

LICENSED TO LIE

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corruption
watch



INTRODUCTION

Thabisa is broke, just starting out at Ntando's up-and-coming ad agency. Then he sets a challenge. Whoever between Thabisa and her sales rival Tamara gets their driving licence first will get a promotion and a new company car. It's game on - but is Tamara playing fair?

Chapter

1

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Thabisa got off the train feeling tired. She was grateful that she didn't have to travel a long distance. She would get home and just lie on the bed. She flashed her ticket at the officials standing by the exit: it was the fifteenth and the gartjies would be there till month end. She walked the empty street, happy that she wasn't far from home. It was there, just up Loop Street.

The house looked lonely and dry from the distance; one would think it had been vacant for a long time. The pink walls were peeling in places, the yard was unkempt and the long grass half hid garden ornaments that Thabisa found weird. Were they to scare the neighbourhood dogs from pooping on the 'lawn'? The house was poorly maintained. By the sound of the TV she knew her landlady was home. Tina was half deaf and half blind, and very mean when she wanted

to be. Thabisa opened the small garden gate to the house and walked slowly along the footpath to the back, where her cottage was. It wasn't much, just an open-plan room with a tiny kitchenette and a shower; all she needed really. But the little place was overpriced. Had she had enough time to look she wouldn't have taken it. She had felt under pressure since getting a job in Woodstock at an advertising agency, and needed a place close to work.

Thabisa threw her bag on the bed and took off her shoes. Her feet were killing her. She had to wear high heels at work even though she never went anywhere and customers hardly ever walked in. But Ntando, her boss, insisted on it. He was building an empire and, "Image is very important in the advertising industry," he'd always remind them.

Thabisa opened the fridge in search of something to eat. She hadn't eaten all day and was starving. She couldn't really take noodles to work for lunch unless she was asking to be Tamara's joke of the week. No,

tea and biscuits would have to do till month end.

She heard the sound of feet dragging - Tina was coming. For a moment she wondered if Tina had seen her walking past the living room window to the back. Or did she simply trust that Thabisa had no life and would be home on time?

"Thabisa?" Tina called, knocking on the door. Thabisa stood by the fridge and didn't answer. The last thing she needed was Tina telling her stories. But Tina called again and Thabisa knew that the only way to get rid of her was to open up.

"Coming," she yelled as she flushed the toilet, pretending not to have heard her.

She opened the door and there was Tina, in her slacks and slippers.

"It's almost month-end now girly. You haven't forgotten our deal?" Tina said, trying to come in. Thabisa was deliberately standing in the doorway with a hand on the handle and the door pulled close behind her.

“Yes, Tina. I remember. I will give you the full amount as soon as my pay comes through,” Thabisa said.

“Yes, yes. See, I was really generous last month and I went over Desmond’s head. See he doesn’t like it when I’m lenient with the tenants. He says they’ll take advantage, see,” Tina said, trying to peer inside the room. She was always peering and sniffing. Her last tenant was into weed and used to stink the place up. Tina couldn’t stand ganja smoke.

“And thank you, I really appreciate what you did. You will have the rest of the money in full. I promise.”

“Yeah, yeah. Coz mos if I don’t get it then I’m sorry girly, I’ll have to find other people to take this place. You know, I’m still paying the bond on it. Desmond is helping but shame, he can’t help out every time.”

Thabisa knew it was almost time for Sewende Laan and Tina never missed an episode; she even watched the repeats on Sundays.

“Would you like some tea, Tina?” she offered, giving her most adorable smile. She even widened the view through the door a bit so Tina could have a better look.

“No, no, girly. Maybe next time. I must get in,” she said after peering in one last time. When she was satisfied, she shuffled back to the main house.

Thabisa waited until Tina had closed the kitchen door before she closed hers.

What a pretending cow, she thought. She wouldn't have been so broke if Tina hadn't insisted on the deposit plus two month's rent. But Thabisa was desperate and had no other place available.

She went to the cupboard and took out a packet of instant noodles. Today she had a choice between chicken or beef; it was nice to have 'choices' in life she thought wryly. While the noodles cooked in the microwave, Thabisa poured herself the last bit of wine she had.

This was not how she had imagined it: broke, single and eating noodles with wine for dinner.

But like her mother always said: "Do not despise small beginnings. They humble you." She knew that it wouldn't always be this bad. All she needed was a raise.

