

RISING VENGEANCE

Written by

Mpho Nkoana

Original Feature Film Screenplay
(Draft 2)

FADE IN ON:

1 **EXT. THABONG TOWNSHIP - STREET - DAY**

1

A beautiful golden majestic sun overlooks the township of Welkom, Thabong.

Children play in the dusty streets, their laughter echoes, a ball rolls past. The air is warm, filled with the sounds of carefree youth.

In the background, the community hall stands weathered, its walls marked with fading graffiti: "NEVER FORGET."

A young boy in a red t-shirt runs past an old wall, its peeling mural of a raised fist barely visible. His shadow lingers too long against the cracked earth.

A little girl in a yellow dress spins, laughing, until her gaze drifts towards the distant hall. Her smile falters, then she resumes playing.

MR. KHUMALO (60s) stands by a metal fence, watching. His weathered face is lined with memories, his hands gripping the metal, fingers calloused and scarred.

The sound of children's laughter briefly quiets.

The ball rolls to Mr. Khumalo's feet. He doesn't move. His eyes shift towards the community hall again.

A young girl tugs at his sleeve, smiling brightly.

GIRL

Uncle, will you play with us?

Mr. Khumalo looks at her, then slowly back at the hall. His smile is faint, sad.

MR. KHUMALO

Not today, little one. Maybe tomorrow.

She runs off, joining the others.

Mr. Khumalo watches, his gaze distant. The children's laughter swells, undisturbed.

2 **INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY**

2

The classroom hums with the low murmur of teenage chatter, the energy of a typical high school morning.

PALESA (17), bright and full of life, sits in the middle of the classroom.

She's dressed in the standard school uniform, a slight slouch in her posture as she listens to her ENGLISH TEACHER, MR. KOOPMAN (40s), who stands at the front, gesturing to the board with a dry marker.

MR. KOOPMAN

Alright, class, let's break it down. What's the subject of this sentence?

He writes on the board: "The dog barked loudly at the mailman."

PALESA

"The dog."

Mr. Koopman nods in agreement, satisfied.

MR. KOOPMAN

Exactly. Palesa, you're on fire today.

She smiles, a flicker of pride, but it's brief.

She glances down at her notebook, doodling in the margin, distracted. Mr. Koopman turns to the rest of the class.

MR. KOOPMAN (CONT'D)

Now, who can tell me the object?

Palesa's eyes drift towards the window. The sound of her teacher's voice fades slightly as her gaze settles on TLADI (35), one of the school's garden workers.

He stands outside, his back to the fence, staring directly at her through the glass.

His intense, unwavering gaze sends a chill through her. Something feels wrong. She quickly looks away, focusing on the lesson again, but her heart races.

BOITUMELO (17), sitting beside her, notices the shift in Palesa's mood. She leans in, whispering.

BOITUMELO

What's up? You're zoning out again.

Palesa plasters on a smile, not quite meeting Boitumelo's eyes.

PALESA

Just... nothing. I'm fine.

But her gaze flicks back to the window. Tladi's still watching her, the corners of his lips barely twitching. Palesa's stomach tightens. She doesn't know why, but she feels exposed.

MR. KOOPMAN
Anyone? The object?

Palesa snaps back to attention. She raises her hand quickly, avoiding eye contact with anyone else.

PALESA
"The mailman."

Mr. Koopman nods in agreement.

MR. KOOPMAN
Correct. Now, let's move on to
adverbs... uh --

The bell rings. The classroom erupts in the typical chaos, students grabbing bags, laughing, gathering their things.

Palesa stands up slowly, trying to shake off the unsettling feeling.

BOITUMELO
Hey, what's going on? You're weird
today.

Palesa gathers her things quickly, avoiding her friend's gaze.

PALESA
There's something off about Tladi.
He... he was looking at me. Like
really staring.

Boitumelo laughs.

BOITUMELO
Palesa, chill. Tladi's always weird.
He probably just likes your vibe. You
know how he is. Always looking at
people like he's about to... I don't
know, ask for directions or something.

Palesa frowns, not fully convinced. She stands, adjusting her uniform, the unease still gnawing at her.

PALESA
I don't know. It felt different this
time.

BOITUMELO

Maybe he's just into you. You do have that "don't mess with me" thing going on.

Palesa laughs lightly, but her eyes still dart towards the window. Tladi is gone now, but the unsettling feeling lingers. She grabs her bag, trying to shake it off.

PALESA

I don't know, man. Something's just... off.

BOITUMELO

You're just paranoid. Come on, let's go. I'm starving.

Palesa plasters on a smile, but the nagging feeling doesn't leave her. She walks out of the classroom, but her steps feel heavier than usual.

The hallway swells with students, noise, laughter, the usual buzz of life.

3

EXT. THABONG TOWNSHIP, STREET - AFTERNOON

3

Palesa and Boitumelo step off a minibus taxi, chatting as they walk down the lively street.

The sounds of the township swirl around them, laughter, chatter, music from a nearby shop.

BOITUMELO

You have to come to Buhle's housewarming this Friday! Her parents are out of town, total freedom.

PALESA

Freedom, huh? My parents won't even let me step out of the yard.

BOITUMELO

It's 2026, girl. You can sneak out. Just be back before the AMs.

Palesa glances at her friend, unsure.

PALESA

I'll think about it. You know they won't let me go.

Boitumelo waves it off, not really listening.

They stroll on, passing the usual sights, kids running by, an old man selling fruit on the corner.

They reach Boitumelo's house. Boitumelo stops and turns to Palesa with a smirk.

BOITUMELO

You know where to find me if you
change your mind. If not, I'll catch
you tomorrow.

A smile dances on Palesa's lips as she nods in agreement.

PALESA

I'll see you later.

Boitumelo heads inside, leaving Palesa standing on the street for a beat.

Palesa pulls out her phone and puts in her earphones. The beat of an upbeat song fills her ears, and she walks on, a light bounce in her step.

She moves through the streets, her energy in contrast to the heat of the day. But as she walks, something feels off. She glances behind her.

Tladi the garden worker from the school, is several steps behind her. His tall figure walks slowly, his eyes fixed on her.

Palesa's smile fades. She quickens her pace, but so does Tladi.

She turns a corner, heading into a narrow alleyway between two run-down houses. She looks back, he's still there, still following.

Her heart begins to race.

PALESA (CONT'D)

(to herself)

Modimo waka... what does he want?

She picks up speed, the alley growing tighter. Her footsteps echo, louder now. Tladi's footsteps are right behind her.

Suddenly, she feels a sharp tug at her arm. Before she can react, Tladi yanks her back, slamming her against the cold brick wall of the alley, her earphones fall out of her ears.

He covers her mouth with his hand, his breath hot and heavy on her face. A butcher knife gleams in his other hand, the blade long and menacing.

TLADI
Scream... and I'll butcher you, right
here. Understood?

Palesa's eyes widen in terror, her body frozen against the wall. Her heartbeat thunders in her chest, but she nods quickly.

He pulls her away from the wall, keeping his grip tight on her arm, and leads her down the alley, dragging her towards his shack at the edge of the township.

PALESA
(whimpering)
Please... what do you want from me?

Tladi's eyes remain cold and unreadable as he pulls her forward. The knife stays in his hand, a constant threat.

They step out of the alley, and the world seems to fall silent around them.

They disappear into the narrow street, the end of the alley now a distant memory.

4

INT. PALESA'S HOME, LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

4

The afternoon light filters through the curtains, casting a soft, golden glow on the modest living room.

The faint ticking of a wall clock breaks the silence.

On a small side table, beside a vase of wilting flowers, there's a framed family photo, Palesa, Joyce, and Ratau smiling together, captured in a rare moment of happiness.

JOYCE (40) sits at the table, flipping through a magazine, her expression distant. The pages turn slowly in her hands, but her mind seems elsewhere. She pauses, glancing at the clock.

A car door slams outside.

RATAU (45), her husband, walks into the house in his police uniform, exhausted but alert. He removes his cap and tosses it onto the side table. His heavy boots thud against the floor.

RATAU
Where's Palesa? Isn't she supposed to
be home by now?

Joyce looks up, clearly caught off guard. She lowers the magazine, trying to appear calm, but there's a hint of unease in her eyes.

JOYCE

I... I don't know. She wasn't here
when I got back.

Ratau's expression tightens, his jaw clenching.

He walks to the table, his boots clicking against the tile.
Joyce pulls out her phone from her bag and dials Palesa's
number, the tension in the air rising with every second.

The phone rings, and rings, and rings.

Joyce's face drops slightly as it goes unanswered.

She presses the phone to her ear again, this time with more
urgency.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

Maybe she's with friends. You know how
she is. Always studying with her
friends.

Ratau watches her with a growing sense of concern. His eyes
flicker to the clock, time is slipping.

RATAU

Call again.

Joyce, now more nervous, dials the number a second time. The
phone rings, and this time the silence feels heavier, more
oppressive.

Her finger hovers over the screen, but she hesitates.

Ratau watches her, his unease deepening. The phone rings once
more, still no answer.

RATAU (CONT'D)

She's always home by now. What if
something happened?

Joyce lowers the phone slowly, a subtle tremor in her hands.

JOYCE

Maybe she just lost track of time.
It's... nothing. I'm sure she's fine.

Ratau's gaze hardens, his instincts kicking in.

RATAU

I'm going out. She's not answering,
and I don't like this.

He heads towards the door, the tension palpable in his every movement. Joyce stands up quickly, her worry turning to quiet panic.

JOYCE

Wait, Ratau, let's just wait a bit longer. It's not like her, but...

Ratau doesn't answer, already halfway to the door. He turns back, his face drawn tight with concern.

5

INT. TLADI'S SHACK - ROOM - AFTERNOON

5

In on a horrified Palesa who is sprawled on a disheveled bed.

Her wrists and ankles are tightly bound with rough rope.

A strip of duct tape seals her mouth, muffling the cries that bubble beneath.

Blood stains her thighs, the evidence of a struggle etched into the fabric of her skirt.

The phone on the bedside table vibrates insistently, a lifeline in a sea of despair.

Palesa's eyes dart towards it, desperate hope igniting in her gaze. But just as she thinks salvation might be near, Tladi storms in, snatching the phone from its perch.

He hangs up with a flick of his wrist, a dismissive smirk playing on his lips as he strides out, slamming the door behind him.

Palesa's heart races as she scans the room, her mind whirring with possibilities.

With a shaky breath, she rolls off the bed, landing on the floor with a soft thud. Pain radiates through her body, but she pushes it aside as she glances under the bed. Her breath catches in her throat.

Two teenage girls lie lifeless, their wide eyes staring blankly at the ceiling, frozen in a moment of terror.

Palesa's scream is trapped behind the tape. Her body trembles, a mix of horror and urgency fuelling her next move.

PALESA

(muffled, desperate)

Mmmmph!

She wriggles backward, inching towards the kitchen counter, her eyes fixed on a block of kitchen knives.

She shuffles across the floor, her wrists raw against the bindings.

6

EXT. TLADI'S SHACK - DOORSTEP - GOLDEN HOUR

6

In on Tladi, who leans against the crumbling wall of his shack, smoking a loose cigarette.

MAM'BEATRICE (50s), the landlord, hangs laundry on a makeshift line nearby, her movements slow and deliberate. The wind rustles the sheets, the only sound apart from the distant hum of the street.

MAM'BEATRICE

How's it going, Tladi? Everything good?

Tladi sighs as he exhales the smoke.

TLADI

Yeah, you know, just the usual. Work's been a bit much lately. But I'm alright.

He takes another drag of his cigarette, eyes scanning the quiet street.

Mam'Beatrice nods, accepting his answer. She shakes a pillowcase out, letting it flap in the breeze.

MAM'BEATRICE

Okay. I'm just happy you paid the rent on time.

Suddenly, a faint whimpering comes from inside the shack. It's low but sharp enough to be heard, a sound of distress.

Mam'Beatrice stops what she's doing, she glances at the shack, puzzled.

MAM'BEATRICE

What's that? Is someone inside?

Tladi flicks the cigarette, crushing it under his boot with a calm, almost practiced motion. He leans forward slightly, frowning.

TLADI

Oh, it's nothing. Just watching a horror movie. You know how loud the volume gets with those things.

Mam'Beatrice doesn't seem entirely convinced. She squints toward the shack, her eyes narrowing. There's a beat of hesitation before she speaks again.

MAM'BEATRICE

Horror movie, eh? Sounds... pretty real for a movie.

Tladi straightens up, a plastered smile crossing his face. He brushes off the moment, turning his back to Mam'Beatrice.

TLADI

Yeah, you know, nothing like a bit of drama to pass the time. Don't worry about it.

He moves towards the door of the shack, quickening his pace. The whimpering grows slightly louder but still muffled, a jagged edge to the sound.

Mam'Beatrice frowns, more curious.

MAM'BEATRICE

Well, if you say so. I'll just finish up here.

She resumes hanging the laundry, her eyes lingering on the door of the shack for a moment longer than necessary.

Tladi, now at the door, pauses. He turns back to Mam'Beatrice, his face neutral again, almost expressionless.

TLADI

I'll catch you later, Mam'Beatrice. Enjoy the rest of the day.

He disappears inside the shack, closing the door with a soft but definitive click.

Mam'Beatrice glances towards the door one last time, her brow furrowed. She shakes her head, muttering to herself, then goes back to her laundry.

MAM'BEATRICE

Strange man...

She continues her work, unaware of the horrors concealed behind the shack's walls.

7

INT. TLADI'S SHACK - ROOM - CONTINUOUS

7

Tladi's eyes dart around the room, searching. The bed is rumpled, sheets tossed aside, signs of chaos.

Palesa is nowhere to be seen.

Suddenly, a subtle sound, a whisper of movement, breaks the stillness.

From behind him, Palesa emerges, her expression a storm of fury and desperation. Clutched in her right hand is a gleaming kitchen knife, ready to strike.

Without a word, she lunges forward. The knife plunges into Tladi's arm, a flash of pain erupting as he gasps in shock.

Blood seeps from the wound, pooling onto the floor.

Tladi, eyes wide with disbelief, grits his teeth against the pain.

He stumbles back, clutching his arm, and before he can react, Palesa's foot connects with his groin, a brutal kick that sends him crashing to the ground.

But she's already bolting past him, her figure a blur as she darts out of the shack, leaving the door swinging wildly in her wake.

8

EXT. TLADI'S SHACK - DOORSTEP - CONTINUOUS

8

Palesa stumbles out of the shack, eyes wide and trembling, a storm of fear and fury brewing within her.

