to be very careful with questions of this nature. There is no right or wrong answer, but your answer will make all the difference.

“Thandi”, I began with such calm, “I loved you the first time I saw you. I didn't want to believe it then, but seeing you again in the boardroom I knew you were what I had been looking for. What do I want from you? All I know is that I do love you. I do know also that I want to be with you. I am very sure that you make me happy. And because of that, I want to make you happy also. I hope that we can love one another honestly.”

Hearing my answer, Thandi cried. It was not really a cry. She was silent with a very peaceful face, yet tears were rolling down from her eyes. She sat like that for a long time, and my heart was bleeding to see her in this way. I was absolutely clueless what I needed to do to calm her down. I wished she could stop crying, yet I felt that maybe she needed to cry. So I did nothing. When she finally stopped crying, she asked me to kiss her. The

passion that followed the kiss was like right in the middle of summer when all the storms met and spewed their anger on earth with all their might. Love is beautiful.

The next hour was the most difficult one and awkward. Of all the things I had come to appreciate about Thandi since I knew her, was her direct nature. She saw no need whatsoever to go around matters and coat things. She was direct and that was it. “Xola, I really hope you do know what you are doing”, she had started. “But before I say what's on my mind, I need you to promise me one thing. Promise that you will never play me for a fool. Be straight with me, all the time, I am a big girl and I can take care of myself. That's all I ask, that you be straight with me. Next you need to understand that I am a married woman, at least I was until this morning”. “Huh? What did you say?” I asked in shock. “When I left my home this morning I had no intention of falling in love, let alone of cheating on my husband. I cannot expect my husband to understand or forgive me for what happened today. But then again, I am not looking for his forgiveness. I am not going back to my husband henceforth.”

There was a long silence following this announcement. Slowly, I was beginning to see the seriousness of the situation. While things were relatively simple for me, what had happened that day had changed Thandi's life completely. She began to explain: “I cannot go back home after what has happened. The only thing I need is to pick up my clothes and files from home. I really don't know what will become of me after this, *kodwa* I know my marriage is over. Well, don't feel much guilt about it, my marriage has been over for a long time, even though I have been married for only three months. I married Mandla because my parents forced me to, but I have never wanted to be married to him. At the same time, I don't expect much from you Xola, but I just need a little assurance that at least you will not leave me. Not right away anyway, I don't think I can deal with that. So if you will please be by my side while I try to rebuild my life. Listen, I will check myself into a hotel for about a week, while I look for an apartment to rent. In the mean time, you and I have lots of work to sort out in the office, so we must be at work tomorrow. And Xola, I do love you.”

How does it happen that things can happen so miraculously? I had only met Thandi the previous day in the coffee spot. That same day I was dumped by Motlatsi, for whom I harboured much affection. The following day, today, I cried in the hands of Thandi because of Motlatsi. Thandi and I made love in her office this morning. Up to that point, I had never said a single word of affection to Thandi. Her marriage is ruined, because of me. Her life is turned upside down in less than thirty hours of meeting me. I am madly in love with this woman I met only yesterday.

We spent the whole day and night in bed. At some point, I thought Thandi just wanted to forget about her problems. I learned so much about her that day than I could ever have hoped for. At seven o' clock on the dot Thandi's phone rang. She jumped like she knew who it was. In fact it was the person I was praying he never calls, Thandi's husband. My sweet Thandi, she put the phone on the speaker so I could hear the conversation. Green

flies of gossip never cease to work. Somehow, they have managed to find their way to Thandi's husband and whispered the story making rounds in the gossip circles. For the first time since I knew her, she seemed at a loss for words. I quickly typed the words to say on the laptop lying nearby: "*I don't want to talk right now, I'll call you when I'm ready.*" I simply held her close to assure her. The only words Mandla had said were "*Is it true?*"

Thandi and I usually get to work early, about an hour or two before most people. It is usually quiet at that time and you can get so much work done. So out of habit, we left early for work the next day. The previous night we had had a new set of clothes delivered for Thandi which we ordered by phone and paid for by credit card. It was like nothing I had seen before. When we got to work, everyone was already waiting. To see so many people at work by seven o' clock in the morning was amazing. It was like everyone called everyone when the car pulled into the basement. When we walked into the foyer, again it was exactly like the previous day when we left. There were so many curious faces looking at us. This time I was bold enough to hold her hand. Seeing the scene we had created, Thandi beckoned for me to her office. We burst out laughing as soon as we were inside. We decided to help the curious faces by her accompanying me to my desk to leave my stuff. Then we literally strolled to the coffee spot where we sat hand in hand. After the coffee, I left her in her office with a passionate kiss and we were ready to face the day.

Let me tell you a little story. An honest man in a rural village had a beautiful wife, whom he loved very much. While the man was poor, somehow the woman had agreed to marry him in defiance to her parents whom she felt were too controlling. But their marriage had been very rough, with the woman doing as she pleased. The poor man was very obedient to his wife, despite his wife's character. Soon after their marriage, the woman began bringing men to their home. When the man complained, she would ask him if he provided enough for her and if he thought he was good enough for her, she would scold him to let her be. This continued for several years until one day the husband came home and found his wife in bed with another man. As usual, the woman scolded the husband and he left without saying a word. When he came back, he killed both the woman and her lover. And then he sat down next to them and asked neighbours to call the police, he said he was now ready to go to jail. The lesson: *you must be afraid of a man who responds quietly to a situation involving his wife.*

While I was swamped with work, once or twice I did think about Mandla. His only interest was in finding out *if it was true*, nothing else. That worried me.

Time flew by, with so much work to get through, with so much on my mind. I picked up the phone to tell Thandi I love her, much to her approval. She smiled at me with her sweet voice. The next time I looked up I was being summoned to a meeting I was supposed to attend which I had completely forgotten about. I had locked my BlackBerry

phone in the drawer so that I wouldn't be disturbed. I sat away from my laptop to be able to ignore emails. My Thandi was in the same meeting I was late for, and she hadn't said a word about it earlier on the phone. I was expected to make a presentation in this meeting I had not prepared for, but all went well and everybody was happy. At the end of my presentation, my sweetheart winked at me and smiled. We left together for lunch, carrying along our laptops to look like we were working, which was a lie. We really didn't eat our lunch either, we just sat there blushing and loving each other, like young children do when in love.

There were a number of logistical matters about Thandi's situation that needed our attention. Firstly we had to find a hotel for her. She needed a new set of clothes until she could pick up her stuff from home. We also had lots of work facing us in the office. I booked a suite at Protea Hotel Wanderers for her. I am a member of their loyalty club and this qualifies me for a discount. With that taken care of, I asked her to go pick up some clothes using my credit card. So this left only work on our plate. I asked her to sort out the shopping immediately while I continued to push work and we would meet at my apartment late in the afternoon. Since we had used my car to go to lunch, I asked her to take the car and I took a cab back to work. I would take her car home at the end of the day. We kissed good byes and set on our separate ways.

In matters of the heart people lose all sense of rationality.

Black people are too trusting and choose to overlook things when it comes to love and family. While Thandi is an intelligent woman, she too had overlooked certain aspects of her life. When she had to pay for the clothes she was buying, she decided to pay with her own credit card, one co-signed by Mandla. Even though she had her own bank account, she had never seen the need to own a credit card, so the one she had was jointly owned with her husband. When the card was presented to pay for the clothes, it had been cancelled. This is an embarrassment a woman like Thandi should never have to go through. She paid with my card, like she should have in the first place. She called to tell me what had happened and decided to go to a spa for a quick treatment. Meanwhile things were getting serious on the work front.

When I got to the office I called Thandi's secretary to ask her to bring me her car keys. I was dumbfounded when she told me that Mandla had personally come to pick the car soon after Thandi and I left for lunch. I simply did not know what to make of the matter, but I asked her not to let Thandi know. I figured the credit card issue was enough trouble for her for the day. I would tell her later in the evening.

I am always amazed at the level of control some women give their husbands. For a woman as successful as Thandi to have overlooked simple matters such as finances was unforgivable, I think. Especially considering that Thandi had a BCom degree? The outcome of ceding responsibility for finances almost always backfires badly. The skeptic in me told me that things are likely to get worse for Thandi. If she had been using a credit

card jointly owned with Mandla, drove a car in Mandla's name, what else was there that Mandla owned that Thandi used and had never paid attention to?

I wish part of counselling that all black women receive before marriage would include managing own finances.

The bell rang in Thandi's head when the bank made a courtesy call to find out why she was moving such large sums of money out of her current account. At her level, her salary made her a platinum client with access to private banking facilities, and this is why she had come to know first hand before Mandla could do much damage. She owned the bank account yes, but Mandla was a co-signatory on the account. It turns out Mandla was intending closing the account and had already transferred most of the funds into third party accounts. Fortunately for her, as a private banking client, this meant that the transfer of funds could only be finalised the next morning as her private banker was in meetings and as agreed that no movement of large funds will take place without the supervision of the financial adviser, who was Thandi's private banker. So the customer care department had decided to call her and find out if they could persuade her not to close her account. She was still at the spa when the call came through. She was so alarmed that she instructed the bank to freeze all her assets until the next morning when she would personally come to the bank to sort matters out. She called me to report the latest developments, and I advised her to drive straight to my apartment to wait for me.