Tell us: *Have you ever been in Thabisa's desperate cash-flow situation? How did you deal with it?*

Chapter

2

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It was half past seven when Thabisa got to the station and waited for the twenty-to-eight train. But the train didn't pitch. She sat there and soon started panicking and pacing. The last thing she needed was to be late, again. She had already gotten a verbal warning from Ntando.

Ntando refused to understand that such things happened, as if he had never taken public transport before. And it didn't help Thabisa one bit that she had miss goody-two-shoes, Tamara, as a colleague. Tamara was a privileged prima donna who never showed up late. Her boyfriend always dropped her off at a quarter to eight.

"You see, Thabisa, to get ahead in life you need to be hungry for success. Be a go-getter, like Tamara," Ntando had said the first time he called her in for a warning. But he

just hadn't understood that the train drivers were on strike; something totally out of her control.

"But we make our own destiny," Ntando had said, and there were "no excuses".

That is why at the age of thirty he had his own advertising and marketing company. It was small, but it allowed him the privilege of coming and going as he pleased, without having to report to anybody. It bought him a nice GTI Sport that he liked more than his employees. He lived in an apartment in Claremont, paying rent that Thabisa wouldn't even dream of. He was his own man, and his employees were his golden geese. They made him the money and he spent it. That was the law of the universe: you want it badly enough then you have to make it yours.

"Trains running late again?" Tamara said while eating muesli at her desk.

"Metrorail, what can you do?" Thabisa said, keeping her voice low and walking to her desk. She didn't want Ntando to know she was fifteen minutes late.

“You’re lucky Ntando isn’t here, otherwise you’d be in shit,” Tamara said, scooping more cereal from her bowl.

“Yeah, you don’t say,” Thabisa voiced her frustration out loud. But the sarcasm was lost on Tamara.

“Yeah, I do say. You’ve been late a lot. Why do you bother with trains when you can get a man to drive you around?” she said, getting up to wash her dish in the tiny office kitchen. Thabisa rolled her eyes as Tamara’s heels clicked on the tiled floor.

Thabisa wasted no time; she got on the phone and started dialling clients. By the time Tamara got back Thabisa was already securing a deal. This day was starting off well, she thought as she said her goodbyes to the client and hung up.

Her moment of victory didn’t last long. Ntando walked in and summoned them to his office.

“Ladies, ladies, sit down,” he said swinging side to side in his leather office chair. The young boss had style and liked to show it.

"I've just had an exciting meeting that will definitely put us on the map," he continued, smiling. He hardly ever smiled so this had to be good.

"I'm investing in a car for the business. Instead of wasting time sitting here, we're going to expand our capacity and 'take the advertising to Mohamed'," he said with his arms spread out wide.

"Oh nice. Who is Mohamed?" Tamara said with a giggle. Thabisa couldn't believe the girl; she must be already seeing a potential flirt on the horizon.

"No, no dear, it's a figure of sp-... never mind." Ntando said getting up and walking around to their side of the table. "I need you girls to be out there - meeting with the clients face-to-face and pitching their ideal ad." He was now sitting on the corner of the table by Tamara's side. "Who has a driver's license?" he asked, looking at Tamara.

Both young women shook their heads.

"If you want to stay ahead you need to think proactively. The first one to get a license will

be the one who does the pitches. That means there are incentives: travelling allowance, a big bonus – the works!”

“That sounds great, Mr R. I’ll get that license in no time,” Tamara said, blinking her eyes rather too many times.

“That’s the spirit, Tammy. Now why are you still sitting here? The clients aren’t going to call themselves you know!” Ntando said, dismissing them.

Thabisa decided to take a walk during lunch. They weren’t allowed to take lunch at the same time so Tamara always went first. That left Thabisa with enough time to try and close deals with as many clients as she could squeeze in an hour. Working alone in peace and quiet was always productive for her.

When she got back Tamara was sitting on her desk talking on the phone. Her desk was facing away from the door so she didn’t see Thabisa, or hear her when she walked in.

“Are you versin? I don’t have time to waste on taking lessons. Besides, Jay will teach me anything I need to know about driving. It’s

not rocket science," she said to the person on the other end. After a short pause she laughed. "Yeah, that job is as good as mine. I'll have the license in two weeks, tops."

She must have heard Thabisa's footsteps as she crossed the room trying to listen to more of the conversation. She ended the call abruptly. "'Kay, babe, gotta go. The mice in this building like to eavesdrop," she said, giving Thabisa a nasty once-over. "See you tonight at the party," and then she hung up. So the race was on.

