

Maria's Child

(van) = vernacular dialogue

Ext. Forest - Late Afternoon

**COLOUR GRADING - brown green/sharp/dark*

Two young girls are running away from something. They are crying, scared and desperately pacing through the bushes. Exhaustion fills their young lungs as they try to escape. The girls are immune to the grazes and cuts from branches and thorns, on their fast paced journey to safety. They are terrified. They constantly look back to check if they are still being chased; they are.

Fade out:

Credits start

Ext. Saunders Home Driveway- Night

It's pouring with rain outside. The roaring sound of thunder is heard and lightning randomly illuminates the night.

A beautiful and slender built Maria (33yrs), dressed in a nightgown, runs up to a parked car; a Mercedes Benz sports coupe'. She looks inside and knocks on the passenger window. A scruffy and frustrated Joshua (18) inclines his seat and unlocks the doors.

Cut to:

Int. Josh's Car - Night

Maria is on the passenger seat inside the sports car, as a disturbed Joshua opens up to her.

JOSH

She won't even listen to me. Her mind is made up Ria, it's like she doesn't even care what I think.

MARIA

Okay, and what *do* you think?

JOSH

Well- huh- I don't know, you know, I'm not sure. I mean she does make a good point; that we're young and the situation could mess up our future and what not.

There's silence. Only the sounds of rain falling on the vehicle are audible. Maria stares at the confused teen as he scratches his hair, panicking.

MARIA (annoyed)

Joshua, look at me.

Maria grabs Joshua by the chin to face her.

MARIA (conti'd)

Do what you know is right. Don't follow Bianca's stupid decisions for the sake of agreeing.

JOSH (frustrated)

I don't know Ria, I just don't know.

Lightning illuminates the car momentarily, with thunderous sounds.

JOSH (teary eyed)

I don't want to lose her. But I also don't want her to resent me for forcing her to go through with it.

MARIA (fierce)

If it means losing her; then so be it, boy.

They both pause and absorb a brief silence.

JOSH

It's just the thought of being without her after all this time ...

MARIA

Look at it this way; if she breaks up with you at a time like this, then she doesn't deserve you and you're better off without her.

Tears fall down Josh's face.

Sounds of thunder are still audible.

JOSH

Have you ever felt worthless Ria, and out of control?

MARIA (worried)

No man Josh. You can't think that way.

JOSH

I feel powerless Ria, you know. I feel useless -

MARIA (jumpy)

Okay that's it. You need to get out of this car,
right now. Stop thinking about her, eat, go to bed
and wake up good as new. Come on let's go.

JOSH (depressed)

Sure, sure I'll come in just now.

MARIA (concerned)

Time heals everything, y'know. In a couple of
years you'll look back and laugh at all of this.

Josh isn't convinced.

Maria studies the boy intensely, then steps out of the
sports car, into the rain and runs back inside the house.

Ext. Suburban Neighbourhood – Morning

We pan across an aerial view of an up-market suburban neighbourhood.

Cut to:

Int. Saunder's Mansion-Morning

Dressed in a cream silk pin striped suit, an elegant looking Sarah Saunders (40, elegant and energetic) walks into the kitchen as Maria washes dishes. Sarah is busy sending text messages on her phone with her one hand as she uses the other to place her briefcase on the table.

SARAH

Please wrap me up something, I'm so late Ria.
I'm gonna have to grab a bite in the car.

MARIA

Already done ma'am.

Maria hands her a lunch box.

SARAH

You're a life saver dear.

Sarah puts her lunch inside her briefcase and closes it.

Peter Saunders, a tall chubby 45 year old man walks into as kitchen.

PETER

Morning Ria.

MARIA

Morning sir.

Sarah kisses Peter as she heads for the door.

SARAH

Bye love, don't forget to call me about the PTY issue.

Sarah snatches her car keys from the keys hanger.

PETER

Will do, cheers sweetie.

Peter scratches around in the fridge

MARIA's POV: Through the window, we see Sarah's luxury car reverse.

Maria turns around to Peter.

MARIA

Sorry Sir, I'm just wondering if I can please go see my brother this morning. I'll be back early in the afternoon.

PETER

No problem, take all the time you need. Do you know if Joshua's gonna be around though?

MARIA

I'll ask him.

PETER

Okay you do that. I must run, cheerio.

Peter grabs his briefcase and key from the key hanger.

PETER: (Conti'd)

Be sure to say hi to Virginia for us.

MARIA

I will sir, thank you.

PETER

Bye bye now.

Peter exits too.

Maria is left cleaning up.

Ext. Saunders home Patio - Morning

Josh is listening to music on he's i-pod, watching the beautiful ocean scenery while simultaneously smoking weed. He seems deeply at peace until the back head slap of Maria's hand breaks his somber state of mind.

JOSH:

What the hell?

Josh removes the earphones.

MARIA

What the hell do you think you're doing Josh?

JOSH (annoyed)

What??

MARIA

What are you smoking Josh?

JOSH

Nothing man.