She clutches her skirt, the fabric stained a deep crimson, and the world around her blurs.

MAM'BEATRICE

What have you done, child?

PALESA

(breathless)

He...

Mam'Beatrice sees blood seeping in between her legs, she drops the laundry, her hands trembling as she steps closer.

MAM'BEATRICE

Follow... follow me.

Palesa's eyes flicker with a mix of fear and defiance. She takes a shaky step forward and follows Mam'Beatrice.

9

INT. MAM'BEATRICE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

9

Mam'Beatrice drags Palesa into the cramped kitchen. The room is modest and cluttered.

Mam'Beatrice's hands are shaking, but her movements are quick and decisive.

She locks the burglar bars with a sharp click, the heavy sound echoing in the quiet of the room.

Palesa stands near the door, still trembling, her face pale, her body shaking from the trauma.

Blood stains the fabric of her skirt.

She looks over at Mam'Beatrice, tears welling in her eyes, but she doesn't speak, just continues to whimper softly.

Mam'Beatrice pulls open the kitchen drawer, rummaging through it until she pulls out a whistle. She holds it tightly, her breath steady despite the chaos unfolding.

She motions towards the door, she raises the whistle to her lips and blows hard. The sharp, shrill sound slices through the tension in the room.

Palesa flinches, but Mam'Beatrice doesn't pause.

MAM'BEATRICE

The community's on their way. They'll take care of him. Tladi's going to pay for what he did.

Palesa's body shakes harder at the words. She still can't fully process the weight of it all, her mind flickers with images of what she's been through, and the emotions crash over her in waves.

PALESA

He... He... touched...

She struggles to get the words out, her voice barely above a whisper, as her knees buckle.

She sinks down to the floor, hugging herself for comfort, her tears blending with the blood still dripping from her.

Mam'Beatrice watches her for a moment, her own eyes hard but filled with compassion.

She moves quickly, crossing the room to kneel beside Palesa. She places a gentle hand on the girl's shoulder, trying to steady her.

MAM'BEATRICE

(soft, reassuring)

No, child. You don't have to explain anything. He's the one who'll answer for this.

Palesa whimpers louder, but her eyes look to Mam'Beatrice, searching for something, reassurance, comfort, anything.

The whistle has echoed through the neighbourhood, and soon the sounds of footsteps begin to draw closer from outside. The community is coming.

She stands up slowly, looking at Palesa one more time. There's no hesitation now. The fear, the anger, and the resolve in her eyes are clear.

She moves towards the window, peering out cautiously, watching for the first signs of the others.

PALESA

What... what's going happen to him?

Mam'Beatrice's gaze flickers back to Palesa, but she doesn't answer right away. She doesn't need to. The sound of the community approaching speaks volumes.

10

INT. TLADI'S SHACK - ROOM - CONTINUOUS

10

The room is silent, save for the faint sound of Tladi's laboured breathing.

He lies on the floor for a moment, struggling with the pain in his bleeding arm. His body is stiff, but there's no time to rest.

Tladi slowly pushes himself up, gritting his teeth as he fights the waves of pain from his wound.

His hand instinctively goes to his arm, where the knife wound is still fresh, the blood dripping slowly.

His eyes scan the room, he's disoriented but aware of the urgency. Palesa is gone.

He staggers over to the bed, wincing with each movement.

He yanks a shirt that's lying there and uses it to bind his arm, the fabric sticking slightly to the blood, but he ties it as tight as he can manage, his fingers trembling.

He stands up, his face twisted in pain, and looks around one last time.

With a heavy grunt, he stumbles towards the door, his movements slow and erratic.

Each step is a battle against the pain, but he pushes forward, fighting to stay on his feet.

He opens the door slowly, the hinges creaking in protest.

Outside, the sounds of the township feel more distant now, as if the world has shifted.

Tladi takes a deep breath, trying to steady himself. His eyes dart towards the street, towards freedom, but also towards danger.

He knows he's not safe. The community is already on their way, and soon they will come for him.

He hobbles out of the shack, his movements clumsy and desperate.

Each step is a struggle as he stumbles into the fading light, blood still staining his shirt, his body weak.

11

INT. THABONG TOWNSHIP - STREET - CONTINUOUS

11

Tladi, disheveled and wild-eyed, bursts from Mam'Beatrice's front gate, only to be met by a wall of furious COMMUNITY MEMBERS wielding sjamboks, five-litre bottles of petrol, and tires.

Their faces are masks of rage and pain, each step forward tightening the noose around Tladi's fate.

Mam'Beatrice steps out the gate.

MAM'BEATRICE

That monster, he's the one! He touched
our girl! He ruined her!

Palesa appears behind Mam'Beatrice, blood staining her clothes, her face a canvas of despair and disbelief.

COMMUNITY MEMBER #1

(shouts)

*Hold him! Mo tšoare. A re khaole
hlooho ya hae!*

Palesa stares at Tladi, who is now cornered, desperation clawing at his throat.

TLADI

Please, guys... It's not what you --

The crowd closes in, a pack ready to feast.

COMMUNITY MEMBER #1
We've had enough of your unsavoury
behaviour, Tladi!

As tires are piled around him,. A sinister grin spreads across
the faces of the villagers like wildfire.

COMMUNITY MEMBER #2 (O.S.)
(shouts)
He likes the young ones! He deserves
worse than this!

Suddenly, a POLICE VAN rolls into view.

Inside, RATAU grips the wheel. JOYCE sits beside him, eyes
locked on the unfolding horror.

JOYCE
Ratau...

They step out, the weight of authority heavy on Ratau's
shoulders.

He sees Palesa, trembling, blood trickling down her legs – a
heartbreaking sight that ignites a fire in his chest.

RATAU
What the hell is going on here?

The crowd doesn't flinch. They're too consumed by their thirst
for justice. They pour petrol over Tladi, who is now on his
knees, eyes wide with terror as he screams.

TLADI
No! Please! I didn't do it!

Ratau's gaze narrows as he processes the truth. His daughter's
cries echo in his mind.

RATAU
Get away from him!

The crowd parts slightly, but the tension is palpable.

Ratau pulls out his firearm, the metallic click reverberating
like a gunshot in their hearts.

RATAU (CONT'D)
I said move!

Community members exchange startled glances; fear and fury
intermingle.

COMMUNITY MEMBER #3
You think you can scare us?

Ratau's finger hovers over the trigger.

RATAU
I'm not scaring anyone. He must pay
for what he did to my daughter!

He levels the gun at Tladi, whose eyes widen in disbelief.

RATAU (CONT'D)
For my daughter.

He pulls the trigger. A deafening shot echoes, and the crowd gasps.

Tladi crumples, his body still as the flames leap up around him, igniting a horrifying spectacle.

Boitumelo approaches Palesa and Joyce, their faces illuminated by the flames.

BOITUMELO
You didn't deserve this. None of us
did.

Palesa's eyes remain fixed on the inferno, a mix of horror and grim relief.

Joyce's eyes wells up tears as she tries to comfort Palesa.

JOYCE
I'm so sorry, my baby. You're safe
now, my baby. You're safe.

But the fire crackles, and the screams of Tladi lingers in the air.

The community watches, a testament to their pain and fury, as the flames consume the remnants of a life built on darkness.

SUPERIMPOSE:

THREE MONTHS LATER

12

INT. HOME OFFICE - DAY

12

The room is warm, modern, and neat.

Palesa sits on the edge of the couch, her posture rigid but her hands loosely clasped in her lap.

DR. FALATSA, in her mid-40s, calm and composed, watches her patient with a keen but gentle gaze.

DR. FALATSA
How have you been sleeping, Palesa?

Palesa shifts in her seat, her eyes darting for a moment, as if she's navigating a maze in her mind.

PALESA
I'm... taking the medication. It helps... sometimes.

She swallows, avoiding eye contact, as if admitting something deeper.

PALESA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
But the dreams... they don't stop.

Dr. Falatsa's gaze sharpens, but she maintains her professional calm.

DR. FALATSA
Tell me about them.

PALESA
It's... it's always him. Tladi. No matter how many pills I swallow, no matter how much I try to run from it, he's always there. Watching.

Dr. Falatsa doesn't rush to fill the silence. She just nods, waiting for more.

PALESA (CONT'D)
It's like he's still in control... even when he's gone.

There's a shift in the air, an uncomfortable stillness. Dr. Falatsa chooses her words carefully.

DR. FALATSA
Maybe it's time we try something stronger to help with the sleep. I can prescribe something that might help you rest without the... interruptions.

Palesa leans back slightly, her eyes darkened with a mix of resignation and frustration.

PALESA

Oh, yeah? Maybe a stronger pill
will shut him up. But what about my
father?

DR. FALATSA

Your father's not the problem,
Palesa.

But Palesa's eyes flash with something else. The tension in her
shoulders speaks volumes, grief, fear, perhaps even anger.

PALESA

He thinks he failed me.

Dr. Falatsa leans forward slightly, sensing the weight of what's
coming.

DR. FALATSA

Failed you how?

Palesa exhales slowly, a mix of sadness and fury rising.

PALESA

He told me, 'I failed to protect
you.'

(the words burn as she
repeats them)

He said it out loud.

(beat)

I told him it wasn't his fault.

But... He doesn't believe it.

Neither do I, really.

Dr. Falatsa watches Palesa carefully, her eyes soft but
searching, waiting for the deeper layer of the story.

DR. FALATSA

Why don't you believe it?

Palesa's jaw tightens. She's struggling, but the words force
their way out.

PALESA

Because my father... blames himself
for killing the man that... What if
it ruins his life? His career? What
if it costs him everything?

The room is still, the silence heavy.

DR. FALATSA

You are carrying a weight that's
not yours to bear, Palesa.

(MORE)

DR. FALATSA (CONT'D)

Your father will not lose his job.
You don't need to protect him from
that.

PALESA

You don't know him. You don't know
the kind of man he is. How much he
cares about that bloody badge. He
doesn't just fight for the badge,
he dies for it.

DR. FALATSA

That badge isn't going to save him.

Palesa's gaze flickers at the remark, the raw honesty of it
unsettling her. Her defenses slip for just a moment, a crack in
the mask.

PALESA

What's that supposed to mean? You
think he's the bad guy?

DR. FALATSA

No. I think he's human. But we're
all responsible for our choices.
And those choices... they don't
disappear just because we hide them
behind a uniform. Or a name.

The tension between them thickens. Palesa looks away, biting her
lip, trying to suppress the anger and the helplessness inside.

PALESA

He's always been so strong. But now
he's... fragile. It's like I'm the
one who has to hold him up. Like
I'm the one who has to tell him
it's okay, when I'm not even sure
it is.

Dr. Falatsa observes Palesa carefully, the weight of her words
hanging in the space between them. She leans forward, offering a
soft but commanding presence.

DR. FALATSA

You can't be the one to hold him
up, Palesa. Not when you're still
trying to stand yourself.

Palesa looks at her then, searching for something in the
therapist's eyes.

The house is eerily quiet, the familiar walls now feeling foreign, menacing.

The door to her parents' bedroom is wide open. Her heart skips a beat.

The room is empty. The bed is unmade, sheets tangled. Her parents, gone.

She stares, disoriented, then jolts as another knock reverberates through the house, louder now, like it's coming from within her own chest.

She starts moving, faster now, her breath shallow.

Her fingers graze the walls as she hurries towards the front door, her steps hesitant, almost as though something is trying to stop her.

16

INT. PALESA'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS (DREAM)

16

Palesa bursts into the living room, her hand trembling as she reaches for the doorknob.

The knock hits again, demanding attention. She unlocks the door in a panic, swinging it open—

Standing there, on the doorstep, is a disfigured figure, a MAN, his skin charred, as if scorched by fire. He's barely recognisable, but his smile, wide, cruel, gives him away.

Palesa gasps.

The figure, Tladi, doesn't speak. His gaze is cold, unfeeling.

He tilts his head, his smile widening. The air grows thick, heavy. The storm outside intensifies.

The door slams shut in a frantic motion.

Palesa's pulse is hammering. She gasps for breath, but the door shudders on its hinges, it's forced open, slowly, relentlessly.

Tladi steps forward.

Palesa stumbles backward, her heart racing.

She runs towards the kitchen, desperate.

She yanks at the door, her hands shaking, but it won't budge. The lock rattles but refuses to give way. She pulls harder. Frantic.

A sound behind her. She spins.

Tladi is there, closer now, his hands reaching for her throat.

His smile never fades. His grip is cold, unyielding.

Her body stiffens as his fingers close around her neck. She gasps for air, her skin prickling with terror.

She tries to scream, but no sound comes. Her mouth opens, but it's as though the very air is strangling her from the inside.

BACK TO:

17

INT. PALESA'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

17

Palesa's eyes snap open, her chest rising and falling in quick, jagged breaths.

Sweat clings to her skin. Her body jerks as if she's just been ripped out of the nightmare.

She looks around the dimmed room, the faint hum of the fan the only sound.

She's in her bed. The storm outside is soft, distant now.

Her hands tremble as she reaches for the lamp by the bed. She clicks it on, the sudden light harsh against her senses.

The room feels smaller now. Real. Safe.

She snatches her phone from the bedside table, her fingers fumbling to unlock it. The time reads: 03:10 AM.

A deep, shaky breath.

She throws the covers off and stands. Her bare feet hit the cool wooden floor, her movements almost mechanical as she walks towards the window.

She pulls the curtains open, revealing the quiet township street below, empty, peaceful under the dim glow of streetlights.

For a moment, she just stands there, her hand clutching the window ledge.

Her breath steadies, her heartbeat slows. Nothing. Just the quiet, the soft whisper of the wind through the trees.

She exhales, her shoulders slumping, the tension leaving her body in waves.

She turns away from the window, eyes haunted. She glances at the empty room. The storm outside continues, distant now, but Palesa is left with the quiet hum of her own fear, lingering.

18

INT. PALESA'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

18

Palesa sits at the breakfast table, a glass of orange juice in front of her, but she isn't drinking it. She stirs it absentmindedly with a spoon, her eyes unfocused.

Her parents, Joyce and Ratau, sit across from her.

Joyce is chewing slowly, deliberately, as if every bite takes effort.

Ratau's face is etched with tension, picks at his food but barely touches it. The clink of silverware against plates fills the silence between them, but it only deepens the unease.

JOYCE

Palesa, are you ready for school today?

Palesa blinks, slow. Her gaze shifts from the swirling juice in her glass to her mother's face, then back again. She presses her lips together, tight, before answering.