While the banking system in South Africa is world class, their service levels are worse than that of fifth world countries, if there were to be such a nation. And of course we pay an arm and a leg for this terrible service. But there must be some good in a bad system, and this badness is also what saved my Thandi. When you transfer funds using electronic facilities, those funds leave your account but the bank keeps them until midnight before effecting the transfer. While you loose any interest on that money, the bank does make profit from keeping the money. You can't withdraw large sums of money from branches either, you must provide your bank with ample notice before hand about your intended withdrawal. But the beauty of this system is that while money might have already been transferred, you can reverse the transaction during this window period, this fact even Mandla seemed unaware of. So every cent siphoned out of Thandi's account that day was recoverable without even involving the lawyers or police. Saved by a really bad system.

Things were quickly getting out of hand and thought it was time I got involved in Thandi's situation. I asked her to call all banks, brokers and investment houses to freeze her assets until further notice. This to pre-empt any move Mandla might make. I also asked her secretary not to accept any instructions coming from Mandla in the name of Thandi. Anything must be cleared by Thandi herself, then I took a cab home.

Call me a skeptic. Call me paranoid. I have always maintained that there are things in your life you should never cede control of. While we need to compromise and

contribute to our family prosperity, you should remain in control of the part of revenue you are responsible of generating. It is your responsibility to know where every cent goes and how it is spend or managed. While you may let your partner take care of the joint budget, you must be responsible for the rest of your finances. This is necessary for you as an individual to be disciplined but also to ensure that your life is not based on hope and chance. No matter how much you love your partner, you must remain responsible for managing the part of the money that you generate.

Thandi was gravely concerned when I arrived home by cab. She wanted to know what had happened to her car and why I was not using it. I simply smiled at her, kissed her and paid the cab. As soon as we were in the house I asked her to do a list of all her financial commitments and investments. I asked her if she knew what each of her investments were worth at any given time. She answered no. I urged her to register immediately online so that she could access her funds. This way, she could protect her assets plus it gave her much more control over what was happening. I also advised her to issue the instruction to all her fund managers notifying them that she is the sole signatory on her funds. Since it was already late in the afternoon, two of her funds couldn't be activated online, she had to wait for the next day. This would be the most damaging wait seen by anyone.

She had found out that there was a standing instruction to liquidate all of her portfolio in one fund, courtesy of Mandla since they both were signatories. This meant that Mandla could do as he pleased with Thandi's funds without her consent. I asked for a favour from a portfolio manager at the fund since I also had a portfolio with them to cancel the order and transfer the funds into a new account solely under Thandi's name. At that moment, we were only sure of two funds and her bank account that were safe.

It is said that the best thing you could ever do in a crisis situation, is never to panic. Panic takes away the power of reasoning and rationale.

I asked her to postpone moving into a hotel until we knew what was happening. The events of that day plus the confiscated car by Mandla convinced her that staying was the best decision for now. I called the hotel and postponed the check-in by two weeks. The pressing matter became the issue of her having a car. Under her circumstances, it wasn't really advisable for her to acquire anything in her name until she was divorced from Mandla. It seems the situation quickly brought out the lawyer in her and she was thinking and acting like the lawyer she was. We agreed that I would buy a new car that she would use. Using my contacts, I could have the car delivered within three days. Meanwhile we rented a car for her until her new car would arrive. With all these things out of the way, we went out to have some fun and to forget our problems. We drove to Lesedi Cultural Village in Broedestroom, about forty minutes away. To take our minds off things, we went for the cultural experience, something that lasts about three hours! After this we decided to sleep over and drove back in the morning. That evening was a

moment of bonding between two loving people.

Nothing sets the mood better than a boyfriend who has watched attractive girls in traditional attire dancing freely in front of him. Voluptuous and well curved women showing breasts, thighs and behinds. Girls he has no choice but to secretly lust for while watching them, in the presence of his beloved partner. Add the smell of trees and vegetation, for this is a natural scenery. The sounds of birds chirping away beautifully in pairs. Lesedi is a perfect place to distress and have a quality time with your loved one. Strolling in the night under the stars, hand in hand like the old days. Xola and Thandi. Sitting under the night skies at *Kgotla*, my baby's head resting on my chest. Kissing softly, slowly. Embracing, hugging and teasing. Sometimes with nothing said, just looking into each others eyes in the dark night and feeling loved. That night, we taught each other what love is. The walls of the huts witnessed big things. The bushes and the trees stood guard. The sky and stars noted in agreement on what the two of us were engaged in. To nod their agreement, the skies send the great star *Motjhotjhonono* (The Shooting Star) to announce to the universe what they were witnessing. We did to each other what love do to people. Or what people do to people when they are in love. That night.

At my age, thirty years old, tradition decrees that you are a man. *Ndolukile kwaye isiko ndilenzile*. Being a Xhosa man, there are things you also notice about women. While the love mat is about passion, it is also about experience. Our elders used to say that you must take care of your body, for it will carry you through your prime years. In matters of love, prime years are supposed to be when you are married. This is the time when you are expected to give your all to the art of love making. Old women couch young maidens on the art. *Abakhwetha* are advised by old men on satisfying their women. This is our custom as the black race.

That evening, I knew without doubt that Thandi was a full woman. That night the moon was full. That night we were full of love. That night we loved each other dearly. That night, our souls communicated.

The Mkhize family. Mandla's parents are philanthropic with their wealth. They are very good people and have helped many people across the country. They have always been involved in local communities, helping in any way they can. As a result, many kids are educated through their kind gestures as they regularly provide bursaries and scholarships to black people. Thandi's parents are well acquainted to the Mkhizes. Mandla's father and Thandi's were both herd-boys in the same fields many many years ago when they were young boys. After completing their junior certificate (JC), they went separate ways with Mandla's father delving into business almost immediately. Thandi's father worked as a clerk and later became a teacher in rural Shobashobane where Thandi was later born. Mandla's father prospered while teaching doesn't pay much.

Many years later the two fathers met, by chance, and began a solid relationship between them. It was through this relationship that Thandi and Mandla were planned for marriage by their fathers. Both were vehemently opposed to the idea once they learned the plans of the fathers, but in time Mandla relented. Perhaps this softening up was helped by the fact that when he finally met Thandi, there was no way he could refuse such a woman. He instantly took to liking Thandi. On her part, Thandi never accepted the arrangement, but it was causing enough problems in the family already. So in time her mother was begging her to accept the marriage proposal so that peace could rein in their family. Her agreeing to the marriage was in consideration for her mother, whom she loved dearly. Until they married, there had never been any relationship between her and Mandla.

To make matters worse, it turns out Mandla does not love Thandi either. Thandi is some kind of a trophy wife to him. Add to that the fact that Thandi despised him, their house was one miserable union.

I have never really understood why a man would agree to marry someone like Thandi yet fail to appreciate the woman. What is the point of getting married and then becoming hostile to each other? Thandi says Mandla brings women of all sorts to their home, and she is expected not to be offended. I was beginning to have a picture of a really bad marriage between Thandi and Mandla.

The green fly of gossip does work overtime, or at least it does its job. Early in the morning that Thandi and I were supposed to get back to Jozi, Motlatsi called. Just like that. She is the last person I expected to hear from. While I don't consider us enemies following our breakup, I still didn't expect to hear from her, so early in the morning nogal! She said she had come to my apartment the previous day but I was not home. She had thought maybe the two of us needed to talk about a number of things.

She asked if my absence from home had anything to do with Thandi and whether I was with her. Of all things Motlatsi may be, gossiping is not one of them. So I was speechless when this question came from her of all people. She sounded hurt though, above everything else. "Can we talk?" She asked. "But not over the phone please", she explained. I promised to call her when I got to the office to agree on time.

All Thandi said when I told her about the call was that we both had issues that had to be solved, and the sooner the better. I didn't know Motlatsi was an issue to be solved.

Motlatsi had asked me to check my private mailbox first thing when I got to the office. She said I must read it first before starting my day. Such a request from a girlfriend who has broken up with you recently immediately puts a lot of anxiety in your life. For you start asking yourself so many questions that have no answers. Things like whether she is regretting having broken up with you. Whether she feels hurt by stories like the one about Thandi so soon after the breakup. And of course the dreaded one following any breakup,

if she was pregnant?

How do you handle pregnancy from a past girlfriend? Especially if she is the one who broke up with you. Do you guys get back together? Do you have an arrangement regarding this sort of thing? What about Thandi? How would she take such bad news? Can I afford to lose her, especially under the current circumstances? My head was cracking with questions as we were driving to work. There was not much talk between us on the road, even Thandi seemed occupied with her own thoughts.

The rental car was already waiting when we got to the office. There was an unusual peace glowing on Thandi's face that morning. Even though we hadn't spoken much on the road, you could see that she was very free or happy or peaceful. That made me a happy person too. I just believed Thandi did not deserve what life was dishing to her at that moment. After kissing good byes, even though she was just a floor above me, I went to work.

The first thing I did was to have a quick briefing with my team, over coffee. This was followed by another brief meeting with Tatolo Sesi and Makhosi Dikeni. This time to thrash out the details of my advancement programme and to find out if I had given any thought to studying for my masters. This was something I have had no time to think about in the past 22 hours. But the most important part of our meeting was to plan my schedule for the following month. They explained I needed a flexible schedule as I would be called upon regularly as necessary to participate in other matters they deemed important. So it seemed logical that I couldn't be assigned to any project as a primary resource because of this requirement. As a matter of fact, I was already scheduled to spend the whole following week with them.