MARIA

Give that thing to me right now, I'm serious.

JOSH

It isn't weed, it's ... it's just hmm ... tabacco.

MARIA

Don't be clever with me.

JOSH

Okay, okay ill just keep it with me. I won't use it again, promise.

MARIA

Joshua, now!

Josh reluctantly hands it over.

MARIA

You back to smoking this poison now?

JOSH

Huh ... no, not really, I was just ...

Maria shakes her head.

MARIA(interrupting)

Anyway, I'm leaving for a couple of hours. Make sure you lock up if you're not gonna be around.

JOSH

Okay, I will.

MARIA

We're gonna speak about this when I come back.

JOSH

Sure.

Maria stares at the kid momentarily and unsuccessfully trying to hide her concern.

MARIA

Anyway how are you feeling today?

JOSH (smiling)

I'm in high spirits Ria.

Maria looks at him suspiciously.

MARIA

Good. I'll be back in the afternoon.

She leaves.

Joshua waits until she's closed the front door behind her as she leaves. He then pulls another joint from his shirt pocket, and lights it up again.

He's troubled.

Cut to:

We fly over squatter camps, shacks and four roomed houses in the township. We see school kids flirting with one another. We see scholars wearing sagging pants and shirt collars sticking out. The pavements have old women selling fly infested food amongst noisy taxi drivers that openly display their negligence for all traffic laws. The girls wear make up and short gyms.

Maria seems to know a lot of people in the township, as she walks past them, waving.

She walks past the filth and reaches a particular location nearby squatter camps situated along a huge riverbed.

Cut to:

Int. Maria's Home/Brothers shack - afternoon

Maria is wiping sweat off of her sleeping brother, Thabo. She observes his condition in pity and neatens his pills and medication. Thabo is a skinny, light skinned man with a severe rash across the side of his face as a result of his illness.

She expresses disappointment as she sees a hidden bottle of vodka and ladies hi heels by his bedside.

She stand and leaves him.

We pan across a river.

Ext. Maria's home, backyard - Afternoon

Maria's Mother (67, petite and talkative) is hanging washing on her line while chatting to Maria.

MOTHER (van)

So are you buying a car tomorrow if you pass?

MARIA (van)

Ma, I can barely afford to pay for Vuyo's school fees, how am I gonna buy a car?

MOTHER (van)

I don't know, you young people have various ways of generating income.

MARIA (van)

Okay I'm not sure what you're getting at, but anyway - I'm concerned about Thabo, how's he coping, honestly?

MOTHER (sad) (van)

I'm starting to lose hope baby. He's not taking his pills at all, he's still drinking liquor, still bringing home different girls - I just don't know anymore.

They share a moment of silence

MARIA (van)

And Vuyo, how's her new job?

The mood lightens.

MOTHER (van)

She seems happy, really happy. I'm not sure I'm happy about her wearing all that make-up and wearing hi-heels and all that stuff though.

MARIA (van)

Really, what time does she come home?

A plump bubbly Vuyo walks in on them. She's followed by her friend, Thembisa who's in a short skirt, wearing make up slightly overdone.

VUYO (van)

At 6 o'clock, and that's not late coz it's summer now, the sun is still out.

Maria hugs her 18yr old sibling.

MARIA (van)

So how much is the salary, sisi?

VUYO (van)

None of your bees wax.

MOTHER (van)

Don't be silly Vuyo, your sister asked you a question.

Maria looks at Vuyo's friend with a disgusted look.

THEMBISA (cheeky)

Hello sisi Maria.

MARIA (disinterested)

Hi.

Maria turns to Vuyo.

MARIA (Conti'd)

Yes?

VUYO (sulking) (van)

About R300 a week.

MARIA (van)

Good, that's about 3months school fees covered all by yourself.

VUYO (van)

No sis Ria I can't, I need clothes. I have absolutely nothing nice to wear.

MARIA (van)

I know baby but you first have to start with the balance of your school fees, *then* think about flashy clothes.

VUYO (van)

But sisi ...

MARIA (interrupting) (van)

But nothing, I can't pay for an employed person sweetie, and besides it's a small balance that's left.

VUYO (van)

No, that's not fair sisi because -

MOTHER (yelling) (van)

Stop behaving like a brat Vuyo.

MARIA (serious) (van)

You're growing up now, you need to understand that every action has a consequence. I tell you all the time that, life is just about the choices you make.

Vuyo rolls her eyes, bored.

MARIA (conti'd) (van)

You pay school fees *today* - you buy many shoes
later. You buy shoes *today* - you *later* get no job
or shoes because of no education - do you
understand?"

Vuyo is still disinterested

VUYO (van)

Whatever!

MARIA (van)

I have to get back guys, wish me luck for
tomorrow.

MOTHER (van)

We'll be praying for you love.

Maria stands to hug her mother.

MOTHER

You been able to sleep lately?

MARIA (van)

This week hasn't been too bad. Just tossing and
turning a little. Anyway I've gotta run Ma, is
there anything short?

Her mother thinks for a second.