Tamara was already getting on to it and Thabisa had no money for even those driving lessons that Tamara didn't want to take.

But wait a minute - if Tamara wasn't planning on taking lessons then how the hell did she plan on getting the license? Jay? Thabisa didn't like this. And why was Tamara suddenly cagey when she saw her? What was she up to?

Whatever it was, Thabisa needed to get there first. But where would she get the

money before month-end to book for a learner's and some lessons? She needed a plan fast.

Tell us what you think: *What is Tamara up to? Are formal driving lessons a must for getting a license?*

Chapter

3

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Tamara's boyfriend came, on time as usual, to pick her up. Gawd, weren't these people affected by the laws of traffic? He sauntered in and asked for "Tammy". Thabisa almost wanted to say they didn't have such a person working there but before she could have her little joke, Tamara came back from the bathroom.

"Hey Jay-Jay," Tamara greeted him with glee. Jay didn't speak, he just swooped her off her feet by her tiny waist. Then he kissed her, if you could call it that. It seemed forced and painful, Thabisa thought. Tamara grabbed her bag and they were out of the door, Jay sauntering and Tamara giggling.

Thabisa wanted to work late tonight. She needed to reach target and secure some money for the driving lessons. Or else she'd have to 'chat' to Tina again and ask for an

extension. No. No more humiliation, she thought to herself as she picked up the phone to dial a few more clients.

At five thirty her phone beeped. It was a WhatsApp text from Jasmine, her only friend.

Dinner at Neighbourhood after work. My treat J

Suddenly her stomach roared, sharing its excitement at the prospect food other than noodles: real food. She texted back:

Be there in 30. Xx

She had done enough for the day. Thabisa packed up her stuff and locked the office. She walked to the station to catch a train into Cape Town central.

Twenty minutes later she spotted Jasmine in Neighbourhood, their favourite hangout spot. Jasmine was not in her British Airways uniform. She always changed it when she was going out; it was against regulations to wear it at such places in case one misbehaved and put the company's name in disrepute.

"Hey doll," Jasmine greeted, getting up to hug Thabisa. "Why the long face?" she said as she pulled away.

"Ag, you know, only that the world is run by people with a brain the size of a pea," said Thabisa, hanging her jacket on the chair back.

"And I thought it was run by a 'thirty-year-old, self-centred idiot, who doesn't want to come out the closet'," Jasmine laughed, using one of Thabisa's lines of frustration about her boss. "You know what you need?"

"A margarita?" Thabisa said, smiling. Everything was solved by a margarita, as far as Jasmine was concerned. No problems were too big for a margarita.

She ordered two and looked at her friend from across the table.

"Now, tell me what's wrong," Jasmine said, looking over the rim of her cocktail glass at Thabisa.

Thabisa told her the dilemma, what Ntando said and how this could change everything for her.

"And all you have to do is beat little Miss Barbie to it," Jasmine said. "You could do that in your sleep."

"Jazz, she's up to something. I don't know what but I can feel it," Thabisa said gulping on her drink. In the real world you could never base something on just a gut feel. They'll call you crazy. But her gut had been unsettled since she walked in on that phone call at lunch. She told Jasmine what she had heard.

"Look, she probably just saw you and was pretending to be on a call, to mess you up," Jasmine laughed, just as a cute waiter was passing by. She looked at Thabisa and mouthed, "Who's he?"

They hadn't seen him before so he definitely must be new.

"You need another drink and one of those to go," Jasmine said, winking at Thabisa. Thabisa turned and her eyes landed on the waiter's. He smiled. He was gorgeous. Thabisa turned back quickly and covered her face with her hands. How embarrassing!

Now the guy knew they were talking about him.

“Don’t worry, he probably gets it a lot,” Jasmine said, raising her hand to call him over.

Thabisa had to run. She got up and bolted for the bathroom, leaving Jasmine to order. When she returned to the table, there were two more drinks and menus.

“We need to eat - eye candy won’t keep us alive,” Jasmine said, shoving a menu to Thabisa across the table.

All the food sounded amazing. But Thabisa didn’t want to order anything that she may not like - not on her only day of free food. She settled for a burger instead. Jasmine ordered a salad with smoked salmon.

“So, how have you been?” Thabisa asked, fanning the attention away from herself and her troubles, which, incidentally, seemed to be floating further away with each sip of her drink.

“Oh I’m good, can’t complain,” Jasmine said, looking away into the crowd down Long

Street. They were sitting on the balcony, basking in the sunset.