PALESA

I'm fine, Mom. I'm ready.

A beat of silence. Joyce nods, though there's a lingering doubt in her eyes.

RATAU

(clear throat)

I've been suspended from my job.

Palesa's head snaps up, eyes wide, but she doesn't speak. Joyce's fork stops mid-air.

JOYCE

What? Suspended? What happened?

Ratau sets his fork down slowly, his jaw tight as if the words are heavy in his mouth. He doesn't look at either of them.

RATAU

That case... the one with Tladi.

A quiet pause as Joyce stares at him, processing. Palesa's fingers clench around her glass.

JOYCE

The case where you shot him?

Ratau rubs his eyes with the back of his hand, his body sinking into the chair as though the weight of it is too much to bear.

RATAU

It was supposed to be cleared up already, but... there's a lot of noise around it. Too many questions.

Joyce's lips thin.

JOYCE

How long?

RATAU

I don't know. They say it's indefinite. I'm on paid leave for now, but... if they decide to fire me, there's nothing I can do.

Joyce's face tightens, eyes narrowing as she processes this new reality. She's holding it together, but just barely.

JOYCE

You'll find another job. They can't just --

RATAU

No. I've been with the force for 17 years, Joyce. I'm a senior officer. They'll use me as an example. A scapegoat. They'll find a way to make sure I'm out for good. You know how they work.

Palesa is still quietly staring into her juice.

Joyce reaches out to take Ratau's hand, but he pulls it away sharply. The room grows colder.

JOYCE

Can we at least pray? For guidance. For strength.

Ratau looks at her for a long beat. He doesn't move.

RATAU

I don't need prayer. I need my job.

But Joyce doesn't relent. She turns to Palesa, her eyes pleading for some sign of cooperation, some thread of connection.

JOYCE
Palesa... please.

The silence stretches, unbearable. Palesa stares at her mother's outstretched hand. Then, reluctantly, she lets her eyes fall to the table. Her shoulders slump.

PALESA
(under her breath)
Fine.

Joyce smiles faintly, though it's tinged with sadness. She closes her eyes and bows her head, clasping her hands tightly.

Ratau hesitates, his jaw clenched, before he finally joins her.

But Palesa, she does not close her eyes. She sits, stiff, distant, the weight of her nightmare still hanging around her like a shadow.

As Joyce starts to murmur a prayer, Palesa's eyes remain fixed on the half-empty plate before her.

The sound of her mother's voice fades into a low hum in the background, but Palesa can't block out the images in her head. The nightmare still lingers.

19

INT. THABONG TOWNSHIP - STREET - MORNING

19

The sun hangs heavy in the sky, casting a harsh light over the dusty streets of Thabong.

Palesa is clad in her school uniform as she walks alone.

Her face is pale, haunted. Her eyes are vacant, lost in something only she can see.

Her steps are slow, like each one takes more energy than the last.

She approaches Boitumelo's house.

Boitumelo steps out from behind the gate, smiling as she locks it behind her. She's in a good mood, her joy practically bubbles out of her.

BOITUMELO
Good morning to you too, Palesa!

Palesa doesn't respond. Her eyes stay fixed ahead, distant, somewhere else. Her posture is stiff, like she's trying to hold herself together.

Boitumelo notices the silence but doesn't push. She falls into step with Palesa, matching her pace without a word. Together, they walk down the street.

As they pass MAM' BEATRICE'S house, Mam' Beatrice is sweeping her front lawn, each stroke of the broom deliberate, calming. The rhythmic swish of it fills the space between them.

She looks up as they approach.

MAM' BEATRICE
Morning, girls!

Boitumelo smiles and waves back, a natural response, carefree. But Palesa doesn't acknowledge Mam' Beatrice. Her gaze stays glued to the ground.

Boitumelo notices this. She nudges Palesa gently with her elbow.

BOITUMELO
Hey, greet Mam' Beatrice.

Palesa doesn't react right away. She keeps walking, her thoughts lost in a place no one else can reach. Boitumelo gives her a harder nudge this time, more insistent.

Palesa blinks, her mind snapping back to the present. She looks at Mam' Beatrice, then forces a smile, a strained, half-hearted thing.

PALESA
Good morning, Mam' Beatrice.

Mam' Beatrice smiles, warm and understanding, but her eyes, sharp as ever.

MAM' BEATRICE
You okay, Palesa?

Palesa hesitates. Her smile flickers for a second before it returns, more genuine this time, but still edged with something unresolved.

PALESA
I'm getting better.

Mam' Beatrice studies her, not pushing, but her gaze is a quiet interrogation.

Palesa shifts uncomfortably under it. After a long pause, she looks up, meeting Mam' Beatrice's eyes.

PALESA (CONT'D)

I... I just wanted to say thank you.
For... saving me.

Mam' Beatrice tilts her head, waiting for Palesa to finish.

PALESA (CONT'D)

If it weren't for you... I... I'd
be... like the other girls. Gone.

The words hang between them. Mam' Beatrice doesn't flinch. She just watches Palesa with a knowing look, her hand still resting on the broom.

MAM' BEATRICE

You're here. That's what matters.

Palesa nods in agreement.

PALESA

I... I want to buy you a gift.
Something to thank you. For what you
did.

Mam' Beatrice raises an eyebrow, a small, amused smile playing on her lips.

MAM' BEATRICE

You don't need to buy me anything,
child.

Palesa looks at her, searching for something in her eyes. She doesn't let it go.

PALESA

I need to. I need to do something...
for you.

Mam' Beatrice laughs softly, the sound light and full of understanding. She steps closer, lowering her broom to rest against the wall.

MAM' BEATRICE

The fact that you're still standing
here, Palesa... that's enough for me.

Palesa smiles, the first real smile in a long time.

PALESA

I'll figure something out.

Mam' Beatrice watches her walk away, a quiet pride in her eyes.

Palesa's steps are lighter now, not as heavy.

She looks up for the first time, a sense of resolve slowly settling into her posture. She doesn't look back.

20

INT. PALESA'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

20

The flickering light from the TV paints Palesa, sprawled on the couch, her face half-lit and distant.

She's engrossed in the screen.

Ratau and Joyce walk in, bundled up against the cold night.

They exchange a quick glance, both settling into the rhythm of their evening, despite their daughter's unspoken resistance.

RATAU

Hey, Palesa. We're heading out for a bit. Just gotta check on one of my boys who got out of the hospital today. Won't be long.

PALESA

What? You want me to stay here... alone?

JOYCE

It's just for a little while, sweetheart. We won't be long, I promise.

PALESA

(sarcastic, defensive)

Oh yeah? 'Cause that's exactly what I want right now. To be stuck here by myself in the middle of the night. Perfect.

RATAU

Don't make it into a thing, Palesa. You're not really alone. Tshepo's here.

Palesa looks at him, confused for a split second, then irritated as she crosses her arms.

PALESA

Tshepo? What's he doing here?

JOYCE

Your cousin is staying here tonight. We just thought it would be... nice for you to have company.

PALESA
Company. Great. Just what I need.

RATAU
Come on, he's family. You'll survive.

JOYCE
It's just one night, darling. Try to relax. We won't be gone long.

PALESA
(under her breath)
I'll believe it when I see it.

Ratau and Joyce exchange a knowing look, almost too used to Palesa's moods by now, then head for the door.

The sound of their footsteps fading, leaving the house suddenly too quiet.

TSHEPO (18, relaxed, a bit cocky) walks in, his presence filling the doorway.

His bag slung over his shoulder, he looks a little too comfortable already. He steps in casually.

TSHEPO
Hey. I'm here to keep you company.
How's it going?

Palesa doesn't even look up at him. Her attention is firmly back on the TV, pretending to be more absorbed in it than she is.

PALESA
What, did they send you to babysit me now? Is that it?

Tshepo leans against the door frame, unbothered.

TSHEPO
Babysit? Nah. Just here for the night.
Thought you could use the company. You know, fun company.

Palesa gives him a sharp look but doesn't acknowledge him otherwise.

PALESA
Don't flatter yourself.

Tshepo chuckles, unfazed.

He casually drops his bag on the couch and heads to the other couch, sliding onto the other end, too close for comfort.

TSHEPO

So, what are we watching? Or are you just going to stare at the screen like that all night?

Palesa doesn't answer.

She just flicks her hair over her shoulder and turns the volume up on the TV, louder this time, loud enough to drown him out, or so she thinks.

PALESA

I'm not in the mood for a movie marathon, Tshepo. Sorry to disappoint.

Tshepo leans in, not taking the hint.

TSHEPO

Why not? Come on, it's one night. You can't be that miserable.

Palesa glares at him, but keeps her cool, like she's making an art out of ignoring him.

PALESA

(beat)

You know what's funny? You think you're so cool, don't you? But you're just... annoying.

TSHEPO

Annoying? Nah, I'm just... real. You wouldn't know real if it slapped you across the face.

Palesa rolls her eyes and stares harder at the screen.

PALESA

You're right. I don't know real. I know fake, though. And you? You're all fake.

Tshepo laughs, leaning back, clearly entertained. He's playing it cool, but there's something like challenge in his eyes.

TSHEPO

Alright, Miss "I'm too cool for everyone." I see how it is. Whatever. Just don't expect me to be your personal punching bag.

Palesa doesn't even flinch.

PALESA

You're not my punching bag. You're just... background noise.

Tshepo laughs.

TSHEPO

Background noise? Damn, girl. You really know how to kill a vibe. But hey, if that's what makes you feel better...

There's a beat.

Tshepo isn't backing down, but neither is she.

PALESA

I'd rather be alone. At least then, I'd have some peace.

TSHEPO

You think being alone is peaceful? You really don't get it, do you? Being alone's just... lonely. And you don't get to call the shots when you're that deep in it.

Palesa's eyes flash with something deeper, but she doesn't give him the satisfaction of reacting.

PALESA

Maybe it's better to be lonely than stuck with someone like you.

Tshepo just stares at her for a long beat, but the cocky smirk on his face never fully fades. He leans back again, eyes twinkling.

TSHEPO

(to himself)

You're harder to crack than I thought.

She ignores him as she focuses on the screen.

21

EXT. THABONG TOWNSHIP - CEMETERY - NIGHT

21

A tempest rages overhead.

Dark clouds churn ominously, punctuated by jagged flashes of lightning that illuminate the desolate cemetery. The air is electric.

In the midst of the storm, a FRESH TOMBSTONE stands stark against the chaos.

Suddenly, a bolt of lightning strikes, illuminating the stone in a blinding flash. As the thunder rumbles, the tombstone is thrust aside with a forceful shove, revealing a figure beneath.

Tladi emerges, his body disfigured and charred, a grotesque shadow of his former self. The rain pours down, mingling with the blood that streaks his face, washing away remnants of the grave.

He blinks, disoriented, eyes scanning the quiet graveyard, the sound of rain drowning out the distant echoes of the past.

He casts his gaze towards a small, lit mobile container nearby.

Inside, a SECURITY GUARD sits, blissfully unaware, lost in the rhythm of music flowing through his headphones.

Tladi's footsteps are heavy and deliberate, splashing through puddles as he approaches. The rain intensifies, drumming against the metal container, a relentless beat that quickens Tladi's heartbeat.

With a swift motion, he reaches the door of the mobile container and pauses. The guard's head bobs slightly to the beat, oblivious to the storm brewing just outside.

Tladi's hand darts forward, gripping the guard's head.

There's a sickening CRUNCH as Tladi twists, the sound of cracking bones echoing in the night air.

The guard's eyes widen in terror as blood erupts from his mouth, ears, eyes, and nose, a gruesome cascade that splatters the interior of the container.

The lifeless body slumps to the floor, a crumpled doll, the music still playing softly, now accompanied by the steady patter of rain and the distant growl of thunder.

Tladi steps back, surveying his work, the remnants of the guard's life pooling around him.

He turns and strides out of the mobile container, each footfall resonating in the stillness, the rain washing away any trace of his presence.

22

EXT. THABONG TOWNSHIP - PETROL STATION - NIGHT

22

The fluorescent lights of the petrol station flicker, casting an eerie glow over the deserted lot. A weary car pulls in, its engine sputtering to a halt.

Inside, Ratau who is rugged and tense, grips the steering wheel like a lifeline.

Joyce with an air of fragile confidence, fidgets in the passenger seat, her eyes darting around.

The PETROL ATTENDANT, a nervous kid in a faded uniform, approaches.

RATAU
Fill it up, man.

As he begins to pump petrol, Ratau's gaze drifts to the shadows beyond the station.

A figure emerges, Tladi, disfigured and burnt, the remnants of a once-familiar face twisted by pain and vengeance. He stands there, a ghost in the night, eyes burning with a rage that pierces through the dark.

RATAU (CONT'D)
Tladi...

Joyce turns to see.

JOYCE
Who the hell is that?

Ratau's heart races. The attendant, sensing the tension, darts away, leaving the two in a suffocating silence.

RATAU
Stay in the car, Joyce.

He steps out, his breath hitching as he pulls a firearm from his waistband.

RATAU (CONT'D)
Get back!

He fires. The bullet strikes the ground, harmlessly ricocheting. Tladi moves, unfazed, as if the laws of physics no longer apply.

Ratau's eyes widen in terror.

Tladi lunges, grabbing Ratau by the throat and slamming him against the car. The windscreen shatters upon impact, gleaming shards scattering like stars.

JOYCE
 (screaming)
 Ratau!

She bolts from the car, panic driving her towards the petrol station shop.

She bangs on the door.

JOYCE (CONT'D)
 Open up! Open the damn door!

The attendant shakes his head, eyes wide with fear, locking the door as if it would keep the nightmare at bay.

Ratau struggles, gasping for breath.

Tladi releases him, only to pivot towards Joyce, who is still pleading with the attendant.

Ratau scrambles to his feet, gasping.

RATAU
 Joyce, run!

But it's too late.

Tladi's hands wrap around Joyce's throat, squeezing the life out of her. Her eyes bulge with fear, a silent scream escaping her lips.

RATAU (CONT'D)
 NO!

Ratau makes a desperate escape, sprinting towards the street, heart pounding with guilt and adrenaline.

He glances back, horror twisting his features as he sees Tladi standing there, a silhouette against the neon glow, a predator savouring his victory.

RATAU (CONT'D)
 Oh... no, no, no...

With a final, terrified look, Ratau runs, disappearing into the night, leaving the petrol station.

The rain has stopped, but the air is still thick with moisture, and the streetlights cast soft pools of amber in the darkness.

