

## Chapter Seven: Thato

The house was quiet when Thato got home. The kind of quiet that has a specific quality in the early evening — not empty, just suspended, as if the house is waiting for whoever arrives next to establish the mood.

The television was on in the sitting room. The blue-white light of it was visible from the doorway. Tumo was on the couch, stretched out with one arm behind his head, watching something with the settled posture of a person who has been there for some time and intends to remain.

He looked up when she came in. "How was it?"

She dropped her bag on the chair by the door. "Where is everyone?"

"Your mom is sleeping. The others left earlier." He unmuted the television, then muted it again. "So. The date. How was it?"

Thato sat down on the other end of the couch. She looked at the television for a moment without really seeing it. "He said he forgot his wallet."

Tumo looked at her. "He forgot his wallet."

"That's what he said. But honestly I think he just didn't have the money. You don't forget your wallet. You leave it because there is nothing in it."

Tumo laughed, a short, genuine laugh. "Thato. The economy is hard right now. Don't be too rough on the man."

"The economy," she said. "Okay. But if the economy is hard, then you don't make dates you don't have money to spend on. That's just basic sense."

"Basic sense and what people actually do are not always the same thing," Tumo said. He shifted on the couch to look at her more directly. "You okay?"

"I'm fine. I'm just tired. And I'm a little stressed."

He was quiet for a moment. On the television, something was happening that neither of them was watching. Then Tumo said, quietly, "I can help with that. If you want. Take some of that stress off."

Thato looked at him.

She stood up. She did not say anything. She walked toward the hallway. At the door to her room she stopped and looked back at him once, briefly. Then she went in.

Tumo got up from the couch. He did not look toward the room where her mother was sleeping. He walked down the hallway. The door closed.

The television continued. Outside, the ward was settling into the ordinary sounds of evening. In the room where her mother was sleeping, nothing changed.

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