"How is ... Will? No, no Warren, I mean..." Thabisa said, struggling to remember the name of Jasmine's last or current flame. It was hard keeping up with Jasmine's love life. The ground attendant had dreams of becoming an air hostess and travelling the world. She believed that her 'better half' was out there, ready to board a plane she was working on, so they would meet, fall in love, and live happily ever after. But she just wasn't that lucky - yet.

"Wayne. He's fine."

Their food arrived and Thabisa dived right in, not sparing a moment for conversation.

"Slow down! You'll choke," Jasmine said.

After dinner they had last rounds. Thabisa was feeling a bit lighter and better about her situation. It hadn't improved one bit, but her mood about it had. When they were done Jasmine settled the bill and they walked to the train station.

"I'll give you the money for your lessons and learner's," Jasmine said as they were approaching Thabisa's station.

"What?"

"I'll give you the money to do your license. When you're sorted you can always pay me back."

Thabisa didn't know what to say. Jasmine was a truly good friend. She smiled her thank you and hugged her goodbye.

She had just enough energy to take off her work clothes and put herself under the covers. She pictured herself holding her license and smiling broadly and she drifted off to a sound sleep.

Tell us: *Who do you think will get the job? Why? Why not?*

Chapter

4

Thabisa hadn't heard her alarm go off forty-five minutes ago. When she woke up it felt like the weekend, a Saturday, and she was sleeping in. She reached for her phone and jumped up when she saw the time. Shoot - she was late. She called Tamara on the office line and she picked up on the second ring.

"Tamara, it's Thabisa."

"Yeah. You calling to notify me of your resignation?" Tamara said, not keeping her voice down even a little. That meant Ntando was in the office and Tamara was up to her stupid games again. Thabisa didn't have time - or much airtime - for this.

"I'm running late. Please tell Ntando the trains are late and I'll be there as soon as I can."

“Do you have your driver’s license?” Tamara asked. Thabisa couldn’t believe the nerve of the girl.

“No, not yet. What’s that gotta do...?”

“Well I’m not your PA. Tell him yourself,” Tamara said and ended the call.

There was no time to shower – just a change of clothes and a quick brush of her teeth and she was out of the door. She put her heels in her bag and wore flats: they made it easy to run. When she got to the station she knew her life was over. The trains were running late. It was only at half past nine that she walked in to the office – an hour and a half later.

Ntando was furious!

“You know it’s polite in business to inform your employer that you’re going to be late. Failure to do so makes you look like you don’t care.”

“But I called and left a message with Tamara to tell you.”

“Shifting blame makes things worse. You were supposed to be here at eight; no

excuses." He scribbled something down on a pink piece of paper and gave it her. "Please sign here," he said handing her the paper.

"But-" Thabisa tried to protest.

"Do you want a job or not?" Ntando said, not smiling at all. Thabisa didn't answer. "Then sign that and get to work."

She signed it and left it on his desk.

"Consider this your official written warning," he said and nodded for her to leave.

This was bull!

She didn't even have the energy to argue with Tamara. She just went to her desk and watched her as she giggled with Mr Moonsamy, twirling her hair. Was she even ashamed of what she was doing? He could be married for all she knew. But Tamara didn't seem like she cared; she was enjoying herself and well, it got the job done. She was making target.

During tea, Tamara went outside to pick up a call on her cellphone. She had never done that before. Usually she spoke in front of Thabisa and gloated so she could hear her

amazing and fun life stories. This call was quick and she was back at her desk like nothing had happened. She took her purse and shoved a piece of paper in there. Then she went back to work.

Ntando left for lunch and as soon as he was out the door, Tamara used the office phone to make a call.

“Hi, I’d like to know what dates you have available for a learner’s license, please,” she spoke to the other end. The person must have objected and said she needed to come in to book her learner’s.

“Yes, yes, I understand,” and then there was a pause. And then, “Aha, aha, lovely. Thank you very much. Have a good day further.” And she hung up.

Thabisa was listening to the call the whole time, pretending she was on a call of her own. When Tamara hung up she pretended to still be talking. Tamara got up and walked to the bathroom; she was getting ready to go to lunch. She needed to reapply her make up first, as always.

Thabisa got up from her chair and flew to Tamara's desk. She was barefoot so there was no sound on the tiles. On Tamara's desk lay the information she had just received.

Nov 18 10:15 Fish Hoek - Mkhosi

And on the back of that paper was a cell number. Whose cell number, Thabisa didn't know.