MOTHER (van)

Just sugar and paraffin baby.

Maria passes her mom a R20 note and hugs her.

MOTHER (remembering) (van)

Oh, I nearly forgot. Lwazi is coming back and I think for good this time.

Maria is disinterested.

Vuyo smiles mischievously.

MOTHER (conti'd/grinning) (van)

His Mother tells me he's a big shot sergeant or general with the police now.

MARIA (van)

Well, good for him.

Maria hugs Vuyo and whispers in her ear.

MARIA (whispering) (van)

I told you about being friends with Thembisa, she's older than you, she's trashy too.

Thembisa spots Maria's warning against her.

Vuyo plays it down with a silly giggle

VUYO (van)

Okay, cheers then sisi Ria.

Maria leaves, acting unmindful of Thembisa's presence.

Thembisa giggles silently and signals to Vuyo, asking Vuyo to walk her home.

Vuyo obliges.

Ext. Location/Township Streets - Afternoon

THEMBISA (van)

She doesn't even wanna see me hey?

VUYO (van)

I don't want to lie to you my friend. She's not a fan of yours.

They both laugh as they walk through the township.

THEMBISA (van)

Well whatever, I can't worry about such. Mkhuseleli is taking me out on a date tomorrow. He says I'm gonna get the shock of my life.

VUYO (van)

So it's getting serious now, you really like him hey?

THEMBISA (van)

Well he treats me with respect. The whole coconut thing is cute and fun you know, we'll see.

We move away from them, exposing the entire township: WIDE

VUYO (van) (offscreen)

Where do you think he's taking you?

THEMBISA (van)

Not a clue.

VUYO (van)

And what are you wearing?

THEMBISA (van)

That's a good question girlfriend. What do you have, I can borrow?

Fade out:

Fade to:

Int. Saunders Mansion - Night

Sarah comes back from work late with groceries; Josh is smsing Bianca while rested in front of the TV in the lounge.

Sarah walks up to Joshua.

SARAH:

You still up big boy?

Sarah strokes him on the head.

JOSH

Barely.

SARAH:

Go to bed love, I'll switch off everything.

JOSH:

Okay, in a second.

SARAH:

Your dad upstairs? I didn't see his car.

JOSH

Nah, he called and said he'd be working late.

Sarah is annoyed.

SARAH

And Maria?

Josh is still sending text messages.

JOSH

She's in her room, mom.

Cut to:

Ext. Forest - late afternoon

**COLOUR GRADING - brown green/sharp/dark*

Two young girls are running away from something. They are crying, scared and desperately pacing through the bushes. Exhaustion fills their young lungs as they try to escape. The girls are immune to the grazes and cuts from branches and thorns on their fast paced journey to safety. They are terrified. They constantly look back to check if they are still being chased; they are. They continue to sprint away from the imminent danger.

Cut to:

Int. Saunders Mansion/MARIA bedroom - Night

Maria suddenly wakes up in a sweat, realizing that she's been dreaming.

She stands to drink a pill and tries to rest again.

Stuck up on her wall are pictures of Princess Diana, the Buddha, Oprah and Winnie Mandela.

Momentarily, she gets up to change the wet pillowcases for a fresh new pair. She dives back on the bed to rest. She's unable to shut her eyes

Fade to:

Int. Saunders Mansion- Morning

A chubby and hip Mandla (17yrs) walks inside Josh's home with his girlfriend. Maria is seated on the kitchen table with her friend Sindi (39yrs, plump, pleasant) as she shows the youngsters in.

Maria is concentrated on the Driver's License Manual in front of her.

MANDLA

Watsup Ria, you good?

MARIA

I'm well thanks Mandla.

He waves at Sindi, and then turns back to Maria.

MANDLA

This is my new girlfriend Lisa, pretty hey?

He smiles mischievously.

MARIA (disinterested)

Yes she is, Josh is upstairs, boy.

Sindi finds Mandla humorous.

As the teenagers head for Josh's room, Peter comes down and towards the kitchen.

MANDLA

Hi there Mr Saunders.

PETER:

Mandla you monster!

They shake hands and cross paths.

Peter walks inside the kitchen.

PETER (conti'd, to MARIA)

Hi there Sindi.

SINDI

Hello Mr. Saunders.

PETER (to Maria)

So are you nervous about your test this afternoon.

MARIA

Very nervous, I'm afraid I'll just forget everything.

PETER (interrupting):

You'll be fine man, today is the beginning of new and exciting things for you, Ria.

Peter grabs a muffin out of the fridge and shuts it.

MARIA

Thank you, Sir. I really hope so.

PETER (kidding)

You're a winner Ria, just remember: brake, clutch and accelerator. If you know what those are, then you've passed.

Peter laughs.

MARIA

I wish it was that simple.

PETER

I gotta go ladies, good luck.

MARIA:

Thank you Sir.

Peter leaves.

Sindi stands up to leave.

SINDI (sulking) (van)

Let me leave as well, you're not paying attention to me anyway.