Palesa, her posture guarded yet relaxed, sits on the stoep, the edge of the roof providing minimal shelter.

She exhales smoke from a loose cigarette, the ember glowing faintly in the quiet of the night.

Her eyes are fixed on the stars above, as if searching for something out there.

The night is still, peaceful. But not for long.

The front door creaks open. Tshepo, a little unsteady, steps out onto the stoep, his hands in his pockets.

He's a bit surprised to see Palesa here, alone, with a cigarette between her fingers.

TSHEPO

Didn't know you smoked.

Palesa doesn't look at him, just takes another drag, her eyes still focused on the sky. Tshepo watches her for a beat, unsure of what to say.

TSHEPO (CONT'D)

Does your mom and dad know?

PALESA

It's none of your business.

She flicks the ash, the sound sharp in the silence between them.

Tshepo stands a little further away, his gaze not quite settling on her, but not looking away either.

TSHEPO

(seriously)

Are you okay?

The question hits Palesa like a punch in the gut. She glances at him, but doesn't answer right away.

Tshepo notices the hesitation and steps closer, more cautiously this time.

TSHEPO (CONT'D)

You've been through a lot, Palesa.
The... the stuff with Tladi. I...

(beat)

I just wanna make sure you're
alright.

At the mention of Tladi's name, a shudder runs through Palesa, but she hides it well.

She takes another drag of her cigarette, the smoke swirling around her like a shield.

PALESA

I'm getting better. Day by day. But...
I don't wanna talk about it.

There's a long silence.

Tshepo looks like he wants to say more, but he holds himself back.

Palesa takes the last drag of her cigarette, then throws it into the garden with a soft flick of her wrist.

TSHEPO

I'm just trying to understand. You can
talk to me, you know.

She finally looks at him, her expression hard but searching.

PALESA

You don't need to understand.

Tshepo doesn't back off. His eyes soften, not out of pity, but genuine care.

TSHEPO

I do need to understand. Because I'm
your cousin, Palesa. And I care about
you. I'm not gonna let you go through
this alone. Not anymore.

He steps closer, standing at arm's length now.

There's a quiet intensity in the way he watches her, like he's waiting for her to let him in, even just a little.

Palesa hesitates.

PALESA

You really think you're gonna protect
me?

Tshepo's expression doesn't shift. He nods slowly, with conviction.

TSHEPO

From now on, yeah. No one's going
touch you. No one's going hurt you.
Not on my watch.

For a moment, Palesa just watches him. Her expression is unreadable, fierce, defiant, but something else too.

There's a soft shift in her demeanour. It's subtle, but it's there.

She exhales, but this time, it's not out of frustration. She's letting something go. Letting herself believe for a moment.

PALESA

You really think you can protect me
from everything?

Tshepo steps a little closer, closer than he's been all night. There's no bravado in his eyes now, just quiet, unwavering determination.

TSHEPO

Yeah. I do.

Palesa studies him for a moment, her eyes narrowing, trying to gauge the sincerity behind his words.

Then, slowly, she cracks a small smile.

PALESA

You're insane. You're not my knight in
shining armour.

Tshepo smiles back, a grin that's more real than the cocky facade he usually wears.

TSHEPO

Guess we'll find out.

There's a charged silence between them.

Palesa takes a deep breath, watching him for a moment longer. tely-she's still figuring him out, but something in her shifts.

PALESA

If you're going to protect me, Tshepo,
I might need a bit more than just
this.

Tshepo chuckles.

TSHEPO

Don't worry. I've got plans. You won't
even see it coming.

They share a quiet laugh.

Palesa stands up, brushing off the remnants of the night, the cool air now feeling a bit more comfortable.

PALESA
Just don't get all... protective on
me, okay?

Tshepo watches her for a beat, still smiling, before he turns back towards the house.

TSHEPO
No promises.

PALESA
(under her breath)
Yeah, whatever.

She watches him go back inside. And for a moment, she feels something like warmth, like maybe this night wasn't so bad after all.

24

INT. MAM' BEATRICE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

24

The kitchen glows softly under a single overhead light.

Every surface gleams, reflecting Mam'Beatrice's meticulous care.

She places the last plate into the cupboard, her hands steady, a rhythm in her movements.

With a final satisfied nod, she turns off the light, casting the room into a dim twilight.

Shadows stretch and dance across the walls.

Suddenly, a sharp KNOCK reverberates against the kitchen glass door.

Mam'Beatrice freezes, her breath hitching. She glances at the door, her brow furrowing with confusion.

MAM' BEATRICE
(to herself)
Who could that be at this hour?

She approaches the door cautiously, each step deliberate. The faint outline of a FIGURE is visible through the glass, shrouded in darkness.

The figure shifts, and before she can react, it SLAMS into the glass, shattering it in a spray of jagged shards.

He lunges forward, seizing her by the neck. Mam'Beatrice gasps, her eyes wide with shock.

In a swift, brutal motion, Tladi plunges a knife into her nose. Pain explodes in her face as she falls back, dazed, her vision blurring.

Blood pours from her wound, pooling on the pristine floor.

Tladi, unfazed, unlocks the door and strides to the counter, grabbing a larger kitchen knife. The blade glints ominously under the faint light, a predator ready to feast.

MAM'BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Please...

But her words are drowned in the rising tide of her own blood.

Tladi approaches, a sinister smile stretching across his face.

Each slice of the knife is methodical, a grotesque artistry.

As her strength ebbs away, Mam'Beatrice's eyes flutter, life slipping from her grasp.

The kitchen, once a sanctuary, transforms into a gruesome tableau of carnage.

With a final, gory thrust, Tladi stands over her lifeless body, victorious.

He wipes the bloodied knife on her apron, then pockets it, glancing around as if savouring the moment.

He exits the kitchen, leaving behind the haunting silence.

Mam'Beatrice lies still, a pool of crimson spreading beneath her.

25

EXT. PALESA'S HOME - STOEP - NIGHT

25

The air is still cool, and the faint glow of the stars above is the only light that cuts through the thick darkness.

Palesa is standing on the stoep, holds a loose cigarette in her hand, the ember glowing brightly against the blackness.

She exhales slowly, her gaze fixed on the stars, lost in thought, her mind far away.

Suddenly, the sound of tires rolling through gravel breaks the stillness. An UBER pulls up to the gate of the yard with a sharp stop.

The headlights cut through the night as it idles there for a moment, the engine humming.

A horrified Ratau stumbles out of the backseat, his eyes wide and frantic.

RATAU
(to Driver)
Don't leave! Don't leave!

He rushes towards the yard, not bothering to close the car door.

Palesa's head snaps around, her heart suddenly pounding. She doesn't even realise she's stopped breathing.

She stares at Ratau in confusion.

PALESA
Dad? What... what's going on? Where's
mom? Where's the car?

The words tumble out before she can process the fear in his face.

Tshepo steps outside the house, having heard the commotion.

He stops short when he sees Ratau's expression, something's terribly wrong.

His posture stiffens, a silent tension hanging in the air between them.

Ratau's face is terrified, his breath shallow. He's not calming down, and Palesa's confusion morphs into anxiety.

RATAU
Palesa... Tshepo, come with me. Now!

Tshepo doesn't wait. Without a word, he quickly moves towards the stoep, his face unreadable.

Palesa watches them both, her mind racing. Something is terribly wrong.

PALESA
Dad, what's happening? Where's Mom?
What's going on?

But Ratau doesn't answer her directly. He grabs her arm urgently, pulling her towards the Uber.

RATAU

We don't have time to explain, Palesa.
Get in the car. We'll talk when we're
safe.

Tshepo, moving with a sense of urgency but controlled, looks at Palesa for a moment, his eyes serious and calculating.

Tshepo closes the door behind him, the faint echo of the lock clicking in the tense silence.

Ratau is already in the Uber, urging them both in.

The driver sits in the front, waiting, clearly nervous but unsure of what's happening.

RATAU (CONT'D)

Just get in. We need to go. Now.

Palesa doesn't hesitate, her heart pounding in her chest.

She follows Tshepo into the car, the weight of the unknown hanging heavily over them.

As soon as the door shuts behind them, Ratau leans forward, speaking quickly to the driver.

RATAU (CONT'D)

Police station. Now.

The driver hesitates for a brief moment but nods, putting the car into gear and pulling away with a screech of tires.

The night outside blurs into motion as they speed down the road.

Palesa, still processing, looks out the window at the flashing lights passing by. She can't focus, her mind swirling with too many thoughts.

Tshepo sits beside her, his eyes scanning Ratau's tense face in the rearview mirror, but he doesn't say a word.

There's only silence for now.

26

INT. THABONG TOWNSHIP - POLICE STATION - NIGHT

26

The heavy clatter of boots against the cold concrete echoes as Ratau bursts into the police station.

His face is drained, eyes wide with a mixture of disbelief and urgency.

Behind him, Palesa and Tshepo follow, their confusion mounting with every step.

RATAU
I need help. Now.

He rushes towards the front desk, where two POLICE CONSTABLES are casually chatting, sipping from mugs of tepid coffee.

RATAU (CONT'D)
It's Tladi, he's back. From the dead. He... he killed her. Joyce, at the petrol station. She's...
(swallows, struggling)
She's dead.

PALESA
What? No... No, no.

Palesa's eyes widen in disbelief, her hands instinctively reaching for Tshepo. She staggers back, pressing her palm to her mouth as the horror sinks in.

TSHEPO
Uncle Ratau, what are you talking about?

RATAU
I saw him, Tshepo. I saw his face. He was there, he attacked me... he killed her. You don't understand... he was dead. We buried him.

He grabs the counter for support, trembling, desperate.

PALESA
But... Tladi? He's... he's been dead for... for months. Dad, this isn't possible.

The FIRST CONSTABLE, a young man, glances up lazily from his mug, before smirking at Ratau. His expression is a mix of condescension and amusement.

FIRST CONSTABLE
Oh, here we go. The ghost story.

He looks over to the other constable, who rolls his eyes and lets out a low laugh.

SECOND CONSTABLE
Yeah, must've been that family of his.

(MORE)

SECOND CONSTABLE (CONT'D)

They probably did some weird voodoo
shit on him, huh? Bewitched him,
maybe?

Ratau's eyes narrow, his fury rising, the tension thick
enough to cut.

RATAU

You want laugh, huh? Laugh at me? My
wife's dead, and you think I'm just
crazy?

SECOND CONSTABLE

No, man. I'm just saying, this whole
thing's a little... out there, don't
you think?

Ratau steps forward, leaning in.

RATAU

You think this is a joke, don't you?
Maybe you'd laugh harder if it was
your own mother, your own wife. Would
you be so quick to dismiss it then?

The FIRST CONSTABLE blinks, the grin faltering as Ratau's glare
cuts through him. There's a brief, tense silence.

Palesa, still reeling from the news, takes a step forward, her
eyes red and frantic.

PALESA

Stop laughing. My mother's dead, and
you don't get to make fun of that. You
don't get to make fun of him.

The constables exchange glances. The mockery lingers in their
eyes, but something about the look in Palesa's face gives them
pause. It's not fear. It's something deeper, darker.

RATAU

You can laugh all you want. But mark
my words: this is real.

He turns to Palesa, his voice softening as he reaches for her
arm.

RATAU (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, my baby. I know you're in
pain, but we need to do something.
Now.

Palesa collapses into Tshepo's arms, her face crumpling as the weight of the loss presses down on her. Tshepo holds her tightly, his face full of anger and confusion.

TSHEPO
 (under his breath)
 What are we supposed to do now, uncle
 Ratau?

Ratau looks over at the constables, a dark resolve settling into his features.

RATAU
 We're going after him. Dead or alive.
 And this time, we finish it.

The constables exchange uncomfortable glances. It's clear they're no longer laughing.

Out on Ratau as he turns, taking a step towards the door.

27

INT. PALESA'S HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

27

Palesa sits on the edge of the bed, her face red and swollen from crying.

She's been up for hours, packing the remnants of her life into a suitcase. Her hands move mechanically, folding clothes she can barely look at.

Ratau enters without knocking, his voice low but steady. His eyes scan the packed suitcase, the look of disbelief washing over his face.

RATAU
 Palesa... What are you doing?

Palesa doesn't look up, her fingers stiff as they zip the suitcase shut.

She pauses for a moment, as if weighing the gravity of her next words. Finally, she looks at him, her face etched with a mixture of sorrow and anger.

PALESA
 I'm leaving. I'm going to Aunty
 Malefu's. And Tshepo.

Ratau steps closer, his eyes pleading, not understanding, his voice breaking as he approaches her.

RATAU

Palesa... no. This, this isn't you.
You can't just walk away from me like
this.

PALESA

I'm not safe here.

She lifts the suitcase.

Ratau takes a step back, a flicker of something in his
eyes, fear? Guilt? Something deeper.

RATAU

What are you talking about? You think
I... you think I killed your mother?

The words sting, but it's not just disbelief in his voice.

RATAU (CONT'D)

Why would I do that? Why would I hurt
her? Joyce... she... she was
everything to me.

A tear slides down his cheek, and for the first time, his grief
is palpable. Palesa's eyes flicker, but she doesn't waver.

PALESA

You loved her? You loved her? And now
you're telling me that you saw Tladi,
dead, and he came back? You're out of
your mind.

(beat)

There's no way a dead man can come
back. No way. I don't care how much
you want to believe it, this isn't the
truth. This is... this is delusion.

RATAU

Palesa, please. I didn't kill your
mother! How can you think that? I
loved her!

He stumbles forward, desperation in every movement. He falls to
his knees in front of her, his hands gripping her suitcase, his
eyes pleading.

RATAU (CONT'D)

I didn't kill her! I didn't,
Tladi's back, Palesa. This... this
is real. He came back, and I-- I
don't know why, but I swear to you,
I'm not lying.

Palesa stands frozen, the suitcase heavy in her hand, her expression unreadable.

She glances down at him, a brief flicker of doubt passing through her eyes, but it quickly vanishes.

PALESA

You need help, dad. You need to see someone. A mental health doctor, or... something.

RATAU

I don't need a doctor, Palesa. I need you to believe me. Please... I'm begging you.

Palesa doesn't respond. She stands still for a long moment, her face unreadable. Then, finally, she zips the suitcase with a sharp motion.

PALESA

I don't feel safe here. Not with you.

Ratau's face crumples. His chest tightens, the weight of her words crushing him.

He watches as Palesa moves past him, towards the door.

RATAU

Please, Palesa... don't leave me. Don't leave your father. I love you.