As soon as I got to my desk I called Thandi just to say I miss her. She asked if I had spoken to Motlatsi already. Oops, I had forgotten to call! I told her no and she asked me to call her right away. The way she put it was that both of us had things that needed to be taken of, and we should not pretend otherwise. I immediately called Motlatsi after speaking to Thandi.

“I have been waiting for your call”, was the way she answered my call. “So before we talk, how have you been keeping Mr Mthunzi?” Knowing Motlatsi, this formality was worrying me into believing there was more to what must be talked about. I told her I have been okay, a plain lie of course and she knew it. After the usual chit chat about the weather, she asked me when we could meet. I answered we could meet the same night if her schedule allowed. We agreed to meet after work at Protea Hotel in Gold Reed City Casino, exactly where we had met the first time! Even if this was just a coincidence, it did not really sit well with me. I am not one for coincidences and I just hate being left in suspense. I agreed to the venue nonetheless.

After this talk with Motlatsi, the day suddenly became a drag. No matter how hard I tried to focus on work, I couldn't. After a while I just decided to walk over to Thandi, hoping

she wouldn't be that busy to see me. The secretary said she asked not to be disturbed so I went back to my desk. No sooner after I have seated, the phone rang and it was Thandi asking me to come over to her office. When I got there she asked me to close the door and to take a seat. I briefed her about my talk with Motlatsi, and she laughed. She said I sounded so worried while I knew very well it is something that had to be done. She told me she was planning to go see Mandla also, and if I was going out then tonight might as well be time. And then she said let's be serious for a minute. She said her situation with Mandla had to be sorted out. "We really can't have a clean and blissful relationship while this matter is hanging over our heads", which was actually true. So she explained that she would be home, my apartment, late night as she had arranged for her and Mandla's parents to be at her house after work. She said her situation had to be resolved no matter the outcome, what she feared was that her parents were going to side with Mandla. I really felt sorry for her at that moment. And then she asked me to be gentle with Motlatsi, whatever she had to say.

Why are breakups so difficult? Does anyone know? No matter what the relations are between two people in a relationship, it is almost always impossible to tell the other person with a straight face that the relationship must come to an end. This is really disturbing and someone somewhere must find a solution.

It was even worse between Motlatsi and I, when we met after work that evening. While I was happy to see her, my instinct told me something big was coming, so I braced myself for whatever I was about to be told. The first forty minutes or so were okay because we were catching up on what had been happening in our lives. Then she broached the Thandi question as follows: "Xola, *yazi* whatever happened to us you can always be open to me. I would like to believe that the trust part has not changed between us. Is it really true that Thandi is living with you?"

It felt like I had a lump on my throat. Not that the question was in any way difficult, but at that moment when Motlatsi asked me, it seemed way too soon for me to have someone already living with me. No matter what you think about your life, someone can always make you feel sick about it. It took me a while to find the words to say to Motlatsi in response to her question.

"Motlatsi", I began to explain, "while it is true that in over the four weeks that I have heard nothing from you I have never looked at another woman, many things have happened in my life in the past two days. I am still trying to understand it myself, but events have taken place that have changed my life significantly. And part of those events were your breakup with me the day before yesterday. So to answer your question in short, yes it is true that as of yesterday, Thandi has been living in my apartment."

I paused a little to ensure she had heard me right. Then I continued. "Following everything that has happened to me in that time frame, I do not expect people to

understand, but at the same time I do not need people to judge me. I know right from wrong and I have my views about what has happened between me and Thandi. I know it is traditionally wrong, but I would not have done things differently if I were given another chance." I stopped talking and looked at her with anticipation.

Motlatsi took her time before saying another word. She seemed deep in thought but not much troubled by what I have said. Then she looked directly at me and sighed. Her eyes were quickly watery with tears but quickly dried up again. She smiled a little and said "I know." I have been with you long enough to know that you know right from wrong, and I will never judge you. When I heard about you and Thandi yesterday, I had been contemplating seeing you so we could talk. But it was rather hard for me to make that move, even though I knew it had to happen at some point. So I guess that the situation sort of helped me in my dilemma. Because I could say I know you, I know very well that there must be a compelling reason why things turned out the way they did between you two. I also understand that you cannot let Thandi suffer when you can help, especially because you are really part of what is happening. While it hurt me a lot that we had only separated for less than a day when it happened, I really do understand.

"While you and Thandi were just an excuse on my part for asking to see you, it is really not the reason I wanted us to meet. In all fairness, you don't owe me an explanation, but thank you all the same for offering me one. I have always known you to be a decent person. Xola I know for a fact that you could not do something to intentionally hurt me. Even though I know I have hurt you badly. But you see I had no choice in the matter. The time I haven't been seeing you was killing me, honestly. And let me be frank with you to say I do love you, with all my heart. That has never changed, even by acting the way I did. Please I beg you to understand that fact. While I know that you don't dwell much on things you have no control over, but understand I was forced by circumstances to do what I did to us. I spent a lot of time hiding from myself and crying, hoping that it would ease the pain and guilt, to no avail. Because everything I have tried that involves running away has not helped, it is time I face to my reality. Xola.....", she began to say but started sobbing. I wasn't sure if I should walk over to her and comfort her or what, so I just sat there. The reason I broke up with you is because.....", she paused. "Xola I have HIV!"

Most times we don't realise how delicate life is, that it can be over just like that. My brain went into overdrive. If Motlatsi is HIV positive, does this mean I am also positive? Of course we used condoms but the thing would break once in a while. And I vividly remember one night that I actually insisted on sleeping with her without a condom, after they ran out in the middle of the night. If Motlatsi is HIV positive, from whom did she get it? When did she get it? I know for sure she didn't get it from me. When did she find out about her HIV status that she is only telling now?

I ordered a bottle of Amarula cream instantly. After the first glass of Amarula, I tried to find the courage to ask all these questions. But all I managed to say to Motlatsi was "are you okay?"

You know that people are strange creatures. They react differently to same situations based on many things. While I had never imagined a situation like this in my life, I would expect to shout or go mad. But my mind told me that none of that will change the fact just raised by Motlatsi. And I was already operating in crisis mode in my soul. I was already searching for answers of what I would do if it turned out I am positive too? Thandi, what about her? I saw a flash in my eyes of the previous night at Lesedi Cultural Village! What will I do about Thandi? I prayed in my heart to God *Qamata* and called the highest favours from my ancestors to please pass this ugliness away from Thandi. I made up my mind that I would pass by Sandton Clinic on my way home to take an elisa test. At least I would know by the time I get home what my status is, and I would be able to talk to Thandi in absolutes. For I did not think it fair for Thandi, with all her problems, to have to worry about HIV. My mind was made up, whatever the consequences.

Another piece of the puzzle that is inherently wrong with black people. Black people will generally not ask about the HIV status of their partner. It is considered rude to ask. Yet many people continue to contract the virus in this way, simply because they did not know.

I had never bothered to ask Motlatsi about her HIV status in the past two and a half years, despite the fact that we had constantly had heated debates about the subject. You see, the thinking is that if I am okay, the other person must be too. It is not that black people don't think about the risk, or are oblivious to the reality, it is just unthinkable to ask.

I was getting a bit tipsy with the rich creamy Amarula, for I was drinking it like a Coke. In time Motlatsi breached the silence. She said she supposed I wanted to know what had happened. Of course I did but was in no mood to neither ask the questions nor answer the question asked. She reminded me about a trip to Spain she had undertaken about eight months ago, on business as usual. She continued, "one weekend on a Friday after a really tough day, we went out to have some fun and distress. We started out at a bar in town but ended up taking a train to Madrid as we were told there was a party of the century going on. To sweeten our enthusiasm, we were told all the great French League players would be there. So we went to have fun. And we had a lot of fun. As the night got heavy, everyone of us had picked a boyfriend, with the understanding that whatever happened that night would end that night. I also had a boyfriend, one of the players of Arsenal. I was swept off my feet by this guy. He took me to a hotel where we spend the night. The next morning I left Madrid for Spain and everything was forgotten, well at least I tried to.

About five weeks ago I was preparing to launch a business I had been hard at work putting it together secretly. Everything was ready for the take off. I had negotiated a really good deal with some venture capitalists I met on a trip to Zurich a while back. It had taken us about three years to work this deal out and finally things had succeeded. Part of my seed capital, above the cash I had raised, would be a life policy that I would cede to them to make up the difference. Since the cover I was taking was really steep, the

insurance firm insisted on a HIV test before they could cover me. Of course I innocently agreed to the tests. I had known for two days when I stormed out of your apartment and never returned. I had been looking for a way to break up with you, but there was none. So that moment you told me about your meeting I sort of knew your changing jobs will most likely result in a marriage proposal from you. So I had to act before things went that far." All this was said with such calm, but after this she broke down crying.

The price of having fun. I always wondered why people, especially young ones, would go all out to have fun. To them fun defines life. Fun for them involves heavy drinking, loud music and sex. And the rate at which they seek fun is worrying. They must have fun at least once a week.

If you count the number of times they have fun, average it out and you get an idea of the amount of sex they do. They will have fun with whomever happen to be the fun person or the one who can show them the fun. No commitment, not strings attached, just plain fun.

Is it any amazing then that the majority of new HIV infections are among the young people? Is it amazing then that the rate of spreading is so alarming when you factor the number of sex partners each one have over any given period of time? By the time these kids reach maturity and start working, they have slept with more people than the total number of relationships any grown up has had in their entire life. Sometimes they simply compete on the number of sexual partners they have had or they can have.