MARIA (van)

Would you rather I pay attention to you and fail, or study without interruptions, and pass?

SINDI (van)

Whatever, I'm leaving.

MARIA (van)

Don't be like that friend. But cheers. We'll chat later.

SINDI (van)

Cheers.

Sindi turns around, remembering.

SINDI (conti'd/van)

Oh, so you've picked a decent dress right?

MARIA (van)

This isn't a fashion show, Sindi.

SINDI (van)

No man, I'm talking about church. You promised you'd come this week remember?

MARIA (moaning) (van)

I didn't.

SINDI

Yes you did. We were arguing about your silly reincarnation theories. And I told you that the bible says nothing about before and after lives. We took a bet, and you couldn't find proof, so you promised you'd come to church with me this week.

Maria rolls her eyes.

MARIA (van)

Yah whatever. I'll see church after the test, if I pass.

SINDI (van)

Your situation is so sad. It really is. There are some cute guys there as well, come on man.

MARIA (van)

You mean like the priest you have a crush on.

SINDI (van)

It's not a crush; we just enjoy each others company, that's all.

MARIA (van)

Okay whatever girl, I'll see. Bye bye.

Sindi shakes her head and leaves.

Maria is glued to her K53 Drivers Manual.

Cut to:

Ext. Lion Park - Day

We see various wild animals in their encaged habitats: tigers, lions, crocodiles, and ostrich.

Thembisa is with Mkhuseleli, a skinny and fragile looking young man. He looks peculiar and almost sickly. The couple are having a blast, taking pictures and laughing merrily.

MKHUSELELI

I was crossing my fingers that you'd like it here.
I wasn't sure whether you like animals or not.

THEMBISA

I love them, this is awesome thanks baby.

Mkhuseleli takes a photo of her as she watches the crocodiles feed.

He stares at her with loving eyes and walks up to her, giving her a peck on her lips.

THEMBISA

And what's that for?

MKHUSELELI

Cos' you make me happy.

Thembisa blushes and points at a caged leopard.

THEMBISA (van)

That's a jaguar right?

MKHUSELELI (van)

I think it's a leopard baby, I'm not sure myself,
I'll ask the ranger for you, and get us something
to drink.

Mkhuseli runs off to query about the animal.

Thembisa is particularly fascinated by the leopard. She
stares at it with genuine admiration.

Ext- MANDLA's Parents house/Pool area - Day

Josh and his friends are having a braai/barbeque at
Mandla's place. It is the union of drunk, wealthy and
spoilt youngsters, having fun at a mansion pool area.
The teenagers are smoking, drinking and flirting with one
another.

Excluded from everyone else are Josh and his gorgeous
coloured girlfriend Bianca (18yrs). They are having a
heated discussion in a corner.

BIANCA

I got a number.

JOSH

Who is it?

BIANCA:

A doctor, a professional surgeon that specializes in these sorts of things.

JOSH (panicking)

I don't know baby.

BIANCA

What do you mean you don't know? He's a medical surgeon that can help us, dude.

JOSH:

Help you maybe.

BIANCA (surprised):

Excuse me?

JOSH

I don't know, you know. I'm not sure we've thought it through properly.

BIANCA (angry)

What choice do we have Josh? Don't be stupid.

We see a couple of the kids in the pool gulping down their beers. They flirt and fondle. Others are snorting cocaine secretly in a corner.

JOSH

I don't know, I think we should give it a bit more thought and maybe it wouldn't be so bad to ... to ... you know ... keep it ...

BIANCA (startled)

What, are you high? Where's all of this coming from all of a sudden?

Josh moves closer to Bianca.

JOSH (desperate)

Do you still love me baby?

BIANCA

What's that gotta do with anything now?

JOSH

Do you still?

BIANCA (annoyed)

Yes, yes I do Josh.

JOSH (panicking)

I love you too baby, I love you with all my heart and I figure if we're still in love, maybe we could make means and ways to keep the baby.

BIANCA

Okay now listen to me - my parents would kill me, yours would too! We don't have jobs, we're too

young, we don't know the first thing about raising babies, should I continue?

She hits him hard on his chest.

BIANCA (conti'd)

What's gotten into you?

Josh paces up and down in confusion and fear. He scratches his head furiously.

JOSH

Do you even know how much it costs?

BIANCA

About 5 grand or so.

A worried Josh ponders.

JOSH

What if it's our destiny to have this one child B? What if, I don't know, God meant for us to have this one child. And now we're wanna get rid of it. I reckon this is a blessing baby.

BIANCA

A blessing that I walk around with a huge belly for nine months while everyone is laughing at me? I don't think so. Just take me home Josh, I don't feel sociable.

We see the kids running up and down, half dressed and still acting the fool around the pool.

Joshua and Bianca leave.

Ext. Lion Park - Afternoon

Mkhuseli wants to take a picture of Thembisa holding one of the lion cubs. She refuses, scared.

THEMBISA (van)

No, sorry baby I can't, I mean it's still a lion.