But Palesa doesn't turn back.

Ratau stays kneeling on the floor, watching her leave, his heart in pieces.

The sound of her footsteps grows fainter as she walks down the hallway, the door clicking shut behind her with a finality that cuts through the room like a blade.

The silence is deafening.

PALESA (O.S.)

Goodbye, Dad.

The door closes with a soft thud, and Ratau is left alone in the room.

His face crumples, his hands shaking as he stares at the empty space where she just stood.

He finally lets out a long, strangled sob, the weight of his sorrow threatening to consume him.

28

INT. TSHEPO'S HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

28

A modest dining table is set with dinner.

MALEFU (41), sharp, composed, eyes like knives, sits across from Palesa and Tshepo.

Palesa picks at her food, her face betraying a storm inside.

Tshepo is calm, methodical, a boy of few words but many thoughts.

Malefu's gaze is unflinching.

MALEFU

Why do you think your father killed
your mother?

Palesa freezes. Her fork hovers mid-air. The question lands like a slap.

PALESA

I... I don't want to talk about it.

Malefu leans forward, unrelenting.

Tshepo notices the change in atmosphere but says nothing.

MALEFU

You don't get to shut me out,
Palesa.

Palesa's eyes well with tears, but she blinks them back, biting her lip.

PALESA

It's not like that. I-- I just...
can't.

A faint ding interrupts the silence. The three of them pull out their phones in unison, the ping unsettling. A WhatsApp notification. They all check it.

The words on the screen are like a punch to the gut.

TSHEPO

Mam'Beatrice...

Malefu's face shifts, a brief flicker of concern, but she masks it quickly.

Tshepo, too, seems affected, but less so.

Palesa reads the message again, her face drains of colour. The phone slips from her fingers, clattering onto the table.

PALESA

No...

Her breath catches. A tear escapes, rolling down her cheek.

She stands abruptly, knocking her chair back.

PALESA (CONT'D)

I... I need to --

She doesn't finish. She rushes towards the bedroom, her footsteps loud in the heavy silence.

Malefu exhales, then turns to Tshepo, voice low but insistent.

MALEFU

We need to call her father.

Tshepo doesn't respond right away.

He watches Palesa's retreating figure.

TSHEPO

No. Don't do that, mom.

MALEFU

What do you mean, "No"? She's falling apart. He needs to know.

TSHEPO

She's not falling apart. She's shocked. She just... needs time to breathe.

Malefu looks at him, a sharpness in her gaze. Then, she nods, just slightly, like she's considering his words, but doesn't fully trust them.

29

INT. TSHEPO'S HOME - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

29

The door slams shut behind her, the sound sharp, final.

Palesa stumbles into the room, her hands trembling as she grips the doorknob for a moment, as if trying to hold herself together.

She lets out a shaky breath, but it doesn't help.

She crosses the room in quick, frantic steps, like she's trying to outrun something she can't escape. The bed is her only refuge.

With a strangled sob, she falls onto the bed, face buried in the pillow, her whole body shaking.

Tears spill freely now, soaking the fabric, her chest rising and falling in ragged bursts.

Palesa clutches the pillow tighter, like it's the only thing that can hold her, keep her from breaking apart.

Her breaths are uneven, each one a struggle to regain control, but it's useless. The tears come faster, harder.

A long beat of silence. Then, the faint sound of footsteps in the hallway.

TSHEPO (O.S.)

Palesa...

She doesn't answer.

Tshepo hesitates for a moment, then gently knocks, as if waiting for permission that will never come.

Palesa's sobs slowly subside, but the ache in her chest doesn't.

30

INT. PALESA'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

30

In on Ratau as he sits at the table, his broad hands folded over a newspaper, but his eyes are far from the print. They're lost somewhere in the weight of his own thoughts, dark, haunted.

His face is worn, the edges of his features like crumpled paper, torn between regret and something darker.

A KNOCK. A solid, authoritative sound that breaks the fragile silence.

Ratau doesn't move at first. He stares at the door, his gaze steely but heavy. It's a knock he's been expecting.

He takes a breath and slowly rises to his feet, every movement slow, deliberate, like a man walking towards his fate.

He opens the door.

Standing on the threshold are two familiar faces.

DETECTIVE JACOB, late 40s, sharp-eyed, stands with a silent authority, his jaw set, his hand hovering near his badge, though he doesn't flash it.

Next to him, CONSTABLE THABISO, mid-20s, younger, more nervous but still formidable, shifts uneasily on his feet, eyes darting between Ratau and the street beyond.

JACOB
Ratau Mokoena.

RATAU
What is this, Jacob?

Jacob doesn't answer immediately. He just looks at Ratau for a long moment, as if weighing something, truth, or perhaps betrayal.

He gestures to Thabiso, who steps forward and pulls out a pair of handcuffs.

THABISO
We're here to arrest you.

RATAU
For what?

JACOB
For the murders of Beatrice Ngema and Joyce Mokoena.

Ratau's face goes pale, but he doesn't flinch. There's no shock in his eyes, just a slow, simmering rage.

RATAU
Murder? My wife? You think I killed Joyce?
(beat, laughing without
humour)
What the hell would I kill her for?

Jacob watches him, cold and unblinking. There's no warmth in his gaze.

JACOB
We have evidence, Ratau.

Ratau shakes his head, his voice tightening as if trying to swallow down his fury.

RATAU
You've got nothing. You want evidence?
Go ask the guys at the petrol station
in Thabong Township. They'll tell you.

Jacob steps forward slightly, his presence pressing down like a weight on Ratau's chest. He watches the man like a hawk, his eyes narrowing, calculating.

JACOB

I don't need their word, Ratau. I need yours.

Ratau's face twists with something hard, frustration, defiance, something raw and jagged.

RATAU

I'm telling you, ask them. They saw me. You want to put me in a cell for something I didn't do? Then do it. But don't come here pretending you've got answers.

The two men stare each other down. A silent battle of wills.

Thabiso looks from Jacob to Ratau, unsure of the outcome, his hands twitching toward the cuffs.

JACOB

What you say can and will be used against you in court, Ratau. You understand that?

Ratau's eyes flicker briefly, the reality of the words settling in, but his jaw tightens, determined.

He stands a little straighter, as if ready to fight.

RATAU

I understand. Now what? You going to drag me out like some criminal?

Jacob nods, a small, almost imperceptible movement, and Thabiso steps forward again, this time firmly grabbing Ratau's arm. The clinking sound of the handcuffs echoes in the room.

JACOB

We're taking you in.

RATAU

And what then? You think this will be over once you've got me locked away? You think anyone will believe your lies?

Thabiso starts to pull him away, but Ratau stands his ground, his voice rising, an edge of desperation now creeping in.

RATAU (CONT'D)
I didn't do it, Jacob! I didn't kill
Joyce!

Jacob doesn't flinch. Doesn't blink. Just stands there, watching
as Ratau is led out.

JACOB
We'll see what the courts say.

As Ratau is pushed out the door, his voice cracks, but only for
a moment, like a thread snapping.

RATAU
You don't know what you're doing...

The door slams shut behind them, and the house falls silent
again.

The room feels emptier now, more hollow, like the walls
themselves are closing in.

31 **INT. TSHEPO'S HOME - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

31

Malefu stares off into space, her eyes sharp, scanning the room
as though she's searching for something that isn't there.

MALEFU
Bodies dropping like flies... first
Joyce... now Mam'Beatrice.

Tshepo, already clearing the table, doesn't respond right away.

He places the last empty plate in the sink, his movements
deliberate, as if he's trying to keep his hands busy, his mind
occupied.

TSHEPO
Thabong's no longer safe.

Malefu's eyes snap to him, her brows furrowing.

She stands, walking towards the window, peering out into the
dark.

MALEFU
Lock the doors.

TSHEPO
Already did.

A beat.

Then, as Tshepo picks up the last of the cups, he speaks.

TSHEPO (CONT'D)

You really believe Tladi's back from
the grave? Like Ratau says?

Malefu freezes for a moment, then lets out a bitter laugh,
shaking her head.

She turns from the window, facing her son. Her face is
unreadable, but there's something hard in her eyes now.

MALEFU

(scoffs)

I don't believe in that nonsense,
Tshepo. That's for the movies. Dead
men don't walk.

TSHEPO

You sure?

An irked Malefu watches him for a moment.

MALEFU

What's that supposed to mean?

Tshepo finishes clearing the table, his movements purposeful,
but his eyes never leave his mother.

32 **INT. TSHEPO'S HOME - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

32

Palesa, tangled in sheets, sprawls across the bed, her beauty
untouched by the chaos of the night.

A gentle breeze whispers through the window, rustling the
curtains like ghostly fingers.

33 **INT. TSHEPO'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT (DREAM)**

33

Palesa stirs in her sleep, the wind's howl shifting from a soft
lullaby to a chilling serenade. She jolts awake, disoriented.

Her eyes widen as they fall upon TLADI, his disfigured figure
silhouetted against the moonlight, a grotesque smile painted
across his burnt visage. The horror is palpable.

Her mouth opens, a silent scream caught in her throat.

34

INT. TSHEPO'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

34

The stillness of the room is shattered by Palesa's frantic screams.

Her body jerks violently beneath the covers, kicking and thrashing as if trapped in a nightmare she can't escape.

Tshepo, hearing the scream, bursts through the door, his face a mask of urgency. He rushes to the bed, shaking her gently but firmly.

TSHEPO

Palesa! Wake up, Palesa!

Palesa's eyes snap open. Her breath is ragged, her chest heaving as she jerks upright in bed.

She scans the room, wide-eyed and terrified, her face slick with sweat, as though she's still caught in the dream.

TSHEPO (CONT'D)

What's wrong? What happened?

Palesa's eyes are glassy with fear. She grabs the edge of the bed, her fingers shaking.

PALESA

I saw him... Tladi. He was outside...
just standing there... burned...
smiling at me...

Tshepo watches her, his face softening with a mix of concern and understanding.

He takes her hand, gently but firmly, trying to ground her in the reality of the moment.

TSHEPO

It's just a dream, Palesa. Nothing's
real. It's just a nightmare.

Palesa looks at him, her breath still erratic, her heart racing. The terror lingers in her eyes, but slowly, so slowly, she begins to calm down.

PALESA

But it felt real... like he was really
there...

Tshepo's expression softens as he leans in closer, brushing a few damp strands of hair away from her face.

TSHEPO

I know. I know it felt real. But it's over now. It's just a dream.

Before Palesa can say anything more...

Malefu steps into the room, her face filled with worry, having heard the screams from her bedroom.

MALEFU

Is she alright?

Tshepo looks up at his mother, then back at Palesa, who is still visibly shaken but no longer screaming.

TSHEPO

She just had a nightmare, Ma.

Malefu lingers at the door for a moment, her eyes scanning Palesa's face, the concern in her gaze unmistakable.

After a beat, she nods, understanding the situation but still feeling the weight of it.

MALEFU

Do you need water?

Palesa nods slightly.

Malefu gives a final glance at her, then turns and exits the room, her footsteps fading down the hall.

Inside the room, Tshepo pulls Palesa closer, wrapping his arms around her. She leans into him, trembling.

TSHEPO

It's alright now. You're safe.

Palesa doesn't answer, but she clings to him tighter, her face buried in his chest.

35

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

35

The room is cold, almost clinical, lit only by the harsh glow of a single overhead bulb.

Its sterile walls are lined with old, peeling paint.

A metal table sits in the centre, bare except for a few files scattered haphazardly, a reminder of bureaucracy at its most indifferent.

Ratau sits slouched in the chair across from Detective Jacob, his wrists still encased in handcuffs, the cuffs resting loosely on the table.

His posture is casual, but his eyes are sharp, brimming with an underlying tension. His shirt is untucked, the collar loose from hours of discomfort.

He leans back, the quiet defiance in his stance thick and unmistakable.

Jacob sits opposite him, hands clasped in front of him. His eyes bore into Ratau, cold and steady.

Jacob's jaw is set, his face hard, like he's been through this countless times before. But there's an edge tonight. Something different.

JACOB

You murdered your wife, Ratau. You murdered Joyce.

RATAU

How many times do I have to tell you, Jacob? I didn't kill her.

Jacob's eyes flicker with impatience.

He taps his pen on the table, the only sound in the room besides Ratau's breathing.

JACOB

And Beatrice Ngema. You didn't kill her either?

RATAU

No. I didn't kill anyone.

Jacob watches him closely. His gaze doesn't waver. His next words are deliberate, chilling.

JACOB

I can keep you here all night. I'll make you talk. You'll tell me everything.

Ratau doesn't flinch. He just stares back, unyielding.

RATAU

You think I'll break? You think I'll tell you something I didn't do just because you stare at me long enough?

A long beat of silence.

Jacob leans back in his chair, unphased. He knows this game. He's played it a thousand times before. But tonight, something feels different.

Suddenly, the silence is broken by a KNOCK at the door.

Constable Thabiso enters with a small USB drive in hand.

He walks towards Jacob, his steps purposeful but his eyes darting to Ratau as he places the USB on the table.

THABISO
(clearly proud)
Here it is, sir. The evidence you
asked for.

Jacob raises an eyebrow. He nods, finally breaking his focused stare on Ratau. His tone shifts, almost lighter, satisfied.

JACOB
Do you have a warrant for this
footage, Thabiso?

Thabiso nods quickly, almost eager.

THABISO
I got it straight from the owner of
the petrol station.

Jacob's smile widens slightly.

He picks up the USB and looks at it for a beat, as if savouring the moment.

He motions for Thabiso to insert it into the laptop sitting beside him.

The soft click of the device sliding into the port punctuates the air.

JACOB
Let's see if this clears up your
little story, Ratau.

Thabiso presses a few keys, and the screen flickers to life.

The CCTV FOOTAGE plays.

The grainy video shows a BURNED, DISFIGURED FIGURE, Tladi, staggering towards Ratau and Joyce, flames still licking at his charred clothing. He lunges, wild-eyed, attacking them both with reckless fury.

Jacob's face shifts from a smug confidence to stunned disbelief.

He leans forward, eyes locked on the screen, mouth slightly ajar.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Is that... is that Tladi?

He turns to Ratau, his shock quickly turning into suspicion.

JACOB (CONT'D)
(whispering)
He's supposed to be dead. He died in that fire. How is he alive?

Ratau's eyes remain steady, unwavering.

He watches Jacob's reaction, the corner of his mouth curling into the faintest smirk.