Everything has a start and an end. Many of them die before the age of twenty five, many will not see adulthood. Is this the price of having fun?

Motlatsi had to have fun all the way in Spain, having gone there for only a week. And eight months later my life is directly at risk on account of someone wanting to have fun. Thandi's life may be at risk because Motlatsi wanted fun. How many more other people are at risk because someone somewhere decided they wanted fun? Is it really acceptable that I have to suffer because someone else was irresponsible with their life? Can we really afford to allow this chain of events to continue unchallenged by habits and customs?

At that moment, when I thought about all these things, I knew that I hated Motlatsi. An air of anger was rising deep down in me. My rationality was quickly leaving me and I knew things would get out of hand soon. But I thought about what Thandi said to me when I told her about Motlatsi that afternoon. She said I must be gentle no matter what the situation. Motlatsi must thank her ancestors for having sent Thandi of all people to her rescue.

I asked for the waiter to bring the bill so that I could leave. Seeing my almost non

responsive behaviour, Motlatsi said she thought I should know and was sorry. While paying for the bill, all I asked her was how her father was taking it. I really did feel bad for the old man. For such a respectable father to be burdened by the irresponsible acts of children. I paid and left without a good bye.

I drove around for a while before I headed for Sandton Clinic. I looked up the pathology department from their directory and simply walked in. My Amarula tipsiness had vanished. I was as sober as someone who hadn't had a drink in their entire life. I filled out the required forms and waited my turn. Just to be sure, I took both the quick test and the one for which you must await results to come back. I told the attending nurse when she finished that for the quick test I didn't need her to tell me the outcome. She must just give me the results and I will go away. I told them I didn't need no stupid counselling nor did I want to hear their half fake concerns. "I am just a number to you, so please treat me as such." It took about thirty minutes from arrival, testing to getting my results. As soon as I received them I left the hospital without a word to anyone. As I drove out I realised that the paper in my hands determined my future. Just like that, it did not matter anymore what I had worked so hard for, nor what my future plans were. And the result of this recklessness is irresponsible behaviour by Motlatsi and my unchecked trust in her. This was the result of trusting someone with your life. They wreck theirs and take yours along with them.

After a while I drove home to face the music. Motlatsi might have betrayed me and run away from taking responsibility for it, but I was not going to do the same to Thandi. My calculating mind was already formulating what needed to be done should it turn out Thandi was at risk. I decided I would accept whatever the outcome of this talk with Thandi would be. I wasn't even sure if I would say I was sorry. How do you say sorry to someone for being responsible for such a grave matter? To me saying sorry would be patronising and insulting to her.

It was around eight in the evening when I got home. I took a deep breath before getting out of the car. This was it, a man must face his sins and take it like a man. Even though I believe a man who is this irresponsible with peoples lives does not deserve to be called a man. *Ligwala*, a coward. And I accepted at that moment that the title of man does not qualify me. I was only praying that Thandi was not burdened following her meeting with the parents. These are not things to take lightly, it is other peoples lives.

As I was walking towards the house, I vowed that tonight I shall never shed a tear. This problem was no longer about me, but about how it affected Thandi. Thandi was not home yet, I was so focused on my problems I had failed to notice that her car was not parked outside. I dropped the test results on the table and went straight to bed. I did not bother undressing or taking off my shoes, I laid on the bed and dozed off.

Does love kill?

I ask this question because of all things that happen in the name of love. I was in love with Motlatsi yet she brought HIV into our lives. I have heard of people committing suicide because they loved those who didn't love them back. Some kill those who don't love them back. Others loose their minds and go mad because of love, or is it because of lost love?

If love does kill, what do we do about it?

Think about it, how many people do you know that have been affected badly as a result of love? Today many women vow not to marry as a result of lost love. Men remain bachelors into their old age because they have lost hope of love. Young children don't have parents all because of love gone wrong.

I suppose no one has ever been taught about love. Everyone assumes that since love is natural, people will cope naturally with its effects. But is that really a realistic expectation?

When it rains it pours.

I had a relatively perfect life just a few days ago, maybe a month ago if you consider the Motlatsi issue. Up to that point, I had tried to be a responsible citizen and conducted myself with dignity. Coming from such a humble background, you would understand that back home I am something of a role model. In an environment where people are having a tough time just surviving, anyone who can make something out of life is a hero. So whatever I do in my life always reflects back to my community. And this, I think, has had a tremendous effect on me because there are things I would have done in my life if it wasn't for this reminder of my responsibility to society. So I had always lived my life with caution.

I didn't have any complications in my life, at least I thought so with Motlatsi. But in a period of two days my life seems to have turned upside down. Dumped by a girlfriend. Slept with a married woman. Took somebody's wife away from the husband. Had a live-in partner, something I would never do in my life. Just learned I probably am HIV positive. My newly found love with Thandi will probably end when she learns about the HIV issue. My beautiful Thandi will most likely be disowned by her family. Mandla will do his best to clean Thandi out in the divorce.

The Motlatsi I didn't know.

Motlatsi had grown up an intelligent woman. From a young age, she had always been ahead of her age mates in understanding. This had prompted a number of people to refer to her as a gifted child. The things she was able to understand were far beyond a person of her age. This was a major asset during her school years. She always came first in all her subjects. The teachers had identified her as one of the most promising children to

come from *Ha Motlhabedi* in Limpopo.

She had always come first in the school activities such as debating, chess and creative writing. Her parents were poor, despite the fact that her father worked as a primary school teacher in *Ha Motlhabedi*. Her mother, like many mothers from Limpopo, was a house wife who took care of the family. Her father was the only educated person in her clan. After passing his junior certificate and starting to work, Ntate Tsilo had enrolled for a teachers diploma at Setlogelo College of Education in Tshwane. As soon as he graduated he left his job and started working as a school teacher.

Motlatsi was their only child in the fifty five years of marriage they had had. Her gift brought much joy to the parents as they had high hopes for their only daughter.

When Motlatsi reached standard seven, she developed a habit of hanging around with girls much older than she was. Her parents had tried in vain to reason with her. In time, the fruits of her friendship with older girls began to show. During winter of that year she had started a habit of not sleeping at home, no one knew where she was. Her parents were deeply agrieved with this turn of events about their daughter. Ntate Tsilo had started being very strict with her on a number of things, hoping that this would bring some changes to his beloved daughter.

By the beginning of spring, Motlatsi was pregnant, at the age of thirteen; with a child whose father she could not point. Motlatsi had got involved with a group of girls who frequented the mines in Polokwane in search of money and fun. It was during one such outing that Motlatsi too had got a boyfriend at that young age. The boyfriend in question was really not someone you can call a boyfriend, he was way too old to even be with Motlatsi. He worked as a truck driver for a coal mine in Polokwane. The boyfriend had refused outright that he was responsible for the pregnancy. He had made it clear that he was only one of the men who slept with Motlatsi, so he couldn't understand why he would be singled out as the person responsible for this. When pressured to be forthright, Motlatsi admitted to having slept with almost all men her friends were sleeping with; all at about the same time as everyone else. So she had no clue who the person responsible for her pregnancy was.

Her parents had called a family meeting which was attended mostly by the elders of the clan. The dire situation about Motlatsi was put forward and the elders had to make a decision regarding Motlatsi and the pregnancy. It was resolved that in light of Motlatsi not knowing who the father of the child was, it was best for the pregnancy to be terminated. This especially to allow her the opportunity to finish her education. This was to be the only terminated pregnancy her parents were to know about.

Instead, things got really bad with Motlatsi's behaviour. She became the most unruly girl in school and she had started to even sleeping with male teachers. She was still very much intelligent but her behaviour had gone from bad to worse. By the time she was

doing standard eight, Motlatsi must have slept with more men than the totality of her age. In desperation, her father had decided to send her to live with her uncle in Mabopane in Tshwane to complete her schooling. Living with her strick uncle seemed to help as she stopped going out with friends and spend most of her time at home reading. It was at this point that her flair for poetry became obvious. She composed quite a collection of poems which she kept deligently in her poetry notebook. Through her uncle's beckoning, she started performing as a slam poet at many poetry sessions around Mabopane, she even won an award for the best young writer in the province of Limpopo sponsored by a national newspaper.

This new Motlatsi pleased her uncles so much that he started taking a keen interest in her school affairs and encouraged her to play an active role in extra mural activities at school. It was this changed behaviour that had made her uncle to apply for a bursary, on her behalf, to the Tshwane municipality. The bursary had ensured that Motlatsi got the best education possible, which she got at Wits University in Johannesburg. She had relocated to Johannesburg after working for three years at the Tshwane municipality to joining the big five consulting firm.

It is the professional woman in Motlatsi that I had later met and fell in love with. As they say, the past does not matter right? Following my experiences with her later on in life, heck no. The past matters and could be all the difference between happy ever after and a troublesome life like the one I face today.

Thandi woke me up, she had both a concerned and a tired look on her face. But somehow she still managed to smile. "Wake up you sleepy bird", she was teasing me. "How does a grown man sleep with his clothes on? And the shoes?" She continued with the teasing. "*Uyahloa na?*" It was jut after eleven, close to midnight. "Are you alright baby?" That's me trying to get my senses back. She kissed me fully on the mouth, sat next to me and with a jilted head told me she loved me. "Wow, you woke me up just to tell me that? I should sleep with my clothes on more often", I shot back. We both giggled at this lame joke.

