

Maria's Dream

Radio Play

Cast:

Maria Sebe (In prison, nanny, early 30's)

Sarah Saunders (Business Executive, reserved, mid 50's)

Nicole Martins (Business Executive, polite, 40's)

Gordon Morrison (Business Executive, rude, assertive,
50's)

Mr Miles (High powered lawyer, 50's)

Khanya Madolo (Primary school teacher, early 30's)

Thembisa Moyo (Outspoken, street smart, confident, mid
20's)

Sango (Slimy crooked criminal, liar, late 40's)

Nancy Abrahams (Polite, professional, social worker,
early 60's)

Pastor (Black, gentleman, late 40's)

Pastor's Wife (Black, lady, wheelchair bound, late
40's)

Mkhuseli (Naïve, 18 years old)

FX: HEART BEAT. OFFICE TELEPHONES, PRINTERS,
TYPING AND FAX MACHINES AT A DISTANCE. DOOR
OPENS.

SARAH: Hello. Take a seat, please, Maria.

MARIA (polite/nervous/ African accent): Thank you.

NICOLE: My name is Nicole Martins and this is my
colleague Gordon Morrison. Just the two of us
will be interviewing you.

MARIA: Thanks. Pleased to meet you.

NICOLE: And you obviously know Sarah over there.

SARAH: I'm just here to observe. Act like I'm not
even here.

MARIA: I understand. Thank you.

NICOLE: So, Maria, tell us about yourself. Where're
you from? Let's start with your background.

MARIA: Okay my name is Maria Sebe, and I'm working
in Ms Sarah's home. I'm the help, but I have
a driver's license, I'm ambitious and ...

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

FX: LOUDER HEART BEAT. DEEP BREATHS, INHALING,
EXHALING.

SARAH: Relax Gordon, let her speak.

GORDON: You shouldn't even be here, Sarah. You're her
boss, at home.

SARAH: Whatever! Just let her speak.

MARIA (stuttering): I'm from New B-b-brighton location
just outside of, outside of Port Elizabeth.
It's a location about twenty kilometers away
from ...

GORDON: Listen sunshine, we wanna know about you. We
have maps. We know where New Brighton is.
Tell us about your background - who is Maria,
what's Maria passionate about? Is she lazy or
energetic? Is she creative or does she like
structure and numbers?

MARIA: Sorry, okay, I'm passionate about gender
equality. I think women can do everything men
can. The world is still as ... uhmmn ...
chauvinistic as a hundred years ago.

GORDON: Just tell us about YOU sweetheart! No need
for lesson on gender equality.

MARIA: Sir, you said you want to know what I'm
passionate about.

NICOLE: Just give her a chance, Gordon. Maybe she's getting there.

GORDON (sarcastic): Before Christmas I hope. Fine!

MARIA (panting/stuttering): I'm p-p-passionate about uhmmn, empowering women. I believe that the world, the world needs it. Women are still treated as second grade ... Y'know what, I'm so sorry, friends, I can't do this.

SARAH: Maria, just breathe. Relax. You can do this.

FX: CHAIR SHIFTS AS MARIA STANDS.

MARIA: I'm sorry Ms Sarah. I'm sorry to all of you too.

SARAH: MARIA!

MARIA: I'm very sorry. Goodbye.

FX: DOOR OPENS. LOUD SOUNDS OF TELEPHONES, PRINTERS, FAX MACHINES AND TYPING. DOOR CLOSES.

CROSS CUT DOOR SOUND TO:

FX: STEEL DOORS HITTING IN A HOLLOW ROOM. MEN CHATTING A DISTANCE.

LAWYER: And then you immediately went back home to the township, after the job interview? I need every last detail, Ms Sebe. I'll be a bit pedantic with the info at times. If I'm to defend you successfully, there can't be any surprises in court. Tell me every single detail please.

MARIA: I understand, and you can call me Maria.

LAWYER: Okay.

MARIA: So, before I left I first went back to Ms Sarah's place, my workplace, to pack my bags. Then I went up to her bedroom and took ...I took ... her husband's, Peter's gun. Josh was in the other room playing video games with his buddy.

FX: PEN SCRIBBLING.

LAWYER: Okay. And Josh is your boss Sarah's son.

MARIA: Yes. We've very close.

LAWYER: Very Close? Please explain.

MARIA: His parents are very busy at the office, and they're always overseas. I'm Josh's friend/mom/nanny. He ...uhmmn ... what's the word ...?