RATAU
I told you. I didn't kill my wife. I didn't kill Beatrice.

Jacob's eyes snap back to Ratau, disbelief slowly transforming into realisation.

He's piecing it together, but the frustration is palpable, his theory is unraveling in real-time.

JACOB
So what? You're telling me this... this man attacked you and Joyce... and Beatrice too?

Ratau leans forward slightly, his voice sharp, but quiet, like a warning.

RATAU
What I'm telling you, Jacob... is that you've been chasing ghosts. This wasn't me. And it wasn't Joyce either.

Jacob watches him, the weight of the moment sinking in.

His eyes narrow, the gears turning, but Ratau's look is one of silent victory. He's been saying this from the start, this is the truth.

Thabiso watches them both, unsure whether to celebrate or remain cautious.

THABISO
So, what now?

Jacob doesn't answer. Instead, he watches the screen again, his mind racing.

But Ratau is already watching him, waiting.

RATAU
You don't have the full picture,
Jacob. Not yet. But you will.

The footage continues to play out on the screen, a final piece of the puzzle clicking into place.

36

INT. MORTUARY - ROOM - DAY

36

The room is cold, clinical, and eerily silent.

The white walls reflect the harsh, fluorescent light that hums overhead.

There's an overwhelming stillness, broken only by the faint rustle of the Mortuary Assistant's footsteps echoing on the sterile tile floor.

Ratau stands in the doorway, his eyes already locking onto the lifeless body of Joyce lying on the mortuary bed.

The room feels suffocating, the air thick with the weight of death.

Her face is still, peaceful, yet wrong, as if the violence that took her has never fully left her.

She looks untouched, perfect in the way the dead sometimes do, but there's something unnatural about the stillness.

The MORTUARY ASSISTANT, a stoic figure, stands just behind Ratau. His voice is soft but firm.

MORTUARY ASSISTANT
You have a moment.

Ratau doesn't answer immediately.

He stands frozen in the doorway, staring at Joyce, eyes glassy, lips pressed tight.

After a beat, he turns to the assistant.

RATAU
Can you... Can you give me some space?

The assistant nods, understanding the unspoken request, and exits with quiet footsteps, leaving Ratau alone in the room with his wife.

The moment the door clicks shut, Ratau's shoulders sag. It's as if the weight of the world has pressed down on him in that single, shuddering breath.

His steps are slow, deliberate, but as he approaches the bed, there's an unnatural hesitation in his movements.

He's not sure he's ready for this, but he's already walked too far.

He reaches out, his fingers trembling slightly, and touches Joyce's cold hand. A sharp intake of breath escapes his lips. The coldness of it is like a slap to his soul.

RATAU (CONT'D)

I... I didn't protect you, Joyce.

His voice is hoarse, raw, as if the words are being torn out of him.

He slowly sits beside her, his hand still clutching hers, the softness of her skin contrasting with the cold, unyielding chill of the room.

The stillness presses in on him from all sides, suffocating. He stares at her face, now forever frozen in the peacefulness of death.

RATAU (CONT'D)

I failed you. I couldn't protect you.
I promised you I would... but I
couldn't.

There's a slight tremor in his voice, a crack that's almost imperceptible.

His eyes search her face, as if looking for some sign, some spark of life he can hold on to.

RATAU (CONT'D)

I'll make it right. I'll make him pay.
Tladi... I swear to you, I'll find
him.

He leans forward, his forehead resting against her cold hand, his breath coming in heavy, uneven gasps.

The tears start to form, but he fights them back, barely.

His jaw clenches tight as the weight of the moment settles on him.

RATAU (CONT'D)

I will fight for you, Joyce. I will
fight for everything we had...
everything we should've had.

His eyes shift to her still face.

He takes a shuddering breath, his hand squeezing hers tighter.

RATAU (CONT'D)

I will find him. I'll drag him out of
whatever hole he's hiding in... and
I'll send him back to the grave. Where
he belongs. I swear on my life.

A long pause.

The words hang in the air, heavy with grief and anger.

His voice cracks, breaking through the veneer of control. He
doesn't care anymore, he's past the point of holding back.

RATAU (CONT'D)

I should've been there for you. I
should've... kept you safe. You always
thought I could protect you. But I
couldn't.

His hand trembles as it rests on hers, and for a long moment, he
just stares at her face, the silence enveloping them both.

RATAU (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

And then it breaks.

The grief spills over, raw and uncontrollable.

He leans down, burying his face in the bed beside her hand, his
tears soaking into the sheets.

His shoulders shake with sobs, the sound of his pain raw,
desperate.

RATAU (CONT'D)

I couldn't save you. I couldn't save
you, Joyce.

He weeps, unrestrained now. His body shakes with the depth of
his grief, the reality of the loss crashing over him like a
tidal wave.

Every moment he couldn't protect her, every time he failed her, it all comes rushing back now, flooding his mind with guilt.

But through the tears, through the suffocating sorrow, a dark resolve is beginning to form.

RATAU (CONT'D)

I will make him pay. I will make them
all pay.

The tears continue to flow, but beneath the grief, something else stirs, rage, vengeance, the cold fire of determination.

He wipes his eyes, takes a shaky breath, and looks down at her one last time.

RATAU (CONT'D)

(whispering)

I'll bring him to justice, Joyce. You
won't be forgotten.

With that, he gently places her hand back on the bed, his fingers lingering for just a moment longer than necessary.

Then he stands, his face hardening into something colder.

He takes a final look at her body, a last glimpse of the woman he loved, the woman he failed to protect.

Then, with a single, deep breath, he turns and walks out of the room, leaving behind the lifeless form of his wife and the weight of his grief.

The door clicks shut softly behind him, leaving the room empty once again.

37

INT. TSHEPO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

37

The room is quiet, bathed in soft, muted sunlight filtering through the windows.

The hum of the world outside is distant, as though it has paused, allowing the stillness to settle inside.

The air feels thick with unspoken sorrow, a grief so heavy it seems to weigh down everything in the room.

At the breakfast table, Palesa sits alone in her thoughts.

She holds her smartphone in both hands, her fingers trembling as she stares at a photo of her late mother, Joyce.

The picture is old, a smiling Joyce, vibrant and alive, frozen in time. Her image contrasts painfully with the emptiness that now lingers in Palesa's heart.

The table is otherwise quiet. Malefu sits across from Palesa, quietly eating her food, her eyes scanning the table, the air around her heavy with the weight of their collective mourning.

Tshepo is beside Palesa, his movements slow, his face unreadable, though there is a quiet, lingering sorrow in his eyes.

No one speaks. The silence between them is the loudest sound in the room.

Palesa's eyes begin to well up, her tears gathering in her lashes, but she doesn't move to wipe them away.

She stays there, looking at the photo, as if trying to hold on to a piece of the mother she's lost.

She doesn't speak, doesn't say anything about the storm inside her chest. The tears are the only language she has now.

Tshepo glances over at Palesa. He doesn't speak either, but his expression softens. His eyes are a mirror of her own grief.

He reaches out, but stops just short of touching her, unsure of what comfort he can offer. Instead, he simply sits there beside her, his presence steady and grounded.

The sound of Malefu's chewing is the only noise now, but even that feels too intrusive, too raw.

The food on the table is forgotten, untouched, ignored.

Palesa's breath hitches in her throat as the tears begin to spill over. They fall silently down her cheeks, each drop a reminder of the emptiness that now defines her world.

Without a word, Tshepo reaches over, gently placing a hand on Palesa's shoulder.

Palesa doesn't flinch, doesn't pull away. Instead, she leans into his touch, her shoulders shaking slightly with the weight of her grief.

The tears come harder now, flooding her vision, as if the dam inside her is finally giving way.

She doesn't try to hide it. There is no point in hiding anymore.

Malefu looks between them, but she says nothing. She doesn't need to. She understands the silence, the weight of it.

Tshupo's hand stays on Palesa's shoulder, offering no words, no promises.

The minutes stretch on, each one heavy with the mourning of the woman they've lost.

There's no rush to fill the silence, no need for words.

They are all just there, together, grieving in their own way.

Outside, the world continues to move.

But in this small room, on this quiet morning, time stands still.

38

INT. FUNERAL HOME - CHAPEL - MORNING

38

The chapel is filled with a subdued, somber atmosphere.

The low hum of murmurs and the faint rustling of tissues punctuate the silence.

Joyce Mokoena's funeral is sparsely attended, but the people who are here make their presence felt with their heavy grief.

At the front, beside an open casket, a large framed photo of Joyce, her warm, smiling face frozen in time, gazes down upon the mourners.

A delicate arrangement of white lilies rests at the edge of the casket, but the flowers seem as if they too are wilting under the weight of the moment.

The Pastor stands by the podium, a reverent figure, his voice soft yet clear.

PASTOR

We are gathered here today to lay to
rest a beloved soul... Joyce Mokoena.
A wife, a mother, a friend.

The room goes quiet as the Pastor gestures for Ratau, Joyce's husband, to come up to speak.

Ratau walks slowly to the podium, his steps heavy, the weight of grief pulling him down.

He's wearing dark sunglasses, though they don't hide the redness of his eyes. He places a trembling hand on the microphone, clearing his throat before he speaks.

RATAU

I... I loved her. Joyce was everything
to me.

His voice cracks, and he struggles to regain control, his emotions overwhelming him. He pauses, a choked sob escaping before he continues.

RATAU (CONT'D)

She didn't deserve to die like this...
I... I failed her.

A few people in the crowd shift uncomfortably. Some exchange glances, unsure of where this is going.

Palesa, sitting in the front row, stares at her father through swollen eyes.

Her face is blotchy from crying, her gaze locked on him, as though trying to make sense of what's happening.

RATAU (CONT'D)

I know who did this. I know who took
her from us.

There's a slight rustling in the crowd, murmurs of confusion.

RATAU (CONT'D)

It was Tladi.

The room goes eerily silent.

People look at each other, sharing puzzled glances, unsure if they've heard him correctly. The tension is palpable.

RATAU (CONT'D)

He's back. He's risen from the grave.

Palesa's breath catches in her throat. Her eyes widen, a mix of disbelief and confusion washing over her.

Tshepo, sitting beside her, shifts uneasily, his hand finding hers and squeezing it gently.

Her gaze never leaving her father.

RATAU (CONT'D)

Tladi... he was dead. But he's back.
And he took her from me. He's here...
and he's going to kill us all.

Ratau's body shakes with the force of his emotion, his breath shallow and ragged.

Some mourners exchange uneasy glances, unsure whether to speak up or to leave the room.

Palesa clenches her fists in her lap, trying to steady her breathing.

She feels Tshepo's presence beside her, but the tightness in her throat makes it hard to focus on anything but her father's face, his tears, his desperate need for someone to believe him.

In the back of the room, a few of the older attendees whisper among themselves.

Malefu, standing off to the side, crosses her arms, her expression unreadable.

PASTOR

Brother Ratau, I understand your grief, but --

RATAU

You don't understand! He's back! He's alive, and he's going to keep killing until we stop him!

The Pastor's eyes soften, his lips pressed together as he steps back, unsure of how to continue.

Palesa's tears fall silently, her body trembling with the weight of her father's words.

And amidst it all, Ratau stands before the congregation, a broken man, clinging to a story no one is ready to believe.

39

EXT. THABONG TOWNSHIP - CEMETERY - DAY

39

The bright, unforgiving sun casts long shadows over the cemetery.

A modest crowd has gathered, sitting beneath a white tent, their heads bowed in sorrow.

The air is thick with grief as the soft hum of a funeral choir fills the space.

Their voices are mournful, weaving through the air like a prayer.

At the centre of it all, the coffin slowly descends into the grave.

The sound of earth falling onto wood echoes softly, and the choir's song grows more solemn.

Palesa, Ratau, Malefu, Tshepo, Boitumelo, and other members of the community sit beneath the tent, their faces wet with tears.

The weight of the moment presses down on everyone, and the air is heavy with loss.

Palesa's face is pale, her eyes swollen from crying.

She watches, her body trembling as the coffin disappears into the earth.

The finality of it all hits her like a wave, and she feels herself drawn forward, instinctively reaching out towards the grave.

PALESA
(whispering, desperate)
Mama...

Her hands tremble as she steps forward, but before she can take another step, Ratau catches her wrist. His grip is tight, a man broken by grief, but still holding on to what little he has left.

RATAU
Palesa... you can't...

He pulls her back gently, trying to comfort her, but his own tears blur his vision.

They both stand there, clutching each other, lost in their shared sorrow.

RATAU (CONT'D)
I... I loved her so much. She didn't
deserve this, Palesa. She didn't
deserve to die like this.

Palesa's breath hitches as she fights the urge to break free from him and fall into the grave herself.

Her body is shaking, her heart raw. But then, something catches her eye.

Just a few steps away, beside a row of graves, stands a mobile toilet. She pulls herself from Ratau's grip and walks away, her feet moving on their own.

She moves towards the mobile toilet, her face set in a dazed, distant expression. Her mind is elsewhere. Somewhere dark.

Malefu approaches Ratau as she tries to comfort him.

MALAFU

She'll be okay, Ratau. She just needs
a moment... all will be well.

But Ratau doesn't hear her either. His cries grow louder as he buries his face in his hands, grief consuming him.

Malefu puts a hand on his shoulder.

Meanwhile, Palesa reaches the mobile toilet and, without hesitation, steps inside.

The cramped, foul-smelling space offers no solace, but for some reason, it feels like she can breathe in here, like she's finally alone.

Her head leans against the wall, her body sinking into the dirty, dingy interior. Her thoughts swirl, chaotic, desperate, unfiltered.

Then, without warning, she hears the faint sound of earth shifting.

Palesa blinks and steps out of the toilet, her heart pounding.

As she turns, her eyes land on something that stops her dead in her tracks.

TLADI's tombstone.

The grave is open, the earth piled high at its edge, the name TLADI MOLELEKOA clearly etched in the stone. The sight of it sends a shockwave through her chest.

Her eyes widen for a beat, her heart skipping a beat as she stares at the open grave.

The world feels like it's tilting on its axis.

A shiver runs down her spine as she slowly, almost mechanically, turns away. She doesn't know why, but her legs carry her back to the tent without another glance.

The sight of Tladi's tombstone gnaws at her mind, the air thick with an eerie presence she can't quite shake.

Back at the tent, Tshepo notices Palesa returning, her face pale, distant.

He stands up from his seat, his eyes scanning her face with growing concern.

TSHEPO

Palesa...?

But Palesa doesn't answer. She simply walks back to her seat, her body rigid, her eyes distant, as the weight of her discovery crashes into her.