"I was out when I came back, and I just fell asleep." I explained to her. She looked at me with eyes raised and pointed to the dressing table, damn!, I had brought the Amarula bottle into the bedroom. I went all pitiful and she laughed. "Your meeting couldn't have gone that well if you were drinking", she enquired. "And the way you looked when I walked in told me a lot. Was it really that bad?"

There is nothing as safe as sleeping. Whatever your real world problems, when you sleep, they all go away. The land of the sleeping seemingly does not allow physical baggage in. It has plenty of is own scary experiences to be burdened with our nonsense. I had completely forgotten about my problems when I dozed off, but now that I was awake, they were back in full force. And Thandi was expecting an answer. How I dreaded this

moment.

It was something I have never imagined, not in my wildest dreams, I started to explain. While I had not anticipated what Motlatsi wanted to say, I figured it would be more around the reason why she broke up me. Well yes it was, but with more shocking revelations. Things I could never have imagined Motlatsi capable of doing. I paused a little not sure how to continue. Thandi looked at me and I hesitated. There was only one way to tell Thandi about this, and it was by just saying it. But I just couldn't say the words. I became speechless and stupid. After a long silent tension, Thandi simply said "I know." I went blank. How could she know when I am struggling to explain things to her? She possibly could not know, and if she somehow did, she would not be this calm person sitting next to me right now.

"What exactly do you know?" I asked even though I dreaded the answer. She explained: "I know about Motlatsi and the trip to Spain a while back. And I think I know more details about that trip than you will ever know my darling." I looked at her with much surprise. "Anyway", she continued, "one of the people who were on that trip with Motlatsi is a friend of mine. And believe me she has told me horrific things about Spain and her friends during that trip." Now I was really worried, for it seemed there was more to this Spain story than I had been told. "So if you know that much, then you must know what Motlatsi told me today, right?" "Well that part I didn't know until some time ago. I must apologise for this but I couldn't help myself. When I walked in, the first thing I noticed was the paper sitting on the table. So I opened it and read the contents. I was paralysed to read what it contained. And when I walked in here seeing that you were asleep, I sort of understood why you had to sleep. So yes I have guessed what Motlatsi must have told you."

We shouldn't make promises we can't keep. I had promised myself that there will be no tears that day, at least not from me, but I couldn't help it but cry. It was just me ashamed by the turn of events and with my head down emptying the wells of my eyes. Thandi was somewhat stunned by my reaction. After a while she moved closer and held me. I began to mumble something vaguely resembling a regret but she signed for me to be quiet. Then she asked me if I knew what my HIV status was. This was the most painful question I had been asked in my life. Truth is that I didn't know, even though I had gone for the test and got my results, well the results were lying on the table. Was I that much of a coward to have gone through the process of testing but couldn't look at the results?

With the faintest of voices, I said: "Thandi, the truth is that I don't know my status, well at least as of today following what I learned from Motlatsi. When she told me she was HIV positive, I went numb and lost all sense of being. My mind just gave up on me on the thinking side. From there I went straight to the hospital to test and got my results, But I don't know what the results are because I was too shocked and scared to look at them." At this point, the wells of my eyes were beginning to play their part again. Damn these tears sometimes, can't they give me a break to look strong for once? They just fell like

heavy rain that falls during the day in the middle of summer.

It is during moments like these when your mind tells you what the future holds. The human has something called an instinct that works as a guide through life. This time with Thandi, even my instincts failed me, nothing was apparent to me anymore. So I just sat there looking like a young obedient child awaiting punishment from an elder. When Thandi turned to look at me, I could feel her eyes scrutinising me. When she finally sighed a big sigh, I immediately concluded we were done. No self respecting woman would waste her life with an HIV positive man, knowing fully well that she could do so much better. I simply closed my eyes and anticipated the bad news.

Instead, she gave me a soft kiss. I opened my eyes in obvious confusion. She smiled a little and said: "I never knew you were such a baby! Relax, your test came out alright. But I hope this was a lesson to you never to trust someone like that with your life." She handed me the test result to see but hearing it from her was good enough for me. I jumped and danced in joy. Then I held her tightly in my arms like I would never let her go. "Thandi *sthandwa sam*, I love you."

The real story about Spain.

Motlatsi and a couple of her friends had arranged a trip to Spain for fun. The problem was that all their husbands and lovers were told they were going on business. A South African girl who had lived in Spain for a few years had told stories of how easy is it to make money that side of the world. So the girls got together and discussed these news briefly. After much consideration, they decided to visit Spain for a week to have a look for themselves. The biggest mistake of their lives.

The most surprising thing was that Motlatsi and her friends are all highly educated and professional women. Things like these are usually heard of about poor women looking for a way to make life for themselves. The friends nonetheless went to Spain for their excursion.

What amazes me is the calibre of women who went on this trip. Many of them are women you would never have thought capable of such indulgences. Perhaps for me and other men we could be consoled by the fact that they were girlfriends, but for some, it was wives going to Spain under the name business. Or perhaps business it was, for it is said this kind of business is truly lucrative.

Lebogang Thulo is a Business Analyst at an investment firm. She holds a Bcom Hons in Financial Management. Anele Muncu is an Advocate in the Johannesburg High Court. She is Thandi's friend and the two had been at Wits together during their university years. Lucy Phakathi is an HR Director in government, who has a BA degree and several executive development programmes under her name. Mampe Moreki is an Account Executive at an advertising agency. She has a BBA degree as well as an MBA.

These are the best credentials you will find among black people. Five young black women who are highly educated and successful by any measure you can think of. The youngest of these women was Mampe at twenty four years while the oldest was Lucy at thirty. Both Lucy and Lebogang were married with one child each.

Five successful women who wanted to satisfy a curiosity, boredom or whatever it was that drove them into arranging the trip to Spain.

Our very beautiful women, among the best looking women you will find, set out to foreign lands in search of something only they know what it was. They left on a Friday evening and used the weekend refreshing and not doing anything in particular to remind them of their mission. The South African who lived in Spain would meet them on Monday morning to introduce them to some of her most valued clients.

The clients.

It never ceases to amaze me that the number one users of ladies of the night are high esteemed people. Politicians, business men, known personalities and the like. These gentlemen are upright citizens who indulge in women as a past time. Mind you, most of them are happily married. Spain has a rather enticing twist to prostitution. Soccer players are among the loyal customers of these women, and they pay very well too.

While some women might have been reluctant to go through with their plan, the money they saw that first day in their adventure wiped out any doubts they might have had. They were treated to the A-list of clients who knew how to pay. There was only one problem with the A-list, they never agreed to using condoms with the women. And the money they willingly paid was supposed to be reason enough to the women to agree to sex without protection.

Any sane woman would know that a man who goes around sleeping with prostitutes and who insists on wearing no condom is not worth the money they pay. But there is just something in some people about dollars. The fact that these men paid in US dollars made all the difference. Add to that the fact that they were society socialites. So in a way, this prostitution business also worked out for the better for some women as real business deals were struck out of these relationships with the gentlemen. This is how Motlatsi had come to strike a business deal that, if it had worked out, would have made waves in the business circles.

During this week of heavy sex with different men of all kinds, Motlatsi had met one who had taken a personal interest in the affairs of these women. The gentleman had wanted to know from Motlatsi why they were engaged in this kind of business when they seemed so well off. While Motlatsi didn't really have a legitimate reason why she and her friends were doing what they were doing in Spain, she told a white lie and said they had been trying very hard to delve into business but their efforts were always shunned. This

seemed to have touched the client, who then asked Motlatsi to meet him for supper that evening where he would be meeting his friends.

Indeed this man introduced Motlatsi to a number of business people who took interest in her and set out to work out some business deal later. This deal would have been among the best deals South Africa would have seen in direct foreign investment had Motlatsi not developed her problem when she did.

While the women had gone to Spain and set up base there, they in fact had travelled a lot in Europe doing their business of servicing high net worth individuals, courtesy of the South African woman.

By the end of the week the women had made tons of money, all in cash. They were then ready to return to Mzansi and enjoy the fruits of their labour. There was only one problem preventing them from enjoying their money. How were they going to travel to South Africa with such cash? What do they say to SARS they got the money from? Of course they could risk travelling with the money and by never declaring it, but should they be searched all hell would break loose.

They were forced to buy themselves expensive clothes, jewellery and gadgets to blow the money. There was no way they could bank the cash or transport it back home legally.

The women had a fantastic time spoiling themselves in Europe. The night before returning home all agreed that they would meet months later to decide on the possibility of a similar experience in the future.

Not many people in life get a second chance. For those who do, not all of them learn from the grace handed over to them. They go on to live to repeat the same mistakes they did in the past. Such people deserve every bit of misfortune that befall them.

I, Xola Mthunzi, son of tata uZingisa Mthunzi and mama uNolikho Mfengu; had been given a second chance and I am grateful for that. It was like a lid had been removed from my eyes that made me see things somewhat differently. While I may love a woman in the future, I will never again become reckless with my life by placing all my trust in her. Whether she is trustworthy or not. This was the ultimate wake up call for me. If I was not going to listen, then there was nothing that could help me.

I resolved that from this point forward I will never risk a similar situation with anyone, no matter how deep the feelings.

Maybe if everyone did the same, the HIV pandemic would take a breather and look elsewhere for its victims.