MKHUSELI (van)

Love, it's a couple of months old I promise it won't bite.

THEMBISA (van)

No but what if -

MKHUSELI (interrupting) (van)

Please sweetie, I want to enlarge these photos. Just once, please.

He laughs at her as she holds the cub awkwardly. He takes the picture. He then asks another couple to take pictures of him and her.

They can't take their eyes off of each other as they caress.

Int. License testing grounds - Afternoon

A nervous Maria drives the testing vehicle with caution.

Beat/Timecut:

She waits eagerly at the drivers test waiting room with Sindi.

SINDI (van)

Listen whatever happens, it was worth it, and you'll get a second chance if it doesn't work out this time around.

MARIA (van)

All you're doing is scaring me now.

SINDI (van)

I'm just saying, many people test 6 - 7 times before they pass sometimes.

MARIA (van)

You're not helping at all Sindiswa.

SINDI (van)

Okay, okay

MARIA (van)

Wasn't it you that was going on about how easy this is gonna be and how I've already got...?

A loud yell from the driving instructor, for Maria, interrupts the moment.

Maria grabs Sindi's hand and looks at her worriedly.

SINDI (van):

It's yours, you've passed. Go take it now.

Maria stands and walks into the official's office.

Seconds later she returns with a big grin on her face.

She and Sindi scream up and down with joy.

Int. Josh's car - late afternoon

Josh drops Bianca off at her home.

JOSH

I'll give you a call a little later. I still reckon we should give it a bit more thought baby, you know.

BIANCA

You know what, you're really pissing me off Josh. I'm gonna pretend you didn't just say that.

She opens the door to leave.

JOSH (Shouting)

I'll come see you later on, yeah?

BIANCA

Maybe tomorrow dude. Don't feel like company tonight, sorry.

She walks away. He drives off.

Int. MKHUSELI's car - Night

Mkhuseli returns to the township to drop Thembisa off at her place.

The lovebirds stare in each other's eyes lustfully.

MKHUSELI (van)

So when can I see you again?

THEMBISA (van)

Anytime, you know that.

MKHUSELI (smiling) (van)

I know baby, just wanted to hear you say it. I'll call you tonight before I sleep, okay?

THEMBISA (van)

I'd like that.

They kiss passionately and part ways.

Thembisa watches him drive off.

She then lights up a cigarette.

She smiles suspiciously.

Int - MARIA's bedroom- Evening

A bubbly Maria is on the phone with her mother. Her one hand is gripping the phone through which she speaks and with the other a pen. She's scribbling something down on a notepad.

MOTHER (van)

I'm so happy for you my child, now you must gather up some money to buy a little car, even if it's a scrap. So long as it gets you from point a - b.

MARIA (van)

With what money Ma?

MOTHER (van)

This is why I say you must save up baby.

MARIA (van)

That'll probably take me ten years; anyway I have more good news.

Maria grows excited.

MARIA (van)

Sarah said she's trying to organize me an interview at her company - an administration job of sorts. She says all I need to do is sort out my CV, and she'll handle the rest.

MOTHER (van)

You have been blessed my child, don't play with such opportunities now Maria. God rarely hands them out twice.

MARIA (van)

I know, it's super right Ma? I'm gonna take full advantage of this opportunity. I'm so happy today, I feel like a kid with a new toy. How's Thabo anyway?

MOTHER (saddened) (van)

He's got a girl over in his flat right now as we speak.

Maria hides her disappointment by distancing the phone momentarily.

MARIA (van)

Fine, I'll talk to him.

MOTHER (van)

Please do dear - he doesn't listen to us.

MARIA (van)

No problem then, okay I gotta go Mama.

MOTHER (van)

Okay goodnight then.

MARIA (van)

Goodnight.

A close up of MARIA's notepad reads:

Curriculum Vitae of Maria Sebe,

Age: 33, Gender: female, Nationality: South African,

Previous work experience ...

She's stuck.

Cut to:

Ext. BIANCA's neighbourhood - Night

From a distance, in his car, an upset Joshua discreetly watches Bianca and a man flirting with one another, beside his car.

Joshua is furious as his eyes begin to water.

He can't take he's eyes off of them.

Bianca and his new friend are laughing and conversing intimately.

Fade to:

Ext. Churchyard - Morning

People are walking inside the church. Maria is with Sindi, and looking very uncomfortable. Sindi is cheerful, showing Maria the ropes. Sindi points at a group of people huddled together dressed in blue.

SINDI (van)

That's our choir, best in province girl dear.

Maria rolls her eyes, bored.

Sindi then points to a couple of identical looking flats behind the church.

SINDI (van)

That's where the pastors live.

MARIA (van)

That's fabulous, I still think this is a bad idea, look at me man, I look horrible.

SINDI (van)

You're not the only ugly person here, I promise you.

MARIA (van)

That's it I'm leaving.

Sindi grabs her.

SINDI (laughing) (van)

I'm just playing man, relax. Plus there are cute guys inside, we'll find you a boyfriend.

Maria gives her a sarcastic look.