LAWYER: Trusts and confides in you ...

MARIA: Yes, confides in me.

LAWYER: Okay, continue please.

MARIA: So yah, I went to Mr Peter's room, took his gun from his sock drawer and headed out to go see my friend Khanya. She's the girl I was with, when we were attacked.

LAWYER: Please give me Khanya's name, surname and home address. Did you keep in constant contact with her, all these years?

MARIA: I didn't. We didn't. When you've been violated the way we were, Sir, sometimes it's best to keep your distance from everyone involved. I hadn't seen Khanya in over seventeen years, before that meeting. It's Khanya Madolo. I don't know her home address. She teaches at St Annes Primary School.

FADE TO:

FX: KIDS PLAYING AND RUNNING AROUND IN THE
BACKGROUND.

KHANYA: Well that's good for him. Whatever.

MARIA: What?

KHANYA: He's obviously moved on. Move on too, Ria.
C'mon. I don't mean to be insensitive, friend
but we're talking about almost two decades
go.

MARIA: EXCUSE ME?

KHANYA: Okay ... you're not hearing me. This isn't
about him. It's about you, Ria. You're
hurting, not him.

MARIA: Oh, so now that he's a 'righteous' man of
God, I must, in fact WE must forget the past?
Act like nothing happened?

KHANYA: I'm not saying that.

MARIA: Then what the hell are you saying, Khanya?
I'm not sure whose side you're on.

KHANYA: Yours obviously. Listen, I'm saying the first
step to moving on is to forgive him, and then
forgive yourself. Ria, you seriously need to

find a professional to talk to - a mature female psychiatrist that understands rape. This grudge you're carrying is giving THEM power, over YOUR life. Why're you letting these scumbags do this to you?

MARIA: You speak like I did this on purpose; like it's my fault somehow.

KHANYA: That's not what I ...

MARIA: I have nightmares about that day, almost every single day. That's seventeen years of sleepless nights, Sisi. So yes, they have some power or significance in my life.

KHANYA: But not in mine.

MARIA: Well, lucky you.

KHANYA: Not luck. The difference between you and I is that I chose to seek help. I opened up about it. I cried.

MARIA: Y'know, I really don't wanna hear this psychiatric shrink crap, please. I just came to tell you that I found one of our attackers, and he's posing as a Pastor. And I think it's maybe time they learnt a lesson. I don't know how or where or when, but something should be done, I reckon.

KHANYA: Ancient history my dear. Ria, as a rape victim, there's nothing worse than keeping quiet. You'll never be able to forgive and move on. That grudge eats away at you, the victim, and it'll make you sick - not to mention that the culprits get to run free, on the streets, to do as they please. You call the cops, open a case, and consult a psychiatrist.

I used to have what my social worker called hyper arousal. I couldn't sleep... I had panic disorders that made it hard to breathe. I'd have sudden bursts of anger ... I was going crazy, literally. They told me later that it was all caused by fear - fear that I wasn't safe. I think that's what you're going through right now.

MARIA: I don't know why I came here, honestly.

FX: PRESSING CELL PHONE BUTTONS.

KHANYA: Let me scroll through my phone contacts. I have an excellent social worker's number - the same lady I dealt with - Susan Abrahams. She's also a survivor. You've gotta see her, Ria, even if it's for one session. She's fantastic.

BEAT.

FX: KIDS PLAYING, RUNNING UP AND DOWN.

KHANYA: Dammit, I think I may have stored her numbers in my other phone, at home.

MARIA: I see. So anyway how's your son doing? Heard you have a boy.

KHANYA: He's fine thanks. He's big and thinks he's a man now. No but this is gonna be my last. I can't have a crèche of children.

Khanya giggles.

KHANYA: Oh here's the number, 073 -

MARIA: Well, I've just had two miscarriages, in the last two years.

KHANYA: What?

MARIA: While you're basking in the glory of having a crèche of kids, and going on about our attack as some minor issue from the past; the Doc says there's a problem with both my uterus and pelvis. I may never give birth because of what happened to us - d'you hear me? After the second miscarriage I wouldn't even let my boyfriend touch me. We broke up as a result. I'm literally alone in this whole mess.

KHANYA: I'm so sorry, Maria. I didn't know.

MARIA: So ... how do we sort that out? Who must I forgive, talk to and give power to - to heal me? Huh? Keep your phone numbers girlfriend. I know what I must do.