I was shocked beyond belief to learn about Spain from Anele, at the request of Thandi. The problem these women now faced was that all of them were HIV positive. Lucy, a married woman, had committed suicide as a result. Not only was she HIV positive, she was also pregnant from their activities in Spain.

This group of five women had gone on this madness, which ended affecting no less than thirteen people. Of the five, two were married. Unfortunately both husbands were infected with HIV. Mampe's boyfriend was HIV positive. I was almost clean, until I could be cleared by my second test in about five months. The same can be said with the boyfriend of Anele. Lebogang's husband had a mistress, who too was infected. Mampe's boyfriend, Tshepo, had several girlfriends on the side; many of whom were infected also, four to be exact. These four women had boyfriends too, who will probably be affected some way. We don't know if they in turn had anyone they were sleeping with. From this one act of madness, eight other people were facing the reality that their lives had been changed by those whom they loved and trusted.

The South African woman whose business in Spain is prostitution remain HIV negative to this day. No one really knows why or how it is possible. But all the educated women she introduced to the business are HIV positive, with one having committed suicide. This among women of whom the least educated holds an honours degree!

People in South Africa are famous for blaming the government for the HIV pandemic. They say the government is not doing enough to address the problem. While they may have a point, can you really hold the government responsible for behaviour displayed by Motlatsi and her friends? How many more people are there who simply throw their lives away? Whose responsibility it is to ensure HIV does not affect many more people?

Thandi had a big fall-out with Mandla, her in-laws and her father. The family meeting had gone horribly wrong for her. While it is understandable that everyone would lash out at her for going out with me while she was still married, they took it too far. The fact that Mandla had cleaned out some of her funds did not matter to any of them. The fact that they had forced her to marry Mandla was no issue at all. The fact that Mandla does bring women to their matrimonial home didn't seem to make any difference to them. In fact, as the meeting was going on, one of Mandla's many girlfriends was sitting in the bedroom.

Thandi's father had wanted Thandi to apologise to everyone and move back in with Mandla. Mandla didn't want anything to do with Thandi. Mandla's parents demanded their *lobola* back. In all of this, no one really took time to ask Thandi what had happened or even what she wanted. So the meeting turned out to be one very long headache where everyone was angry and shouting. After four hours, everyone started to realise that this meeting would produce no result at all. Thandi was on the verge of walking out of the meeting when suddenly her mother asked her to say what was on her mind. With great

relief, tears of gratitude fell on her face. She explained to her mother that she did not want to live with Mandla anymore. As far as she was concerned, their marriage was over. She did apologise though for bringing their family into disrepute.

Since Mandla's mother was still insistent that the *lobola* must be returned, Thandi volunteered to her parents that she will incur the costs of returning the *lobola*. Everyone was shocked and couldn't believe what they were hearing. While Mandla's mother had been saying this, she actually didn't mean it. But because she had kept on saying it, a response had been given to her statement. Everyone was quiet for a while not sure what to do or say next. Mandla's mother knew that Thandi was the best woman his son could have married.

Thandi had given everyone of them a list of their joint assets and had also made another list detailing what Mandla had taken from her. The lawyer in her had done a splendid job on this one. Instantly, Mandla's family saw the potential problems they were facing based on this second list. Mandla hadn't yet come to understand the implication of the second list to both himself and his family, especially their reputation. It was exactly at this point that Thandi asked everyone to let her go. She stood up and left.

That night we did not make love, but we loved each other dearly. We sat in bed in each other's arms. We talked the night away and before we knew it the sun was shining. We dragged ourselves to work that morning. Since we hadn't slept, we decided to use one car. We had coffee together first thing when we got to work, then got to work.

It was a hectic day with so many deadlines looming in the horizon. But at least the day was very productive. By eleven o' clock I had done so much in a day that would usually take me a few days. But tiredness was creeping in and sleep so enticing. I decided to take a quick nap right there at my desk. I was woken up by Tatolo Sesi, the co-founder of TPS Engineering! He had come to give me hands up on a trip I was supposed to take to Japan. After I gave him some feedback on the work front, he seemed quite satisfied. Five minutes later I was summoned to his office with a phone call. When I got to his office, Thandi was there also. He asked me to close the door and be seated. He wore a serious look on his face.

"The two of you are doing very well with your work", he began to say. "Especially you Xola, Thandi has been with us long enough for us to know what she is capable of. But you, you are new here and already making a big impact. I took the liberty to go through your work this morning while you were asleep. Quite impressive concepts you are working with Mr Mthunzi. I would like for you to arrange a presentation with me and Dikeni on those concepts very soon. As you are aware Xola, your trip to Japan is fast approaching and we need to be ready for that. You will be leaving in two weeks time for a week. The new development though is that we have agreed for you to spend two weeks in Japan. One working week and the other one regaining your senses. We are aware of

the many things that have happened in your life since joining our company, and we need you to take that week getting back to shape. Thandi will be joining you on the second week. And may I remind both of you that we run a respectable company here, we don't need to see people sleeping in the office. If you are tired just don't come to work. You two should leave and rest for the day, come back tomorrow refreshed. And believe me you will need to be refreshed tomorrow as we will be in meetings the whole day. And before you two love birds go, a word of advice from an elder. Get married."

Mandla had cleaned out three of Thandi's investment accounts. He was being investigated for mismanagement of funds at the parastatal. Something must have gone seriously wrong with Mandla for him to be investigated. While I personally didn't know the man, I was told he is quite competent. And many people were shocked to learn about this investigation, others were inclined to believe it was a setup.

But Thandi tells me not to believe everything I hear. She is adamant that the investigation is legitimate. She says a lot of people don't know Mandla very well. They know the Mandla who is a renowned son of the Mkhize family. But the Mandla, the individual, is very different from his parents.

Mandla, like many rich kids, had been forced into a career by his parents. He despised them immensely for this. He had vowed that one day he would get back at them for ruining his life. Mandla had wanted to study engineering when he completed his matric, but his parents wouldn't hear it. They said he had to study business science so he could follow in the family tradition of entrepreneurs. His parents had given him a simple choice at that time. To go study to become a CA or get a job and look after himself without their support. So while Mandla was a capable person, he had only done his qualification to please his parents.

He did not like being an accountant at all, but it gave him some pleasure to know that accounting could just be a way to give his parents a fright one day. He also couldn't get past the fact that they arranged for him to marry Thandi. While Thandi was a beautiful intelligent woman, Mandla had a woman he had hoped to marry one day. The poor woman stood no chance and was disliked very much by his parents. So the two only saw each other in secret.

It seems being appointed a CFO was the beginning of a big plan by Mandla to disgrace his family. To him, his parents needed to be taught a lesson they would never forget. They cared so much for strangers than they did their own children. All Mandla had wished for was to be loved and treated like any kid is loved by its parents. Instead, the Mkhize family was very mechanical with their children. They spend more time helping other people and thereby making their children feel neglected. As a result, Mandla had planned early in his life that he would emigrate at the first chance he got. And since engineers could work just about anywhere in the world, he was sure he would leave the

country as soon as he graduated.

Being forced into a job he didn't want, Mandla's life had been severely dealt a blow. But on the other hand, being a CA had given him an inside look into the workings of financial markets. Specifically, the art of hiding money across the safe heavens where no government agency would find it. He had initially thought of bankrupting his family fortunes, but thought it not disgraceful enough for his parents. He needed to do something major that would forever be the dark side of his family. And he had figured out how.

Mandla had figured out a perfect way to render the parastatal bankrupt. He was in the final stages of his bankruptcy mission when the Thandi issue began. While Mandla harboured no ill feelings towards Thandi, he felt she was a victim of family control just like him, he very much disliked the way she had abandoned him nonetheless. So he had initially thought of cleaning her out too, but felt sorry for her and strangely resolved she didn't deserve such treatment. He had only cleaned out two of her investment funds. He had felt sorry for her while executing the rest of the cleaning up operation on Thandi, and unfortunately for him had become careless as a result. This is why Thandi and I had come to find out about his transferring funds from Thandi's accounts. Otherwise we would have never found out. So Thandi and I should be grateful to Mandla for having had a conscious attack.

Following the family meeting regarding Thandi's situation, Mandla packed up and left the country with Nokuthula, his sweetheart. Nobody really knows where they went, but they simply disappeared. And along followed a big scandal at the parastatal. The company was billions in the red and allegations of mismanagement surfaced. The disappearance of Mandla, the CFO, served to confirm them. A forensic investigation revealed that hundreds of millions had been stolen from the company. But the question was how as the company had strong audit procedures meant to pick things like these early on.

When the news hit the media, the Mkhize family were hardest hit. Their reputation had suffered a huge blow. As a result, the parastatal had needed a bail out from the government to avoid bankruptcy. Mandla was nowhere to be found, and so was the missing money. He had sent Thandi a message explaining his actions, including why he had treated her the way he did. In the end of his letter, he had apologised profusely for any pain he had caused her.

Indeed the next day was involved, as Tatolo had said. My day started at seven to catch up on my work before spending the day with Tatolo and Makhosi. At exactly nine o' clock, the meeting began in earnest. On the agenda for the next two weeks was: my research and development, status of projects I was responsible for, my studies for a masters programme, my trip to Japan and the surprise announcement that Thandi and I were to start working directly together. That sounded nice, knowing that I would be seeing Thandi most of the time when in the office.