40

INT. PALESA'S HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

40

In on Ratau as he sits hunched over a newspaper, his eyes scanning the page, though his mind seems far away.

His face is tired, worn by grief, yet there's a flicker of something else, a need for answers, a restless energy that can't be quieted.

The sound of the front door creaks open, and Palesa enters.

She carries a suitcase, its handle gripped tightly in her hand, but she doesn't seem to notice the weight.

Her face is still pale from the funeral, her eyes red and puffy, but there's something different in the way she moves now, determined.

At the sight of her, Ratau looks up from the newspaper. His face softens, a brief flash of relief crossing his features. He rises from the chair quickly, a smile breaking through his somber demeanour.

Without a second thought, he steps forward and wraps his arms around Palesa in a tight embrace.

RATAU

Palesa... you're home.

Palesa stands still for a moment, her body stiff against his, but she doesn't pull away.

Her hand rests lightly on the suitcase as she absorbs the warmth of her father's hug.

PALESA

I... I believe you, Dad.

Ratau pulls back slightly, his face confused at first, but then understanding flickers in his eyes.

RATAU

What do you mean, Palesa?

Palesa swallows, her eyes shifting away from him as the words come slowly, each one heavier than the last.

PALESA

I believe that Tladi's back. I believe what you said... that he's risen from the grave.

Ratau stares at her for a moment, his expression unreadable.

Then, something in his face shifts, his shoulders relax, and he pulls her back into another hug.

RATAU

I'm glad you believe me, my baby. I've waited so long for you to understand.

Palesa hugs him back tightly, her eyes squeezing shut.

PALESA

I'm so sorry, Dad... for doubting you before...

Ratau pulls back again, his face full of forgiveness, and he cups her face gently in his hands.

RATAU

There's nothing to apologize for. I've already forgiven you. I love you.

A brief silence falls between them, thick with emotion, before Palesa sets the suitcase down on the counter. She takes a deep breath, gathering her thoughts.

PALESA

Dad... we need to do something about this. We need help.

Ratau furrows his brow, his eyes wary.

RATAU

What can we do, Palesa? What can we do?

Palesa steps back slightly, her hands clasped tightly in front of her. She looks at him, a mix of desperation and determination in her eyes.

PALESA

We need to see a sangoma, Dad.

Ratau recoils slightly, his face tightening with disbelief.

RATAU

A sangoma? No, Palesa. We are Christians. We don't... we don't associate with such things.

PALESA

But we need all the help we can get. What if he starts taking more people from this community? What if he finishes us all off like he did to Mama? It's not like we have a choice, Dad.

Ratau's face tightens, his hands trembling slightly as he places them on the table.

His gaze shifts away from her, his thoughts wrestling with the faith he's clung to so tightly.

RATAU

I... I'll think about it, Palesa.

Palesa nods, a small glimmer of hope in her eyes, though the worry remains.

She reaches over and places a hand on his arm, trying to ground him, to pull him from his own storm of doubt.

PALESA

I know you're scared, Dad. But we can't just wait for something worse to happen. We need to act, now.

Ratau looks at her, his expression torn. There's a long beat of silence before he finally exhales deeply, his eyes filled with the weight of everything.

RATAU

I'll think about it. We'll talk more later.

Palesa doesn't push him further. She just nods and walks over to the window, staring out at the world beyond, her mind still racing with the possibilities.

41

INT. RONDAVEL - AFTERNOON

41

The small rondavel is dimly lit, the smoke of burning herbs curling lazily from a clay pot at the centre of the room.

The air is thick with the earthy scent of *muthi* and the faint hum of chanting.

The walls are adorned with beads, animal skins, and ritual tools, a sacred space of deep tradition.

Palesa and Ratau sit on the worn mats opposite the TRADITIONAL HEALER, a woman in her late 60s, weathered by years of practice but sharp-eyed and knowing.

Her hands, calloused and stained with years of working with herbs and bones, lay before her a set of bones and shells, the instruments of divination.

The Traditional Healer's eyes narrow in concentration as she shakes the bones in her hands, letting them fall onto the floor with a soft rattle.

The shells spin and scatter, forming an intricate pattern across the mat.

She stares at the arrangement for a long moment, the air growing heavier with each passing second.

PALESA

What do the bones say? Is there hope?

The Traditional Healer doesn't answer immediately.

Her fingers brush over the bones slowly, reading their alignment, her lips moving in a quiet chant.

Finally, she looks up at them, her face grave.

TRADITIONAL HEALER

Tladi's spirit is not at rest. His death was violent... and that violence tethered him to this world. He seeks closure, revenge.

Palesa's face pales as the words sink in. She sits up straight, heart pounding.

The Traditional Healer stares at them both, her gaze piercing, as if measuring the weight of their resolve.

She picks up another handful of bones and throws them onto the floor again, watching as they land.

TRADITIONAL HEALER (CONT'D)

The full moon is rising tonight. Tladi will rise with it. He will seek those who are closest to you, Palesa, Ntate Ratau. People you love... people you hold dear.

PALESA

My mother... and now my father... No! He can't do this.

Her breath quickens, panic rising in her chest.

Ratau places a steadying hand on her shoulder, though his own expression is tight with worry.

RATAU

What do we do? What can we do to stop him?

TRADITIONAL HEALER

The only way to defeat him is to go to his grave, tonight, and perform a ritual. A ritual that will bind him to the earth where he belongs.

Palesa and Ratau exchange a long, uncomfortable look.

PALESA

A ritual at his grave? At night? Are you certain?

RATAU

It's dangerous... we can't go there at night. It's too much.

The Traditional Healer's eyes flash with a glimmer of understanding.

She leans forward, speaking with quiet urgency.

TRADITIONAL HEALER

There is no other way. If you want to save the people you love... if you want to save yourselves, this is the only path. The full moon will give him strength, and if you do not act before it reaches its peak, you will lose everything.

Palesa and Ratau sit in stunned silence, absorbing the gravity of her words.

The Traditional Healer doesn't let the silence linger. She rises slowly, moving to a wooden chest in the corner.

She opens it with a quiet creak, revealing bundles of herbs, vials of *muthi*, and small wooden charms.

She begins to prepare a mixture, grinding dried herbs with steady hands.

TRADITIONAL HEALER (CONT'D)

I will give you the *muthi* to protect you, against Tladi's spirit, and the evil that follows. But once you begin the ritual, it cannot be stopped.

Palesa and Ratau look at each other, a mix of fear and resignation in their eyes.

PALESA

What if we fail? What if he kills us?

The Traditional Healer stops grinding the herbs and looks directly at Palesa, her gaze steady and knowing.

TRADITIONAL HEALER

Failure is not an option. If you do not try, you will lose everything. Tladi's spirit is already in motion. He is waiting for the full moon. He will come for you. You must go to his grave tonight... or you will lose your lives, and Thabong will be lost to him forever.

Ratau stands up slowly, his face set, but his eyes darkened with the weight of what must be done.

Palesa follows, her face pale but determined.

PALESA

We'll do it. We'll go.

RATAU

We'll go.

The Traditional Healer hands them a small bundle of *muthi* wrapped in a piece of cloth.

TRADITIONAL HEALER

This will protect you from the spirit's reach, but be careful. Tladi's spirit is powerful, and once you begin the ritual, there is no turning back. You must finish it, or you will never be free.

As they take the bundle, they exchange one final, wordless look before walking towards the door.

42

INT. BOITUMELO'S HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

42

Popcorn kernels sizzle in a pot. Boitumelo scrolls through her phone, a smile dancing on her lips.

BOITUMELO

(into phone)

No, Palesa, seriously, my parents are out of town. It's just me and Charlie. We're about to have a movie night.

Boitumelo tosses a handful of popcorn into the air, catching it in her mouth.

PALESA (V.O.)

(panicked)

You need to lock the doors!

Boitumelo rolls her eyes, amused.

BOITUMELO

Come on, you're being dramatic. The only thing I'm locking is my heart. Charlie's here; what could possibly go wrong?

PALESA (V.O.)

This isn't a joke, Boitumelo!

Boitumelo shrugs, unfazed.

BOITUMELO

Well, if he shows up, I'll just offer him some popcorn and a cozy spot on the couch.

PALESA (V.O.)

You don't understand! You have to be careful!

Boitumelo leans against the counter, tapping her fingers.

BOITUMELO

Okay, okay... but I'm fine. Really. Why don't you come over and join us? It'll be fun!

PALESA (V.O.)

I'm too busy for that. I... I have to go. Just lock the doors, okay?!

Boitumelo's smile fades slightly as she hears the urgency in Palesa's voice.

BOITUMELO
 Alright. Just... be safe, okay?

She hangs up, shaking off the unease.

BOITUMELO (CONT'D)
 Charlie! Popcorn's ready!

Silence.

BOITUMELO (CONT'D)
 Charlie?

She walks towards the living room, the cheerful ambiance of the kitchen fading. The door creaks slightly, drawing her gaze.

BOITUMELO (CONT'D)
 Charlie?

Her heart quickens as she sees the door wide open. She approaches cautiously, peering into the darkness beyond.

BOITUMELO (CONT'D)
 Are you playing games with me?

As she inches closer, her eyes widen in horror. There, hanging grotesquely on the gate, is CHARLIE'S CHOPPED OFF HEAD, a gruesome mockery of their night.

BOITUMELO (CONT'D)
 Oh my God...

She opens her mouth to scream, but the sound gets caught in her throat.

Suddenly, a shadow looms behind her. Tladi emerges from behind, a glinting knife in hand.

Before she can react, he slices her throat.

Boitumelo's eyes widen in shock, and she gasps, blood spilling forth.

Boitumelo crumples to the floor, the warmth of her blood pooling, her vision fading.

43

EXT. TSHEPO'S HOME - LAWN - NIGHT

43

The moon hangs high, casting long shadows over the yard.

A bakkie comes screeching to a halt in front of Tshepo's home, kicking up dust as it slides to a stop.

The headlights cut through the darkness like a sharp blade, illuminating the yard in a harsh, unnatural light.

Ratau jumps out of the driver's seat, his face tight with urgency, his eyes wild, as if the weight of the world is on his shoulders.

Palesa follows him out of the passenger side, her face pale, eyes frantic. They move quickly, almost running, as if every second matters.

Without a word, they rush towards the front door, pounding on the stoep with desperation.

44

INT. TSHEPO'S HOME - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

44

Inside, the atmosphere is quiet, mundane.

The sounds of cutlery clinking and soft conversation fill the room as Malefu and Tshepo sit at the table, finishing their meal.

The light from the overhead bulb gives everything a warm glow.

Malefu wipes her forehead, her face showing the weariness of the past few days.

MALEFU

Tshepo, once we're done, you'll wash the dishes, right?

TSHEPO

Yeah, I'll do it.

MALEFU

I'm getting tired of everything... The world's falling apart, Tshepo.

TSHEPO

We'll get through it, Ma.

A sudden, frantic knock at the door interrupts the conversation, sharp and urgent, as if the very air outside is on fire.

Both of them freeze for a moment, the usual stillness of the house now shattered by the sound.

MALEFU

Who could that be at this hour?

Tshepo rises and peeps through the window.

TSHEPO

It's... it's uncle Ratau and Palesa.

He quickly motions towards the door, his instincts telling him that something is very wrong.

The door creaks as he opens it, and Ratau and Palesa almost rush in, breathless, their clothes disheveled, their faces filled with urgency and fear.

RATAU

Tshepo... Malefu... we need to go.
NOW.

PALESA

It's too late! He's coming, Tladi's coming!

Malefu stands up, her chair scraping against the floor, eyes widening as she processes the panic in their voices.

MALEFU

What... what do you mean? What's happening?

RATAU

We need to leave now. Follow me, both of you. It's our only chance. Tladi's spirit is coming tonight, and it won't stop until he's claimed us all.

TSHEPO

Wait, uncle Ratau! What are you talking about? We can't just--

RATAU

There's no time for explanations! Please, Tshepo, we can't lose anyone else! Your mother... you... you're all in danger. We're going to his grave... we have to do the ritual.

PALESA

If we don't go now... if we don't stop him, we're all done for.

Malefu stares at Palesa and Ratau, her mind trying to process everything. The panic, the wild look in their eyes, it's too much.

MALEFU

You want us to follow you in the dead of night? To go to his grave?

RATAU

There's no other way, Malefu. It's the only chance we have.

Malefu hesitates, torn between her disbelief and the desperation in Ratau's voice. Then, slowly, she nods, her face hardening with resolve.

Tshepo opens his mouth to protest, but Malefu raises a hand, cutting him off.

MALEFU

Okay, fine. But Tshepo, don't argue. We're going with them.

TSHEPO

(sighs, defeated)
Alright, Ma.

Tshepo grabs the house keys off the counter, locking the door behind them with a quick motion.

RATAU

Come, now. We can't waste any more time.

The family steps out into the night, the chill of the air biting at their skin. They walk briskly towards the bakkie.

45

EXT. THABONG TOWNSHIP - CEMETERY - STREET - NIGHT

45

The moon hangs low, casting an eerie glow over a quiet street and the cemetery beyond.

The stillness is shattered by the roar of an approaching bakkie.

Inside, Ratau grips the steering wheel, eyes wide with dread. Malefu, his passenger, fidgets nervously.

MALFU

Ratau, are you sure we should be out here?

RATAU

We don't have a choice, Malefu!

In the back, Palesa and Tshepo huddle together, their faces pale with fear.

The tension thickens as a disfigured, burnt figure emerges onto the street, it is Tladi.

He stands motionless in the street, a grotesque smile stretching across his melted face.

Ratau's heart races as he slams the accelerator. The bakkie hurtles forward, tires screeching.

MALFU

Ratau, stop!

Too late. The impact is sickening. Tladi slams against the windshield, blood smearing the glass. He grins, eyes alight with deranged joy.

The bakkie veers off the road and crashes into a construction site. Metal screams as a steel cylinder pierces through Tladi's head, connecting with Malefu's eye.

Ratau's vision blurs as he blacks out.

46

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - NIGHT

46

Ratau awakens, blood trickling from his forehead.

The horror unfolds before him. Tladi is grotesquely still, Malefu lifeless in the passenger seat.

Ratau's breath hitches, tears welling in his eyes.

RATAU

(whispers)

No... no...

The back of the bakkie stirs. Palesa and Tshepo slowly regain consciousness, confused, disoriented.

Ratau catches their eyes, urgency etched on his face. He motions for silence.