Tamara was planning on booking her learner's the next day. Or was she planning on writing it the next day? Thabisa was confused. As soon as Tamara left, Thabisa called the Fish Hoek Traffic Department and asked for a learner's test for herself. The lady confirmed that there was a spot available the next day at 10:15 and then later at 12. But she had to go in and book the times there.

So Tamara was going at 10:15. Thabisa couldn't go at that time - she still didn't have the money. She would go for the 12:00 spot, but she needed to book it today. She

WhatsApped Jasmine:

Cud u send me that moola.

Nd to go book test asap!

In half an hour a message came through.

eWallet transferred to account....

Jasmine had just sent her the money - more than what she had asked for.

Thanks babe. U a life saver. J

Now, the cards were drawn and all she needed to do was to make her play. She went on line and checked the next train to Fish Hoek. It would come in twenty minutes. Tamara should be back by then. It was a tight schedule but she knew Tamara was never late.

And on time Tamara returned from lunch. As soon as she got in Thabisa took her lunch. She was soon on a train to Fish Hoek and went to the Traffic Department. She was so happy to see that there were only two other people in the queue. She filled in her form, did her eye test, and paid her fee. Her lunch hour was over when she was heading back to Woodstock. She didn't care, she had booked her learner's and Ntando couldn't be angry at her for it.

In the office she smiled at Tamara: it was game on.

Tell us: *How would you handle Tamara's attitude? Do you have any 'Tamaras' in your circle of friends?*

Chapter

5

When Ntando returned to the office after three, both girls asked to speak to him. He called them to his office together and sat them down.

"I've got a learner's test tomorrow morning, so I'll need to come in later," Tamara said.

"Oh great, I'm sure Thabisa can hold the fort," Ntando smiled at Thabisa.

"Actually, I can only do that till eleven. I have a test too tomorrow - at twelve - and I can't afford to be late," Thabisa said, returning Ntando's smile. It was a genuine smile, one that he hadn't seen before, and he sat there rather bemused, staring at her.

"Well, my test is first so I'll go before you. You'll have to wait for me to get back."

"No, I won't. If you're not back here by 10:45 I am leaving and the fort will hold itself. I won't let the trains jeopardise this for me,"

Thabisa spoke up firmly and both Tamara and Ntando were speechless.

“Well, well,” Ntando finally said. “Seems like we’ve got ourselves a rat race,” and he clapped his hands in excitement. “Well, that’s settled. Tamara you’ll go and come straight back here, and Thabisa you’ll leave at 10:45 since you’re taking public transport. May the best woman win,” he said, laughing.

“Before you go,” he called to them as they were about to reach the door. “You both know it’s almost month-end, and our company month end’s this coming Friday.”

Thabisa sank down in her chair. She knew where this was going: target review. She hated it when he reviewed their performances in front of each other. She hated that Tamara had always beat her to target. She had only won the spiff once, and it was a bottle of wine, not even an expensive one, just your ordinary Woolies wine. This was going to hurt.

“Thabisa, you came close this time. If you two had a full working day tomorrow maybe you

could have caught up," he said, getting up from his desk and opening the cabinet to his left by the window. "But maybe next time," he said, taking out a gift bag.

"So this month's prize goes to Tamara, for her outstanding work and good sales record."

Thabisa had to clap even though she felt the whole thing a bit too childish. If there were many sales agents then this could work, but it was just the two of them. What a way to make sure your employees hated each other.

Tamara jumped for the bag and dug inside. It was a dress; a summer dress made from African print material. It was beautiful, a mixture of royal blue and mustard colours. Tamara shrieked with joy.

"It's a designer dress, made by a friend of mine. So you can be sure that there's none like it anywhere else."

"Thank you so much, Ntando, it's beautiful."

"You deserve it; you did great.

Congratulations," Ntando said, and looked at Thabisa. She was smiling, but not that sparkly smile she had shown earlier. This was stiff;

she looked like she was in pain under it. Ntando raised his eyebrow, signalling for Thabisa to say something.

“Well done, it’s beautiful,” Thabisa said getting up. She didn’t wait to be dismissed. She didn’t even know why she was needed here. She wasn’t a sales person, she was a designer, a creator of fresh and brilliant ideas that sold themselves when you looked at them. This was below her qualification. She didn’t get a diploma and massive student loans just so she could play sales person for Ntando.

She got to her desk and went on Facebook. Social media was always a space where one could just vent without reason.