They enter the church doors.

Int. Church - Day

Maria is still uncomfortable with her outfit as she repeatedly straightens her skirt and jacket. Hymns are sung.

The Pastors walk in as the congregation stands. Sindi's face lights up.

SINDI (van)

There's pastor Lungelo, he's preaching the word today.

An uninterested Maria sees the short light skinned pastor that Sindi's been raving on about. He has a peculiar look, with tiny oval eyes.

MARIA(van)

Oh please Sindi he's not that cute.

SINDI(van)

You're jealous girlfriend. He's scorching hot.

MARIA(van)

I'm starting to wonder if you like him more as your pastor or a potential boyfriend.

SINDI(van)

You're just jealous because you're not close to someone of significance like I am.

MARIA(van)

Why would I be jealous of-

Maria pauses to look at the pastor again, as if she's noticing something. The congregation opens the service with another hymn.

Maria seems uncomfortable and carefully focuses on Sindi's pastor, as if she knows him.

SINDI(van)

He preaches with such passion and honesty. And he doesn't believe in that reincarnation nonsense

that you're always preaching. There are any before
and after lives - you heathen.

Maria's stare turns into shock and disbelief.
The congregation sits down but Maria remains standing.

SINDI (whispering) (van)
Hey, sit down. Sit down Ria.

She remains standing and staring at the Pastor briefly;
then makes her way to the exit.
Sindi is confused.

Maria vomits outside the churchyard.

Intercut:

Ext - Forest - early evening

***COLOUR GRADING -
brown green/sharp/dark**

*Two young girls race across the thorns and shrubs of the
woods, desperately frightened. They endure grazes and
cuts while sprinting through the bushes in horror.*

Intercut:

Ext-Churchyard -morning

People entering the church watch Maria in amazement.
Maria is dizzy.

Intercut:

Ext- Forest - Early evening

*The girls run, scream, trip, cry, as they dash through
the bushes - scared.*

Cut to:

Ext-Churchyard -morning

Maria searches her bag for something and doesn't find it.
She sweats as she walks away; away from the church to
catch a taxi.

Fade to:

Ext- Gravel road - Early evening

**COLOUR GRADING - brown green/sharp/dark*

*A 16yr old Maria and two friends, Khanya (17, plump) and
Andiswa(16,lightskin, bubbly) are walking on a gravel road
carrying a liter of paraffin, flour and candles. The
weather changes. It begins to drizzle.*

*The girls are worried about the rain as they are dressed in
skirts and t-shirts.*

KHANYA(van)

We'll be soaking wet by the time we get to our location. Should we go through the bush?

Maria looks at Andiswa, worried.

ANDISWA(van)

Yah, I suppose we don't have a choice.

MARIA(van)

Okay let's do it.

We see their location from afar.

Ext. Forest - Early evening/drizzling

***COLOUR GRADING - brown
green/sharp/dark**

The girls walk merrily through the bushes, conversing and clowning.

As they approach a shallow river, they spot three men coming from the opposite direction. It's blurry and dark they can't see them clearly.

KHANYA(van)

Can you guys see those people coming?

They look at each other, concerned, and begin to walk slowly.

MARIA(worried) (van)

Yes I see them, should we turn back?

The girls stare at each other unknowingly.

The girls walk slowly through the woods, cautious of the men ahead.

The three men are speaking loud and approaching from the opposite direction, fast.

ANDISWA (scared) (van)

They're getting closer guys, what do we do?

MARIA(van)

Let's hide and let them pass, and then we'll -

ANDISWA (relieved) (van)

Oh guys don't worry. It's Bhut Sango and his friends from Gomora, we know each other. He lives close to grandma's place there - no stress.

Khanya and Maria still aren't completely convinced, though they follow a confident Andiswa.

Both parties now spot each other now.

ANDISWA (shouting) (van)

Hello Bhut Sango, it's me Andiswa.

The men walk up to Andiswa.

*Their drunken eyes stare at the teens in admiration.
Maria and Khanya are still a few meters behind Andiswa.*

ANDISWA (shouting/conti'd) (van)

It's me Andiswa from ...

Sango punches Andiswa hard with his fist.

She is knocked out, unconscious.

*Khanya and Maria witness the attack and just stand there,
dumbstruck.*

*The other two men move closer to Maria and Khanya as they
continually walk backward in horror.*

*Maria and Khanya drop the paraffin and candles, turn around
and sprint as quickly as they can. Panicking, they run
ducking and diving through the thick bush; screaming for
help. The teenagers race across the thorns and shrubs of
the woods, desperately terrified. They sprint as quickly as
they can. As fatigue catches up, the girls are eventually
tackled down on the ground, beaten up ruthlessly by
overpowering drunkards and get their legs forced open.*

*One of the drunk men is an extremely light skinned man with
tiny hazel oval eyes; Lungelo. Pastor Lungelo and his
friends rape the girls.*

They all have their way with the girls.

Int. Taxi - Morning

Maria is in a moving taxi. She's terrified.