RATAU (CONT'D)

We need to get out... now.

They slip out of the bakkie, faces pale, dread pooling in their stomachs. Palesa gasps as she spots Malefu's lifeless body.

TSHEPO

(tears streaming)

No... no... Ma!

Palesa pulls him close, trying to shield him from the horror around them.

PALESA
 (whispering)
 We can't stay... we have to go.

Ratau glances back at the bakkie. Tladi is gone. His heart races.

RATAU
 Where is he?

Suddenly, Tladi lunges from behind, wielding a kitchen knife, eyes wild with madness.

PALESA
 Dad, run!

But it's too late. Tladi lunges at Ratau, plunging the knife deep. Ratau drops the *muthi* in hand.

Ratau gasps, falling to the ground, blood pooling beneath him as he gurgles.

RATAU
 Palesa...

Palesa and Tshepo watch in horror, frozen for a moment before instinct kicks in.

Palesa grabs the *muthi* from the ground, urgency sparking in her eyes.

PALESA
 (whispers)
 We have to move!

She pulls Tshepo along, tears streaming down their faces as they rush towards the cemetery, desperation fueling their flight.

Tladi watches them, a sadistic smile plastered across his face, savouring the chaos he's wrought.

47

EXT. THABONG TOWNSHIP - CEMETERY - NIGHT

47

The night air is thick with tension, the eerie quiet of the graveyard shattered only by the sound of running feet.

Palesa and Tshepo equally terrified, yet trying to stay strong charge past an iron gate, their breath ragged as they sprint through the graveyard.

Their eyes flick back towards the entrance.

The graveyard gate stands open like a mouth waiting to swallow them whole. And there, emerging slowly from the darkness, is Tladi.

TSHEPO

Where the hell is it?!

They dodge tombstones, racing through the graveyard, scanning for the one they need.

Finally, they stop at a cracked open grave, an unsettling emptiness beneath them.

PALESA

There. That's it. That's Tladi's grave.

She pulls a small bundle of *muthi* in hand. She looks around, searching in a panic.

PALESA (CONT'D)

Do you have a lighter or matches?

TSHEPO

You're the smoker. Don't tell me you left them in the bakkie.

PALESA

I'm not the one out here getting chased by a dead man. God, it's probably in the damn bakkie.

They turn to face Tladi, getting closer, his steps heavy, deliberate. His eyes gleam with the madness of the dead.

PALESA (CONT'D)

Okay, think. Think, Palesa...

Her hand grips Tshepo's, squeezing for reassurance.

PALESA (CONT'D)

We pray.

TSHEPO

(stunned)
What? Now?

Palesa whispers holding the *muthi* in hand.

PALESA

We pray.

The rain begins to fall softly at first, as if the earth itself knows what's about to happen.

Tshepo looks at Palesa, fear, doubt, and a desperate hope in his eyes.

They both stand before the grave, a shared understanding between them.

Palesa closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. She begins to speak, her voice steady but with a strength that resonates through the storm.

PALESA (CONT'D)

O Great Spirit, Keeper of the Earth
and Guardian of the Realms Beyond,
Hear my plea, for I stand before
you in the humblest of hearts,
Gripped by fear, yet filled with
the strength of my ancestors.

Thunder rumbles in the distance.

PALESA (CONT'D)

I call upon the sacred winds to carry
my words through the veil, To reach
the world of the departed, to touch
the spirit of Tladi. O Tladi, once a
soul of this earth, I ask you now,
with reverence, to return to where you
belong.

As she speaks, the rain intensifies, battering their faces.

Tshepo's grip tightens on her hand, his eyes locked on Tladi, who is now only a few feet away.

PALESA (CONT'D)

Do not let your anger blind you,
Do not let your pain turn you into
something lost. May your restless
spirit find peace, And your journey
be guided by the light that once
walked with you.

Lightning flashes, crackling through the air with an energy that seems to respond to her words.

Tladi's body jerks, as if in response, but he continues his slow approach, unyielding.

PALESA (CONT'D)

I beg of you—do not let your shadow
fall upon us any longer. Let your
essence return to the earth from which
it came.

(MORE)

PALESA (CONT'D)

Let the soil embrace you again, And
let the grave that once held you be
your resting place once more. We, the
living, have not trespassed, But we
feel the weight of your grief, And we
fear the darkness of your wrath.

The rain pelts down like bullets now, soaking them, as the wind
howls and the trees shake around them.

Tladi is almost upon them, his form becoming blurry and
indistinct, as if the storm itself is pulling at him.

PALESA (CONT'D)

Spare us, O spirit, from this torment.
Let the land and the sky be your
home, Not the living souls who walk
in this world. We are but vessels,
and we seek only peace.

The earth beneath their feet trembles.

Tshepo glances at Palesa, fear in his eyes. She continues,
unbroken, her voice a force now, strong, full of command.

PALESA (CONT'D)

I ask the forces of nature, the
guardians of the sacred realms,
To shield us from your fury.
Let the wind carry your pain away.
Let the fire burn through your
sorrow. Let the rain wash away the
remnants of your unrest.
Let the earth, in all its wisdom,
reclaim you.

Lightning strikes the grave, crackling through the air with a
blinding light.

Tladi recoils, his body jerking and twisting violently.

PALESA (CONT'D)

I do not ask for vengeance,
But for a return to balance.
For the light of your spirit to
guide you, Back into the arms of
eternity, Where you can rest and be
whole once again.

Tladi's body shudders violently, as if the elements themselves
are stripping him of his form.

PALESA (CONT'D)

(screaming)

The land is sacred, the grave is
sacred! And I ask you, spirit of
Tladi, Let us be free.

The rain begins to fall harder, blurring everything around them.
Tshepo's face is streaked with water and fear.

Tladi's body shakes violently, and then--

BOOM!

Lightning strikes him directly.

The light is blinding. And then, in the blink of an eye, Tladi
crumbles to dust. His body disintegrates, turning to ash that is
carried away by the wind.

The air goes still. The rain slows to a drizzle.

Palesa's chest heaves with exhaustion, but her eyes remain
tightly shut, as if still in prayer.

They both open their eyes.

A long, tense beat. No more storm. No more Tladi.

TSHEPO

Did... did it work?

PALESA

I think, yeah. Yeah, it worked.

They stand there, drenched, their hands still clutching each
other.

And then, without warning, Palesa lets out a breath she didn't
even know she was holding.

Tears spring to her eyes, her body shaking.

They pull each other into an embrace.

A tight, desperate hug, as if trying to hold onto the very
ground beneath them. Their tears mingle with the rain.

For a moment, it's just them alive, together, and free.

48

EXT. THABONG TOWNSHIP - STREET - MORNING

48

A golden sun stretches its fingers over the township of Welkom Thabong, casting a warm glow on the modest homes.

The day seems peaceful, serene even, as life moves on like it always has.

A taxi grinds to a halt outside a small house.

The door swings open, and Palesa and Tshepo step out, their faces worn from the long hours of a night spent in grief.

Their eyes are puffy, hollow. Their bodies seem to drag the weight of their sorrow.

They share a quiet moment, staring at the house that used to feel like home. It's now a place of silence, of memory, and of loss.

They move towards the door, each step heavy, like they're walking in the wake of something that can't be undone.

The taxi pulls away behind them, a vehicle of escape that's now long gone.

49

INT. PALESA'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

49

A modest, lived-in space.

A family photo rests on the table: RATAU, JOYCE, and a young PALESA beaming in the middle. The edges of the photo have started to yellow, the corners frayed like memories fading with time.

Palesa eyes the photo as if willing the people in it to speak, to tell her that this isn't real, that everything she's just witnessed isn't her life now.

She sighs and sits down heavily, her fingers brushing over the surface of the table, trembling ever so slightly.

Tshepo doesn't look at her.

He moves to the radio, turning the dial with a practiced ease that doesn't seem to match his inner chaos.

The static breaks, and a newsreader's voice fills the room.

NEWSREADER (V.O.)

Breaking news this morning. A body has been discovered at Thabong Park.

(MORE)

NEWSREADER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Authorities have confirmed it's
that of local resident Boitumelo
Tsotetsi. Police are
investigating...

Tshepo freezes, glass in hand. His face hardens, then falters, eyes cast downward. He doesn't want to hear it, but the words sink in, cutting deeper than anything the world could throw at him.

Palesa's face hardens too, the tears threatening to spill, but she refuses to let them. She presses her palms into her eyes, wiping away the weight of them, the pain trying to claw its way out.

Tshepo enters the kitchen, the sound of a cupboard door opening and closing as he prepares to fix them both something to drink.

He comes back with two glasses of water, the ice clinking softly against the glass as he hands one to Palesa.

She takes it, fingers curling around the glass, but she doesn't drink. The weight of his gaze is enough to make her eyes swell with unshed tears.

TSHEPO

It's going to be okay.

She stares at the glass, feeling the cold seep into her skin, but her heart is burning, a fire that can't be doused by water.

PALESA

Are we... are we gonna get through
this, Tshepo?

Tshepo sits across from her, his own exhaustion pulling at the edges of his composure.

The sadness in her eyes is a mirror to his own. He rubs the back of his neck, a gesture of helplessness.

TSHEPO

With time. Time heals everything,
right?

Palesa chuckles bitterly, her gaze still locked on him, eyes glassy with unshed tears.

PALESA

Time? How much time do we need,
Tshepo? How much more can we take?

TSHEPO

We'll get better. Maybe not now. But eventually. This... this isn't forever.

She snorts, but it's not a laugh, it's the sound of frustration, of disbelief.

PALESA

Don't feed me that. You think we'll just wake up tomorrow and pretend this doesn't hurt?

Tshepo leans forward, trying to meet her eyes, trying to hold onto something solid between them.

TSHEPO

I'm not pretending. But you can't keep carrying this. It'll eat you alive.

Palesa takes a deep breath, still staring at the glass in her hands. Her voice is a whisper now, as if she's not even sure who she's talking to anymore.

PALESA

What if it already has?

The words hang in the air like smoke, heavy and thick.

Tshepo remains silent, his eyes searching her face for any sign of something, anything, that will pull her back.

50

INT. MORTUARY - ROOM - DAY

50

The harsh fluorescent lights hum overhead, casting a sterile, cold glow over everything.

The Mortuary Assistant in a faded green lab coat, walks ahead of them, his footsteps muffled against the linoleum floor.

He's calm, too calm, as though he's done this a thousand times before.

Palesa and Tshepo follow him in silence. Their faces are taut, their emotions strangled. The pain is there, but it's buried deep, under layers of exhaustion and disbelief.

The assistant stops in front of a stainless steel door, a dull clunk as he opens it.

MORTUARY ASSISTANT

We're draining the blood now. It's standard procedure.

He steps aside, gesturing for them to enter.

Palesa hesitates, her body tight as if she's bracing for something.

Tshepo glances at her but says nothing. He knows better. The only way through this is forward.

They walk in.

The room is stark, unnervingly clean. The bodies lie on metal tables under white sheets, only the barest outline of form visible beneath the fabric.

The soft hiss of a draining machine hums from the far corner, an unsettling soundtrack to the scene.

Palesa's breath catches in her throat as she sees the outline of her aunt, Malefu, lying under a white sheet. Beside her, her father, Ratau. They look so... still. So unnatural in their stillness. It doesn't seem real.

Her legs tremble, and she stumbles forward, almost as if she's trying to reach out to them, to somehow pull them back from the edge of whatever this is.

She falters, then sinks to her knees, her hand pressed against the cold floor as she starts to sob, raw, desperate sobs that rip through her chest.

PALESA

Daddy... aunty...

The Mortuary Assistant steps back, his face impassive, as though this is all just part of the process.

Tshepo's face hardens as he watches Palesa collapse, her grief a weight too heavy to bear.

He moves swiftly to her side, kneeling beside her, his hand resting on her shoulder.

TSHEPO

Palesa... We have to be strong.

Palesa doesn't look at him. Her body trembles as she curls into herself, her sobs echoing off the sterile walls.

PALESA

Strong? How the heck do I do that,
Tshepo? How do I be strong when
they're gone? When... when this is all
I have left of them?

Tshepo's hand squeezes her shoulder, his voice quieter now, softer, more for himself than for her.

TSHEPO

You don't. You can't.

He looks at the bodies, his own grief cracking the surface for just a moment. He fights it down, presses it back. For her.

TSHEPO (CONT'D)

But you'll survive. You have to.

Palesa's sobs begin to quiet, though her shoulders still shake.

She's not looking at him, but the force of his presence is enough to pull her from the edge of her breakdown.

She takes a deep breath, slowly wiping her face with her hands.

PALESA

It wasn't supposed to be like this,
Tshepo.

Tshepo doesn't have an answer. He can't give her what she needs. He just holds her, silently, his chest heavy with his own unsaid words.

The Mortuary Assistant steps forward, breaking the fragile moment between them.

MORTUARY ASSISTANT

We'll need to prepare them for the
funeral. You can come back once that's
done.

Palesa nods weakly, standing on shaky legs, her face still streaked with tears.

Tshepo rises with her, his hand resting on her back, the two of them locked in a shared, painful silence.

As they turn to leave, Palesa's gaze lingers on the bodies one last time.

Her fingers twitch, as if she wants to reach out and touch them one last time. But she doesn't.

The door shuts behind them, the faint sound of the draining machine fading as the air outside the room feels a little heavier, the grief just as suffocating.

SUPERIMPOSE:**TWO WEEKS LATER**51 **EXT. THABONG TOWNSHIP - CEMETERY - DAY**

51

The final resting place of Ratau and Joyce.

Palesa approaches the grave, holding two single white flowers in her hand.

She kneels down, her fingers brushing the earth, feeling a connection to her father and mother that no longer feels heavy with regret.

A soft smile forms on her lips, as if she can almost hear their voice.

PALESA

I'll make you proud, Mom and Dad.

She places the flowers gently on the grave, standing up to take a final, lingering look at the place where her father's body lies.

Her eyes are steady, her spirit unbroken.

52 **EXT. WELKOM THABONG TOWNSHIP - GOLDEN HOUR**

52

The township, once shadowed by fear and bloodshed, now bathed in the warm light of the setting sun.

Palesa walks back into the heart of the town, her face calm, but radiating strength.

The people watch her from their doorways and windows.

We pull back, the world opening up to her future, uncertain, but hers to shape.

As the screen fades to black, the last sound we hear is the soft, distant hum of children playing, their laughter a symbol of the healing beginning to take root in the community.

FADE OUT.

THE END