They said a woman must be more than a pretty face. And yet they still don’t listen to you when you speak! #IllegallyBlonde

The newsfeeds were all the same.

Cops.

Nkandla.

Senzo.

What was the world coming to? If it wasn't corruption then it was deceit and murder. She couldn't take any more bad news. She needed to focus on tomorrow and her test. She went on to the Traffic Department website and took the online learner's practice test. By the third try she had only four wrong answers. Then she took a break and went on to Facebook again. What was the point of working? The day was over anyway.

There, in her view again was a photo.

The caption read: Tamara Tammy October added a new photo.

And there was Tamara, smiling broadly in her new dress. Where was she and when had she taken this?

One of a kind by designer Freddy J coz I'm one of a kind. Xoxo

And the comments about how pretty it was were flooding in. Thabisa couldn't stomach it anymore. The dress was beautiful, no doubt, but Tamara was just a farce. Thabisa hated

that about her. She minimized her screen and went to the bathroom.

"I'm gonna meet him tomorrow at the centre, after I write," Tamara's voice came from behind the door. Another top secret mission that she didn't want people to hear about, Thabisa thought.

"He said he'd signal me. He gave me the signal, and I told him what I'd be wearing," and then silence. "Don't be stupid, of course I deleted it," and then more silence. Thabisa thought Tamara was coming out. She didn't want to be caught standing there with her ear against the door listening in. She took off her shoes and was ready to tiptoe back to her desk when Tamara spoke again.

"I need an extra two grand, and I've got two and a half," and then more silence. "I'll take it from you tomorrow, just don't forget. I give him the money tomorrow and he'll have it for me next week."

Thabisa walked back to the office and when Tamara came in she pretended she hadn't heard anything. She sat at her desk and

scrolled on Facebook again. What the hell was Tamara up to now? What did she need all that cash for tomorrow? Maybe she was going to pay for her lessons. But she had said she wasn't going to waste her time on them. Maybe she had changed her mind. This was too much, Thabisa needed to breathe.

Something was up and she wanted to know what.

Tell us what you think: *What is Tamara planning on doing with the cash?*

Chapter

6

The next day Thabisa arrived at work extra early. It was no use staying at home when she couldn't sleep. This Tamara business was really working on her mind and she needed to know what was going on. But she didn't want to think about it now: she had a test at midday. She went on to the site and refreshed her memory again using the online practice test. Aced it once again.

Then she opened her personal folder and worked on the mock ads she usually did when she was down or bored. They made her feel better.

Ntando came in at 7:20 and was shocked to see her there.

"I would say you slept here, but you weren't wearing that yesterday," he said as he walked passed her desk.

Thabisa smiled and mumbled, "What would you know? You don't see me."

She heard Ntando moving about in his office and wondered if he usually came in this early. She got up to make some coffee, still thinking about Tamara and what she was up to. When she got back to her desk Ntando was standing there, over her computer, scrolling on whatever he was looking at.

She couldn't read his face, but she knew she'd be fired now. She couldn't remember whether she left the screen on Facebook or some other site. 'Losing your job over Facebook' - she could just see her next status update.

"What are these?" Ntando asked without looking at her, his face still on the computer. Thabisa couldn't move. She didn't know whether he was angry or not; she didn't want to get close.

"I'm sorry. I couldn't sleep so I came in early. But too early to start calling, so I was just looking at Facebook, that's all. I'll never do it again."

"What?" Ntando turned and looked her confused. "I mean these - these ads. Where did you get them from?"

Thabisa remembered she had been working on her mock ads. Oh, that was what he meant.

"I made them," she said slowly, her voice uncertain.

"These are brilliant," Ntando said. "Do you have more of them?" he asked.

"Yeah, folders full," she said, walking to the computer to show him.

There were so many ads. Some for clients she didn't close and some for those she did. It helped her cope when she didn't sell a client. Then she would just sit and make something, as though she could say to them: "This is what you're missing out on."

"Come to a breakfast meeting with me," Ntando said, smiling. He had beautiful white teeth and a deep dimple on his right cheek. Thabisa wondered why she hadn't noticed them before.

"I have that test," she said.

"I'll have you there on time, promise."

"Who will take charge of the office?"

"I think it can stand still till Tamara gets back," he said, turning to get his things from his office. "Besides, it's not like clients are queuing to get through on the telephone." He smiled again. And Thabisa felt her stomach heat up. This was a bad idea. But if it got her into the good books of the boss, why the hell not? She took her purse and walked out with him.