Fade to:

Ext. Thembisa's place - Night

Thembisa and three of her male friends are sitting in her garage. They are sipping beers, intently listening to a friend speak.

Friend#1

All you do is shove this card in the ATM machine and then you pull it out. You then pretend as though the machine won't take your card. The objective is to get the other person to insert his or her card in the machine, to check whether it's your card or the machine, that's faulty.

Thembisa and the other goons seem confused.

Friend#1 (cont'd) (van)

Once the client has inserted his card and drawn out his cash and gone. Then you shove this black card back in the machine and you do as you please. The client's details will still remain after he has left, so the machine thinks the client is drawing out money a second time.

THEMBISA (van)

But surely if you put the card in a second time,
you'd need the client's pin number.

Friend#1 (van)

That's the tricky part, you need to do it in such
a way that you see the pin.

Friend#2 (van)

Not sure about this, sounds a little risky.

Thembisa's phone rings. It's Mkhuseleli.

She answers.

THEMBISA (van)

Hey baby, how are you?

MKHUSELELI (van)

I'm outside love.

Thembisa is shocked.

THEMBISA (Surprised) (van)

You're outside ... now ... at my place?

MKHUSELELI (van)

Yeah I hope I'm not interrupting. I have something
to show you.

THEMBISA (van)

Okay I'll be out in a bit.

She drops the phone.

THEMBISA (conti'd) (van)

Guys I'm sorry I have to go and so do you. I'll leave first, you guys stay. Don't move until I buzz you. When I do it'll mean it's safe for you all to open the garage and go.

Friend #1 (van)

What's this shit about now Thembi?

THEMBISA (van)

Love my brother, love. I got this new young cheese boy from town - he's great. Anyway wait for my buzz.

Thembisa opens the garage, gets out and into Mkhuseleli's car

Int. MKHUSELELI'S car - Night

MKHUSELELI (van)

Hello sweetie.

THEMBISA (van)

Hi, I wasn't expecting you.

MKHUSELI (van)

I know, I'm sorry but I just had to come and show you this.

He's about to pull something out of a plastic packet.

THEMBISA (van)

Okay, but drive up to the next block, my mom doesn't like cars in front of the yard like this.

MKHUSELI (van)

No problem I understand.

They drive up two blocks, in a dark corner at a cul da sac. Mkhuseli parks.

He pulls out a black and white picture of them at the lion park. Around the picture is a gold heart shaped frame, engraved *Thembisa and Mkhuseli*.

Thembisa is blown away.

THEMBISA (van)

Oh I love it, you're so sweet Mkhuseli. It's perfect.

MKHUSELI (smiling) (van)

I'm glad you like it baby.

She takes it and holds it close to her heart as if she's hugging; then leans over to kiss him.

Thembisa takes her top off, Mkhusele follows suite. She unbuckles his belt and unzipped him. He does the same to her. They kiss passionately for a while as they undressed one another.

THEMBISA (van)

Do you have a condom?

MKHUSELE (van)

Yes I -

An elbow brakes Mkhusele's driver's door window. Mkhusele is forcefully pulled out of his car through his window by two men with knives. He screams from the top of his voice.

MKHUSELE (van)

I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

Thembisa is shocked. She steps out to see who's responsible.

Mkhusele is frightened out of his wits as they kick him around.

THUG 1 (van)

Give us your wallet and cellphone you shit.

Thembisa sees the two thugs and shouts.

THEMBISA (van)

Voetsek, it's me you idiots, what the hell are you doing? Voetsek!!

They turn to Thembisa.

THUG (van)

Oh it's you Thembi?

She slaps one of them across the face.

THEMBISA (van)

You two are gonna pay for this Anele! I'm gonna make sure you're punished, you bloody idiots.

Thembisa rushes towards Mkhuseleli to help him.

Mkhuseleli has urinated in his pants.

THEMBISA (van)

I'm so sorry baby.

Mkhuseleli pushes her hand away.

MKHUSELELI (crying) (van)

I'm warning you Thembisa, stay the hell away from me.

He dresses quickly. He's sustained cuts on his arm from the broken glass.

THEMBISA (van)

I'm sorry baby; they're just some silly kids from around here.

Mkhuseli won't hear of it. He gets into his car, throws Thembisa's clothes out through the passenger window and speeds off.

Cut to:

Int. MARIA's room - night

Maria is rested, back first on her bed. She's as still as a statue, just starrng at the ceiling and thinking. She looks at the three ladies on her wall.

Placed on her bedside cupboard is a jug of water, a glass, a half done C.V and headache pills.

She picks up the pills and puts one in her hand. She pours the water into the glass, swallows the pill and drinks.

She takes another two; swallows and drinks again.

She stares at the pills contemplating...

As she is about to pour the whole lot in her hand, suddenly a knock startles her out of her trance.

MARIA (shocked)

Yes?

JOSH

It's me Ria, open up.

Maria opens the door.

MARIA

Yes, how can I help you Josh?

Josh wears a naughty smile.