The status of my projects was okay as all projects were on schedule. The research and development portion was a bit worrying because of the time required to get everything completed. While the conceptual work of the designs was done, there was still a long way to go before any of these ideas saw the light. But both Tatolo and Makhosi were keen to see them finished, even if it meant I be removed from my daily duties. I figured they must have been really impressed with the potential of these ideas. This was the main reason why Thandi would be assigned to work closely with me, to ensure that these were prioritised above everything else. And Thandi was known to be a non nonsense person when it came to delivery.

I had decided to register for a masters degree in engineering rather than a business degree. My main motivation to Tatolo and Makhosi was that if TPS Engineering needed fresh ideas and innovation, engineering was the way to go and not management. In any case, TPS Engineering already had a good team of managers with MBAs. I felt that I could contribute more with an engineering post graduate qualification than a management one. My research paper, I had decided, would focus on an area that would benefit TPS Engineering, hyper-threading for embedded systems. Plus I would be valuable being an executive with an engineering background than in business or finance. For as long as TPS Engineering was an engineering firm, it would need engineers to run its affairs. It was then agreed that I would register for a MSc in Computer Science at Wits University.

My trip to Japan was more of a fact finding mission than anything else. I was being sent over to see how things were done and to gain some insight on how the Japanese handled their engineering business.

Does HIV cause AIDS?

Politicians and academics have a strange way of dealing with reality. While people continue to die every day, South African politicians and academics are debating whether HIV causes AIDS. Who cares?

Fact is people are dying from this HIV thing. Fact is many more people are dying from AIDS. Of course the scientific definition of AIDS does not exclude other causes of AIDS than HIV. HIV does indeed cause AIDS, but HIV is not the only cause of AIDS. Let's get that fact out of the way.

Something should catch your eye if you take an interest in current affairs. While some doctors, academics, politicians and NGOs are fighting hard to get anti retrovirals issued to HIV positive people; you should be interested in knowing the benefits and downsides of taking these drugs. On face value, of course these are good drugs that people must take. And it has been proven that those who do take the drugs have a better resistance to the virus. That is a fact.

The downside though is much worse than the benefits of taking the drugs. And unfortunately this affects the poor people exclusively. You cannot take these drugs without a proper nutrition. That is a fact true of any medication. You need to be properly fed for medicine to take effect, failing which makes any drug toxic. The same is true of anti retrovirals. Many poor people cannot keep regular eating patterns, and this poses a huge risk in the fight against HIV. That is a fact.

There is also another risk factor that sits somewhere in between. The risk that some people don't keep to taking their medication as prescribed, resulting in the phenomenon known in medical circles as drug resistance. Unfortunately there is absolutely nothing that can be done about this. Either people take their medication accordingly or they don't. But it is important for anyone to understand the long term impact of this phenomenon. People who have developed drug resistance are the highest risk factor facing the country. These people are still HIV positive, but their strain of HIV has developed to another level. The problem with this is that existing drugs just don't work in situations like this. Add to this the risk of re-infection and for new infection cases involving these people. You end up with new infections from people with the resistant strain, which means for these people there is no known management treatment. Existing anti retrovirals are simply useless against this strain of the virus.

You have two risk factors against rolling out the drugs en-masse, and these risks outweigh the provision of the drugs if you take a long term view of managing HIV. Do you provide people with the drugs even though you know they don't have proper nutrition and thereby end up with cases of horrible side effects of drugs? Side effects which are mostly untreatable and the result of these cases almost always end up in drug resistance.

Do you issue drugs to people when the people are not educated enough about the responsibility that goes with taking these drugs? For as long as people do not understand that anti retrovirals cannot be taken at will and stopped, this is not an option, there is no way in which the fight against the pandemic will be won. It is actually counter-productive to issue these drugs under these circumstances.

On educating the people.

While millions of rands are invested in educating the public about HIV, are these programmes actually effective? Year after year the statistics indicate an increase in the rate of new infections, mostly among the youth. The majority of funds on HIV education are targeted at the young people, but are these commercials appropriate and serving their purpose? If they were, the rate of new infections would be decreasing. So what are we missing?

It seems like the HIV pandemic is academic in nature. The people who are benefiting from this dilemma are the academics and the drug manufacturers. The HIV debate is an intellectual one that has left the ordinary people behind. People have suddenly shot to stardom as the best orators on HIV. While intellectuals are having discussions about viral

loads and CD4 counts, people are dying of AIDS. My people, black people, are dying from curable diseases such as tuberculosis, diarrhoea, flu and malaria.

Thandi did not see the moon, and she kept it to herself.

There is a worrying trend that must be researched by those who do research on HIV and AIDS. Do we really know what is the average time span from an HIV infection to full blown AIDS? Why do poor people die so quickly following and HIV infection? Or is it that poor people spend their lives not knowing their HIV status, and only find out when they have full blown AIDS? Can we attribute this exclusively to poor people?

Motlatsi was critically ill five months following her disclosure to me about her HIV status. This is a well off woman who has access to the best medical care possible, yet in less than a year was critically ill from the effects of HIV. Or course, some middle income people refuse to sign up for HIV management programmes offered by medical aids purely based on the fear to be discovered to be positive. So they let a situation that can be managed, deteriorate beyond hope. I don't know if Motlatsi was using any HIV management programmes, but the rate at which her HIV status had progressed to full blown AIDS was scary. Of the four remaining HIV positive friends of Motlatsi, two had full blown AIDS. Could these women have contracted HIV long before the said time frames?

Do you remember that night? The night. Down at Lesedi Cultural Village. Thandi was pregnant. Let me tell you a secret about men. No matter what they may say or portray, every man feels joy at knowing he is going to be a father. The first reason for this is knowing he can actually make a baby. On top of that it is the thought of having the woman carrying his child, the mother of his child. Every man gets excited about that. I was over the moon with joy to know that Thandi was carrying my baby. To know that finally Thandi and I can settle down and be honest to each other. Grow old together, and do whatever it is married people do. In anticipation of the pregnancy, as culturally proud people, we had already started thinking about marriage. Or rather let me say we were ready, the only issue was how her family was going to react to all this.

Every African person proud of his/her heritage knows that a girl's pregnancy cannot begin to show before she is officially married. That would be a disgrace to the family of the woman. And I had no intention of disgracing either Thandi or her family. Pregnancy should be a proud moment for a woman, and not something to be ashamed of. So I had to do whatever was necessary to settle matters with her family before her pregnancy began to show. My love for Thandi was growing every day, and I intended to keep it that way. *Sofa silahlane.*

Present day city people tend to look down at tradition and custom. What they forget is that tradition and custom hold positive things for the development of society and values. One of these age old traditions is called *ukudlisa*. This is a portion given to either

member of sexes to ensure that people will remain committed to each other. This custom has played a major role on building stable families that exist today.

In light of the lack of solid marriages these days, Thandi and I have consistently jokingly talked about going the route of *ukudlisa*! We figure it is much better to do it willingly while we still love each other than look back at a broken marriage. Long lasting marriages are few and rare among young people these days. So it was with this in mind that Thandi and I consulted her *inyanga* aunt.

Japan.

While the trip was primarily business, my interest in this story is based on the second week of the trip. When Thandi was in Japan. I must really thank Tatolo and his team for allowing Thandi and I this rare moment of being overseas, just the two of us. While we had a lot of things to work through in our relationship following my taking Thandi away from Mandla, Japan was a bliss.

Let me start by telling you that if you are a man and you really want to bond with your better half, leave the country for a holiday. Leave your work behind and focus on your partner, you will thank me.

The week we were to spend with Thandi in Japan we had absolutely no plans whatsoever. We were there and our schedule would be determined by our moods. We refused any prior planning of activities. You see, when you are exploring love, resist the temptation to plan ahead. Be spontaneous and think on your feet. Do whatever happens to please you at that time. That is the secret of happiness. Too many times we plan our lives to the last second, that can't be fun, especially if you want to give a lady a nice time. When Thandi landed, it is an understatement to say I was waiting for her, literally.

I volunteered to pick her up from the airport in a foreign land. When we got to the hotel, I was so ready that she never got the chance to rest, despite the long flight. I had pre-prepared the room especially for this occasion. Put the temperature way down to almost cold. Then she had a glass of her favourite white wine waiting in the room. I stocked on expensive boxes of chocolates found in those regions. I even had some coming from Swiss, that is how nice a time my Thandi was going to have in Japan. My broer, don't bother with a woman will who spoil the mood and tell you she is on diet and therefore does not eat chocolates. Chocolates are merely a gesture of love and appreciation, and your woman must understand that.

I put her into a luke warm bubble bath filled with all sorts of Chinese salts. They claim the salts work wonders on the body, I had to take their word for it. I had even gone out of my way, something I have never done in my life and bought her lingerie! I am brand unconscious but they told me these were the best in women lingerie. They better be, the price said so and I paid with a smile. I knew that I couldn't have gone through all this

trouble and disappoint Thandi. You see, when you are a man and are in love, you do things you never thought you would ever do in your life. Buying lingerie was sure one of them. Paying so much for Chinese bath salts another.

When Thandi was finished bathing, she looked like she was glowing with beauty. I fell in love with her all over again when I saw her.