"Lovely dress," Ntando said, holding the door for her. She smiled to herself and held tightly on to her handbag. Ntando locked the office and went to open the passenger door for her. His GTI Sport was sleek and all-leather inside. This was style, Thabisa thought as they drove off to their meeting.

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When Ntando dropped her off at the Fish Hoek Traffic Department, Thabisa was so happy that she was walking on air. She

walked in there a new person. The meeting had been amazing and the food, simply amazing, and the ride to the meeting and back... Ntando was no longer the self-centred thirty-year-old prick she thought he was. That was all just a persona - to keep the boundaries between the employees and the employer. Sometimes the lines could be blurred and easily crossed. He didn't want that.

They had talked about everything under the sun. He liked jazz and soul music, he was a middle child and very protective of his little brother. His parents were both teachers and were now retired. She had so much to talk about with him that she wanted to talk more.

"You know, I'm harsh sometimes. But it's because I want the best for my business," Ntando had said on the ride back from the meeting. "You've got a great talent. Don't let anyone stop you from achieving it, not even me."

Thabisa was the first one to finish her test. She was marked and had passed, as she knew she would. On any other day she

would've been nervous and sweating about the test. But today she didn't even care. She was just happy.

But as she walked out of the centre, heading back to the train station, she saw something.

There was Tamara in her new dress, standing with an older man, doing what she did best, giggling.

Thabisa was about to greet her and show her learner's but it seemed the two were having a rather intense conversation. So Tamara ducked behind a car in the parking lot. She wanted to see what they were doing. The driving test area was deserted, save for the two of them. Thabisa's phone vibrated in her bag. She quickly took it out, afraid it would ring, in case she had forgotten to put it on silent for the test.

It was a message from Ntando.

Have a client and need your help.

Come straight back when you're done.

Just as she was about to put it away, she saw Tamara taking out a brown envelope. Really, brown! Thabisa thought. Why was it that

people always used brown envelopes when they wanted to be inconspicuous? A brown was as bright as a white bleach mark on a black top. It said 'Look at me, I don't belong here'.

Thabisa quickly opened her camera and started recording a video. The hand-over, the exchange, the handshake, the smiles: it was captured. It was clear what Tamara was doing. All that money she was talking about and the secret signals. This was it. She hadn't planned on taking the lessons because she planned to buy the damn thing. The stupid cheat! But now Tamara was busted.

Tell us: *Would you ever do what Thabisa did: film someone in the middle of a corrupt act? What would you do with the evidence? Would you ever bribe an official? Why?*

Chapter

7

The rest of the day Thabisa couldn't concentrate. She had returned to the office and found Tamara there, giggling her annoying laugh and making stupid jokes with the clients. Thabisa wanted to walk up to her and tell her: 'I know!'

But what good would that do?

Even with the designer dress that was unmistakably one of a kind marking her, Tamara could worm her way out of anything; she was a sly fox. The more she giggled the more Thabisa felt annoyed and wanted to punch her in the face.

"What do you want?" Tamara asked Thabisa.

Thabisa hadn't realised that she was standing in front of Tamara with an if-looks-could-kill expression on her face.

"I saw you. I know what you did. And you won't get away with it," Thabisa said before she could stop herself.

"What? What're you on about?"

Ntando opened his office door and saved Tamara. "Thabisa, you're back. Good, please come here."

Thabisa stood glaring at Tamara, the look telling her that this wasn't over. Then she walked to her desk to put down her bag.

"You're such a freak. Loser!" Tamara said as Thabisa opened Ntando's door.

That girl had such a nerve. But Thabisa needed to focus right now. The last thing she needed was Ntando thinking she was unstable at the first challenge she faced.

"Ntando, I'm leaving now. See you tomorrow," Tamara called from the door.

They were so into the ad thing that they hadn't noticed the time. It was 4:30 already and they were lost in their design.

"You should get going then," Ntando said looking at the time.

"It's fine. I've got no cats waiting for me at home," Thabisa said, not really wanting to go. "Besides, we shouldn't break momentum. Unless you have plans, in which case, you can go."

"No, no. No plans," Ntando smiled at her.

Then his Facebook alerted him to something. He checked quickly. He had 'liked' Tamara's photo of her dress and she had tagged him in one of her comments:

Compliments of Mr Ntando Ramabula.

"It is a beautiful dress; it looks good on her," Thabisa said, trying to mask the bitterness in her voice.