MARIA (conti'd)

Joshua I have a little headache, can we talk tomorrow?

JOSH

Only if you have a nice executive suit.

MARIA

What?

JOSH (excited)

Mom's just told me to tell you that you have your first interview at the brick plant tomorrow. Says she'll brief you about it all in the morning.

Maria forces a transparently fake smile.

MARIA (stunned)

Tomorrow?

JOSH

Yeah, dude, isn't that great? It's what you always speak about - progressing and stuff. It's coming true Ria. Come here.

Josh hugs Maria, Maria reciprocates.

MARIA

I don't know what to say, I mean that's great news, really wonderful.

JOSH

It is isn't it?

MARIA

Tomorrow you say?

JOSH

Yah. What's the matter?

MARIA

"Nothing. Nothing at all. It's great news. I just wasn't expecting an interview so soon.

JOSH

Listen mom wants to see you early tomorrow morning - to prep you up. You know, how to walk, talk, act and maybe borrow you an outfit in the process.

MARIA

Perfect, yes. Yes I'll see her early tomorrow morning then.

JOSH

Okay, goodnight Ria.

MARIA

Goodnight Josh. Ooh, tell Sarah that I say thank you very very much.

JOSH

Will do.

A jovial Josh runs back inside the house.

Maria gets back inside her room. She clears her pills away, putting them in a drawer.

She lays back first on her bed starring at her wall. Hung up are pictures of Princess DI, Winnie Mandela and Oprah Winfrey.

Fade to:

Int - Company Foyer - Morning

Maria is dressed in a beige slightly oversized pin striped suit, seated opposite the receptionist desk.

The sounds of herself, young Khanya and young Andiswa in the forest have clouded her mind. She mumbles her lines repeatedly to concentrate on the job interview.

RECEPTIONIST

Ms Maria Sebe, you can go in now.

She points to the room Maria is to go inside. Maria stands, reluctantly.

MARIA

Thank you.

Maria is sweating profusely. She walks down the long passage, trying to recite everything that Sarah has advised.

Maria stands outside the door and takes a deep breath. She wipes off her sweat with a hankie and turns the gold plated door knob open, and steps in.

Int - Company Boardroom - Morning

Sarah is seated with two of her colleagues, Phumeza (35, skinny, too much make up) and a chubby Gordon (51, gay) They are seated near one another on a round table, clutching on to their pens and paper.

Maria greets the panel. They respond and ask her to sit down.

She stands momentarily, starring at her boss.

SARAH

You can take a seat Maria.

Maria obeys and sits.

PHUMEZA

Hello Maria, My name is Phumeza Dlamini.

She points at her colleague.

PHUMEZA (conti'd)

And this is Gordon Morrison.

Gordon nods.

PHUMEZA (conti'd)

And you probably don't know this, but that pretty looking lady there is Sarah Saunders.

They all laugh professionally.

PHUMEZA (conti'd)

So, Maria tell us about yourself. Where are you from? Your background and where do you plan to be, say in five years from now?

MARIA

Okay my name is Maria Sebe and I'm working in Ms Sarah's home. I'm the help, my responsibilities -

Gordon rolls his eyes

GORDON

Yes, we know that my dear. Tell us where you're from first. What's Maria's background?

Maria takes a deep breath and tries again.

MARIA

I'm from Kwazakhele, Kwazakhele location just outside of Port Elizabeth, it's a location about twenty kilometers away -

GORDON (interrupting)

Listen sunshine, we want to know about *you*. We know where Kwazakhele is. Tell us about *your* background, who is Maria, what is Maria passionate about? Is she lazy or energetic? Is she creative? etc..

Maria's eyes begin to water. Sounds of the forest nightmare plague her mind.

MARIA

Okay, I grew up with my Mother and twin brother in a ...

She pauses briefly and glances at Sarah.

Gordon is bored out of his wits

MARIA (conti'd)

In a beautiful ten bed roomed mansion. Our mother was educated and a good role model for us.

Sarah drops her head.

MARIA (conti'd)

We had everything from quality clothing to healthy food. We were wealthy. We would never go to bed starving.

Tears fall from Maria's eyes

MARIA (conti'd)

We had security in our high class neighborhood and electricity gates with remote controls.

Sarah's colleagues are confused as they gaze at one another.

MARIA (conti'd, to SARAH)

I'm so sorry ma'am I can't do this

Sarah tries to disguise her anger and embarrassment by interrupting in an extremely professional tone.

SARAH

Maria you need to get yourself together now and -

Maria turns to Sarah's colleagues

MARIA

I'm sorry to all of you too.

The judges remain frozen

Maria stands to leave.

MARIA

I don't think I'm ready to work here at the moment. I am sorry for wasting your time.

Sarah is in disbelief as Maria walks out.

Cut to:

Int - Saunder's home - Day

Maria packs some clothing and stuffs it in a kitbag. She leaves

Cut to:

Ext - Saunders Yard - Day

Maria shuts the huge electric gates behind her as they slam closed.

She walks away.