



CHAPTER

1

NEW BEGINNINGS

Embrace the new and exciting moments of your life!

It was a beautiful morning when Ntsumi woke up, her heart full of anxious excitement. The day she had been waiting for had finally arrived—the matric results were being released. Her nerves fluttered inside her, but it was not the bad kind of nerves, it was the good ones. It was the kind that makes you hopeful. The kind that whispers that something good is coming, even if you don't know exactly what it is. It was as though she wasn't sure what to expect, but she was sure of what would happen next.

Ntsumi woke up and for the first time, she didn't need to snooze her alarm or wait for her mother's knock on the bedroom door. She jumped out of bed with a smile and rushed to the bathroom to get ready. She had to go and collect her matric results from school.

She looked at herself in the mirror, almost as if to affirm herself. Ntsumi was light-skinned and had skin so smooth it was as though she bathed with milk. She had a beautiful smile with perfectly aligned teeth and beautiful light-brown eyes that had a blue outline around them.

She walked up to her mum in the kitchen, who had already prepared breakfast. “Mum, quick, let’s go. I can’t eat; I just want to go and get my results.”

Her mum, calm and reassuring, responded, “I know you passed. Stop worrying yourself.”

But the worry wouldn’t leave her. Ntsumi sighed and gave her mum a look that made her quickly get up without another word. Soon, they were driving to the school.

When they arrived, an ocean of students filled the school grounds, some screaming in joy, others jumping up and down, hugging each other. Reality was finally sinking in. This was going to be the beginning of adulthood, the beginning of independence and freedom. Not only would good results guarantee a placement in university, but it meant going to live in a school residence, making new friends, and starting an entirely new chapter.

Ntsumi couldn’t help but daydream about the future as they approached the school entrance.

“Go make me proud,” her mum said with a smile.

Ntsumi took a deep breath, stepped out of the car, and joined the queue. With every step she took, butterflies fluttered in her stomach. When her turn came, she grabbed her results and opened them before she even reached the car.

She had achieved a bachelor’s pass.

Her scream of excitement was swallowed by the cheers of her friends as they rushed to celebrate with her. They took selfies, laughed, and savoured the moment she would remember forever.

When she finally reached the car, her mother looked at her with pride and said, “Well, this calls for a celebration, doesn’t it?”

And indeed, it did. Later that day, friends and family gathered at her home for a braai to celebrate her achievement. Laughter, music, and the warmth of loved ones filled the air.

In the evening, while Ntsumi was upstairs in her room, another message was sent through to Ntsumi: she had been accepted at the Ultimate University, and induction would begin the following week.

Everything was falling into place, but when the night ended and the house fell quiet, a heavy sadness crept into her chest. Lying in bed, she realised her father had not called. Not even a single message. She had always held onto the faint hope that one day they would have a true father-daughter relationship. Tonight, that hope dimmed.

“Well, it shouldn’t matter anyway. If there’s one thing I’ve come to learn, it’s that he *always* disappoints me,” she told herself.

Her father was never consistent. Sometimes present, often absent. AWOL more than he was around.

She pulled the blankets over her head and allowed her tears to fall quietly. Despite the beauty of the day, she fell asleep with a broken heart.