Ntando didn't answer for a while. "You know, if you get your license first the job will be yours. It was made for you," he smiled at her.

"Some things are just not meant for us."

Thabisa avoided his eyes.

"Look, I know Tamara is a bit much. But her ways are good for my business. She's not hurting anyone. I can't fire her for flirting her way to the top. It's not against the law," he said, walking around the table and sitting

down. "You need to be a little more... assertive. You know this job is for you, so why let it slip away?"

"Maybe I should be heading home tonight," Thabisa said. She had a lot on her mind and now this talk was depressing and confusing her. "I'll take these home and bring them back tomorrow."

"No, we'll do them together here another time," he said smiling. "I like working with you. Enjoy your evening."

She went home - even though her heart was telling her to stay. But she needed to decide about this Tamara issue. Tamara couldn't get away with it; she couldn't get away with stealing this job. No, Thabisa would fight.

But how?

There was one great source of information; the internet. Facebook. She logged on and posted a status.

What do you do when the world favours the lazy and corrupt?

Before she got off the train the comments were lining up.

You take a stand and report it!

If you don't speak up then you're no better than them all!

Gal, then you get lazy and corrupt too 😏

The whole world is lazy and corrupt. Look at our government.

Blow the whistle! Corruption Watch

They are corrupt too. Who can you trust?

If you ain't got money, you'll never get anywhere - rich get richer!

A little faith in the system would surprise you.

That was it: Corruption Watch.

She quickly Googled 'Corruption Watch', and there was their site as the first link. After reading some guidelines on how to report a case of corruption, Thabisa decided she would do it anonymously and let the law take its course.

There was no link to add the video she had taken, so she decided to 'like' them on Facebook. She inboxed them the video and said she would like to stay anonymous.

If this was meant to be, then it would be.

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The next morning she went to work as usual. Fridays were meant to be short and she was looking forward to working with Ntando again. Tamara was out of her hands; she had done what she thought was right and there was nothing more she could do.

She had just finished making herself a cup of coffee and it was a bit early for Tamara or Ntando to be in, so she did what she did best in the mornings: watched the Wendy Williams show on YouTube. Wendy was real and made her feel good. She talked about real issues.

Then her phone rang. It was Ntando. "Hello?" she answered.

"Is Tamara there?" Ntando asked without even a 'hello'.

"Ahh, no. She comes in at 7:45. Why?"

"I'm on my way," he said and hung up.

What was going on? Why was Ntando suddenly wanting Tamara so early? She checked her Facebook and there it was: Viral Video of the Day! Corruption Exposed! She had liked Corruption Watch's Facebook page so she got their newsfeeds. And that meant all her friends saw what she saw too. And one of her friends on Facebook was Ntando.

He must've seen the video and recognised the dress; the one-of-a-kind that he gave to Tamara. Her face wasn't shown but Corruption Watch knew at which centre this had taken place, thanks to their anonymous tip-off.

Some people who were common friends were already commenting on it!

Dumb b*\$%ch

Sies!

Ntando arrived at 7:30 and looked around the office. He was angry. Thabisa had never seen him so angry. He was livid.

"As soon as Tamara comes in, send her to me."

Then he went in to his office and banged the door behind him. He knew. Ntando had seen the video. Tamara was busted.

She walked in bouncing and happy, giggling her annoying laugh. But Thabisa wasn't annoyed today. She smiled at Tamara and even greeted her.

"Good morning Tamara. Ntando would like to see you."

Tamara went in and shut the door. Within a minute there was shouting and arguing. Tamara crying and begging, saying sorry over and over again. Ntando yelling for her to go and never come back.

"And don't use me as a reference wherever you're going!" he said, and slammed the door behind her.

Thabisa said nothing. She sat at her desk and smiled. She smiled but she felt bad.

Watching Tamara crying uncontrollably was not nice. But she couldn't help but smile. Ntando only came out of his office at lunch time.

"I'm starving. Wanna grab something to eat?"

“Who will run the office?” Thabisa smiled.

“I’m sure it’ll stand still till we get back and find someone permanent to do that,” Ntando smiled, showing his perfect teeth and holding the door open for Thabisa.

In the car she knew she had to ask. “So what will happen to Tamara now?”

“I don’t know. The video doesn’t show her face but I know it’s her. So maybe the cops will do their jobs and arrest the official. They know where he works.”

“Yeah, there’s hope in our system yet,” she said and smiled.

THE END

Tell us: *What do you think is the biggest cause of corruption? How would you go about reducing corruption in our society?*