FX: CHAIR SHIFTS AS MARIA STANDS.

KHANYA (stunned): Maria just wait a bit.

MARIA: I'll be seeing you, friend.

KHANYA: Uhmmn, uh, wait, Ria.

FX: HAPPY CHILDREN PLAY.

CUT TO:

FX: HARD STEEL DOORS SLAMMING IN A HOLLOW ROOM, AT A DISTANCE. PEOPLE CHAT IN THE BACKGROUND. PEN SCRIBLING.

LAWYER: Let's rewind to all those years back. After you two were attacked, did you open police case? Was there a charge opened against the two culprits? I'll need all that documentation.

MARIA: Nope. We didn't open a case. We didn't even tell anyone.

LAWYER: Ookkaaay ... Why not?

MARIA: Mr Miles, if you've been attacked and raped in the township, at the age of fourteen; the first thing people think is, you have AIDS and you're no longer innocent. You become worthless in a way. And the stigma never leaves you.

LAWYER (clearing his throat): I see. Right ...

MARIA: That's why rapist get away with it, half the time. Victims don't wanna be labeled as filthy and worthless goods.

LAWYER: I get it. But had you opened a case, maybe they'd still be in prison, now.

MARIA: I doubt it. D'you know how easy it was to bribe cops and steal police dockets back then? It probably still is today. The victim doesn't win, Sir, no matter what Khanya says about psychologists and such. I still think it would've been worse to be spoken of as the rape victim, at age 14, who probably has AIDS. Every girl I know that's ever come forward about their attack has regretted it. Maybe it's the lack of professional support in the townships; but they end up alcoholics,

druggies or whores or whatever.

Society treats them like trash, and so they treat themselves that way.

LAWYER (sighs): It's complicated, I guess.

MARIA: It is. Don't get me wrong, I know full well that we should've reported them to the police. And we probably would've, if we were a lil' older.

LAWYER: Right. So what happened after meeting up with your mate?

MARIA: So yah, after seeing Khanya at her school, I went back home, stayed with my mom and brother.

LAWYER: And what about your job at the Saunder's mansion?

MARIA: I left Ms Sarah an sms. Told her something serious happened back home, then I switched my phone off. I hoped she'd believe me after seeing how messed up I was at the interview. Anyways, I spent the next couple of days in the township, looking for the second guy who'd attacked us.

LAWYER: And what were your intentions.

MARIA: I don't understand.

LAWYER: I mean, what were you planning to do? So you've found the Pastor, fine. Now you're looking for the second guy. What did you plan to do to them?

MARIA: I didn't have a clue. I just wanted to find out where they live and how they move, and then take it from there. I did want to hurt them though, I won't lie. I just didn't know how I'd do it.

LAWYER: So ... you found someone to help you?

MARIA: Yes, kinda.

LAWYER: I suggest you give me a name, a real one, Maria. It'll strengthen your case, especially if that person has priors. There's no point in protecting him or her.

BEAT.

MARIA: Hmmmm... She's probably long gone anyway. Her name is Thembisa Moyo. She's a little younger than me. She was friends with my younger cousin, that's how I knew her.

LAWYER: And you asked her to help you find the men?

MARIA: I didn't. I wouldn't put a young girl in danger like that. I was at a tavern, disguised in a dark cap and shades, checking out the second man who'd attacked us. I wasn't actually sure it was him - I suspected. His name is ... I mean was Sango. Don't know his surname. So anyways, as I stood there, in a dark corner, checking him out - Thembisa walked up to me.

FADE TO:

FX: DRUNK CHATTING, EVENING AMBIENCE AND LOUD PARTY MUSIC IN THE BACKGROUND.

THEMBISA: And then? What do you want here?

MARIA(startled): None of your business little girl, go away.

THEMBISA: I heard that you're around - didn't believe it. What, did you get bored of the posh suburban high lifestyle with the lanies?

MARIA: Listen, I'm not gonna tell you again - disappear. I've asked you nicely.

FX: SPARKING OF A CIGARETTE. INHALING. BLOWING OUT.

THEMBISA: Come now, behave Ria. It's my right to stand wherever I want. Just that at this particular moment I feel like standing with you.

MARIA: It's Sis'Maria to you, little girl, not Ria.

THEMBISA: Whatever. You're so 1950's.

BEAT:

FX: PARTING AND DRUNKEN CHATTER. EXHALING OF SMOKE.