I took my beauty queen by the hand and led her to the bedroom. Nothing does it for me like a well fitting piece of lingerie on a beautiful body. At that moment, I knew no woman was more beautiful than my Thandi. She was my beauty queen and I was happy being with her. She had a sexy number on, I was going mad with love. A white panty, not a g-string, of soft lace material. A see through but you can't really see through. Something that tempts your appetite. It had a mixture of pink and lime along the edges. Her bra was almost completely see through. I could see her firm round breasts, like they were calling to my inner most needs. These were real breasts of an African woman who has had no kids. *Amabele entombi*. Thandi you are killing me. She had a dark brown lip stick on her juicy lips. Her hair was tied in a soft brown tarban. Her thighs looked almost yellow in the light. Those legs, curves and bums. *Intle intombi*. She gave me a smile, that smile you only get when you are about to hit it big. A smile that tells you tonight you will be loved beyond description. And I was ready to love and be loved.

Have you ever made love to the person you love in a foreign land? Where everything is new to you and different. It seems to work on your senses of sensitivity. That evening Thandi took me to the boundaries of love. At thirty years old I had not been loved the way Thandi moved me that night. The pleasures of love were redefined completely. Now I knew what was possible if two people decided to give all their love on the love mat. That evening, everything about us was just marvellous. The gentle moves, sometime a little wild, the moans, the gasping for breath. Oooohhh, I could never describe the way Thandi moves at the moment of climax. It feels like I am caught between the two extremes of good feeling. And then she softly moans aaaahhhhhh with eyes rolling and hands squeezing tight around me!

Let me tell you, I had sworn to myself that I would be very responsible about using condoms, but that evening I nearly yelled to Thandi to allow me to enjoy just this moment without any inhibition. We became wild people that I could not recognise. Sometimes I thought I was loosing my mind with pleasure. I could swear I was meeting my creator when we both climaxed. With one strong embrace and sucking of the lips, and tears running down her cheeks, we made it into planet loose yourself.

The moment following a climax is reserved. It is when the hearts of two people in love communicate. No words are spoken but the mind and souls unite. They take a stroll into the world of the spirits, where love is renewed. To come out fresh and strong. We simply lay in each others arms for a long time. Finally we kissed, looked into each others eyes and declared our love to each other. *Ndiyakuthanda sthandwa sam*.

Safika eJapan and we went wild. Around midnight, we sneaked out on foot towards the beach. We walked hand in hand, kissing and holding each other. Midnight was perfect because the beach was deserted. It is like the moon and the stars had read what was on our minds. We certainly didn't want anyone around. We truly surprised ourselves when we went down right there on the beach. The sand was surprisingly warm, but the water a bit chilly. I had never made love naked on the beach before, so this was an experience for me. We were so free like we were in our own private swimming pool. Although afterwards I worried about spy cameras having caught us in the moment touching each other's soul. You never know with everyone owning spy satellites these days. The things we did on that sandy beach.

We were in Japan to love each other, nothing else. When a call from the office was transferred to our room, during our usual session of love making, we chose to ignore it. What we didn't know was that our room had a motion detection phone. The phone automatically answers when it detects your presence in the room! So the people sitting in the boardroom at TPS Engineering heard a little too much of moans and groans before cutting the line. Beware of technology, it can interfere with your private moments.

Call it lust, call it madness, at one point we did it in the theatre. We had gone to watch a play, but ended up in the dressing rooms and simply went at it. Let me tell you, we made love every single day in Japan. We made love when we woke up, made love during breakfast, love for lunch. Evenings were the best. Making love is one of the best ways to know a person. No woman would not get pregnant from so much love making. After all, God is love.

I still had about two months to go before I could know for sure if I was positive or not. Following the horrific deterioration of Motlatsi's health, I was dead scared on what the outcome might hold for me. But most importantly for Thandi and our unborn child. While both of us are well off and could easily have access to drugs, no one wishes to test positive.

Thandi was heavily pregnant, compliments of that night, that night at Lesedi Cultural Village. While Thandi's pregnancy was now showing, we still had an issue with my paying *lobola* for her. Her father had made it abundantly clear that he wants nothing to do with us. In fact, he had said I do not qualify to be called his *umkhwenyana*. This posed a real dilemma for us. Thandi could never be a wife unless *lobola* was paid for her and the marriage rites are performed for her. These rites are performed on both sides of the families. For me, I couldn't be recognised as having a wife unless I had paid *lobola* for her and of course the rites performed. So with her father vehemently refusing to have a hand in our marriage, we had to improvise so that customs could be performed. The best compromise was negotiating the *lobola* with Thandi's aunt, with the help of her mother of course. This is why I only married my Thandi when she was six months pregnant. Quite a

disgrace for me as a man, but our situation was difficult, I console myself.

I finally tested negative, and this put to rest my worries about HIV. Of course Thandi was HIV negative too. She bore me a beautiful set of twins, a girl and a boy. We named them Thamsanqa and Nonhlanhla. Thamsanqa because I was lucky to have escaped HIV from Motlatsi. Nonhlanhla because her mother was lucky to have gone through all the hardships and emerged a proud wife and mother. And because both Thandi and I were blessed to have each other, and our kids were a bond that bound Thandi and I forever. In true Mzansi madness, Thamsanqa was a Xhosa name, while Nonhlanhla was Zulu. In the interest of equality, one name had to be Xhosa while the other Zulu. You gotta love Mzansi. Because I love Thandi so much, I have turned a blind eye to this gender parity taking place in my house.

Motlatsi passed away a few months ago and her father had asked for me to deliver an eulogy at the funeral. He had asked me to be truthful and tell things the way they were. The old man said he wanted kids of today to know that AIDS is real and people are dying from it. My speech was moving, people cried. As for me, I wanted to tell people love exists and must be valued. I wanted young people to know that this *yoyo* dating stuff is dangerous. That there is more to life than having fun, sex, drugs and drinking. For young girls to practice recession when it came to their thighs. For them to know that their bodies are sacred and must be treated as such. And I broke into a rhythmic poetic prose:

Have Mercy

Oh great father
God of our fathers
Unto you we pray
Unto you we submit
For we are mere mortals
Who lie in danger all the time
Our supreme Lord
Today I ask for the highest of favours
I nod my head in respect
I cry tears of sorrow
With a heavy heart, father of our fathers
Please, do not desert us
In this moment of greatest need
Oh God the highest
Our children are dying
Day in day out
They die like flies
Was is it not you God
Who said the child shall bury the parent?
Today we bury our children

And wonder who will bury us
When our time comes
I ask for our children
To see the light
And go astray no more
For our great nation is fading
Fading like a mist when the sun shines
And I am afraid
That no one will be left
To sing our praises when we go to the spirit world
That cannot be, that shall not be
I call to all the spirits in the universe
Invoke the sacred shrines in our homesteads
Appeal to the ancestors
I even nod to the living gods
Let all take pity on us
Prevent the demise of my nation
Parents dying, to leave infants uncared for
Children on whose shoulders our future lie
Dying like there is no tomorrow
What kind of a world
Is this we are creating
Where only the old live
Where have all the young gone?
That we do not see them anymore
That they do not come back
To take their rightful place in society
As honourable citizens and adults
Keeping the light of hope burning
Paving a way for future generations
Like our elders paved the way us
And we paved the way for them
It cannot be, I refuse to listen
I cannot accept that this is our fate
The worst punishment ushered unto earth
To let people perish from their own sins
When God the almighty
Ancestors and all spirits of the world
Turn their backs on us
Leaving us to fate, it that knows no mercy
But thrives in revenge and persecution
Oh my Lord, people have sinned
They have abandoned tradition
Forgetting that tradition taught them about you

To pay respect and honour to the spirits
For these were created by you
Ndiyanqula ndiyanxenxeza
Have mercy on us
Is it not you
Who said we must ask for forgiveness
Today God of our fathers
Standing in front of a grave
Where we bury our children
Soon to run out of grave yards
Because there is too much death
Evil is all over
Ndiyacamagusha
Have mercy, hear our cries
Enough is enough

Mandla was never caught, nobody knows where he went with all the money. I honestly hope he is okay wherever he is with the love of his life.

As for Thandi and me, our love is stronger than ever. Whether we believed it or not, the *bhekaminangedwa* seem to be doing its job. I need not question the ways of my elders, they believed in this portion and people continue to use it today. Generations of my people could not have been that wrong. All I know is that I love Thandi very much, and I have never been tempted to look at another woman.

I give thanks to God and my ancestors for bringing Thandi into my life. And for watching out for me such that I escaped the scourge of HIV and AIDS.

Bantu bakuthi, iAIDS iyabulala.



...By some unknown force, I found myself crying! I couldn't believe what I was witnessing about me. How on earth do I cry in the face of such a beautiful soul? What will she think of me after all these? My feelings just didn't care much about these questions at that moment, tears just fell from my eyes. She jumped up to lock the door, then moved closer to comfort me. I was just too overwhelmed by these events that it seemed like I was someone else. She just held me in her arms for what seemed like eternity. Finally, when the wells of my eyes dried up, then did I have the strength to greet her. She just nodded and looked me in the eyes and said: be straight with me, what is the matter?

What do you do when a woman like Thandi asks you that question? I found myself telling her everything that had happened in the past month with Motlatsi, including yesterday. All she did after hearing my story was take a deep breath and give me a hug. That was it. Then suddenly she straightened up and sat on the other couch, very businesslike. Much like the reaction I would expect from someone of her calibre. I really hated myself for having burdened her with my problems. What kind of a man does that make me? In a way she was deeply touched, and at the same time very cordial. I stood up and walked out...



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