THEMBISA: I can help you, y'know.

MARIA: Help me? Help me with what?

THEMBISA: His name is Sango, the guy you've been staring at all night. He lives at Ezinyoka village with his cousin. And I know the exact address.

MARIA: And what makes you think I care about what you're telling me?

THEMBISA: Call it a hunch.

MARIA: I don't know what you're on about. Now leave.

THEMBISA: Don't play stupid, okay. It's boring.

MARIA: WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE TALKING TO, THEMBISA?
I will slap you, right here, now, little
girl! Test me!

THEMBISA: Whoa, okay relax. Chill. My bad.

MARIA: Now please leave.

THEMBISA: Listen, meet me at my place tomorrow morning,
at about 10o'clock; I'll tell you everything
you need to know about him. I'll show you his
house and how he moves - all that. Okay?

BEAT.

MARIA: Whatever. I'll see.

FADE TO:

FX: HOLLOW ROOM. MEN CHAT IN THE BACKGROUND.
STEEL DOOR SHUTTING.

LAWYER: So this Thembisa girl obviously knew about
your attack? My next question is, how?

MARIA: That's the thing; at the time I wasn't sure what she knew, and it bothered me. But I needed the info she had ...

LAWYER: So you met up the next day, at her place?

MARIA: We did. But not at her place. Up on a hill, scoping Sango's house out from a distance.

FX: SCRIBBLING DOWN NOTES.

LAWYER: Name - of - first - attacker, Sango. You said you don't have his surname ...

MARIA: I don't. I don't think Thembisa knew it either.

LAWYER: Okay. You met up with Thembisa on a hill, looking down at the guy's house ...

MARIA: Yes. It was cold windy day.

FADE TO:

FX: WIND BLOWING. EXTERNAL TOWNSHIP SOUNDS
(TAXIS/DOGS/CARS) IN THE FAR BACKGROUND.

THEMBISA: And that's all he does for a living.

MARIA: What, is he selling weed?

THEMBISA: Yep, and mandrax. Look carefully through those binoculars. Everyone leaving his house has something thick in his pocket. Check it out.

BEAT.

MARIA: You're right. Oh my word.

BEAT.

MARIA: I heard you also smoke weed, Thembisa.

THEMBISA: One, none of your business. Two, what's that gotta do with what we're doing here, Maria?

MARIA: It's Sisi Maria. Watch your tone when you speak to me, okay?

THEMBISA: Whatever. Respect goes both ways.

MARIA: What do you want Thembisa, huh? Why are you even here? What do you think you know?

THEMBISA: Everything! I'm not stupid.

MARIA: What's everything?

THEMBISA: Everything, about you, back in the day.

FX: THEMBISA PULLS OUT A BAYONET KNIFE OUT.

MARIA (startled): What the hell? Where'd you get a
 knife like that?

THEMBISA: It doesn't matter. You'll have to learn how
 to use it, if we're doing this. I know Sango
 personally. We can visit him one of these
 nights. And ... y'know ... do it. The sooner the
 better.

MARIA: Listen, Thembisa, I can handle it from here,
 really, thanks for your help, okay. You can't
 be involved. I know your whole family. They
 wouldn't approve. I need you to walk away now
 and forget all of this.

THEMBISA: I can't.

MARIA: You can't what?

THEMBISA: I was dating him, late last year. Well at
 least I thought I was ... we were.

MARIA: And ... what happened?

THEMBISA: Nothing. Nothing, Ria. It didn't work out.
 That's all you need to know.

MARIA: He was abusive?

THEMBISA: Kinda, but not really. Anyways I'd rather not go into it. It's something I'm trying to put behind me - if that's even possible.

BEAT:

MARIA: Did he give you something?

THEMBISA: What?

MARIA: Have you had an HIV test, Thembisa?

THEMBISA: Are you gonna ask me a thousand questions all day or are we gonna concentrate on what we're doing?

MARIA: Okay, relax. So, what's next?

THEMBISA: I'll call him tonight and tell him I'm bringing a friend, for tomorrow night. So tomorrow evening, it's on, at about 22h30. You'd better not wimp out.

MARIA: I won't. Hey, listen. Uhhmn ... I ... I have a gun. Don't know how to use it though.

THEMBISA: It's easy. Bring it tomorrow. I'll show you.

MARIA: Sure.

FADE TO:

FX: NIGHT, RAIN DRIZZLE, PANTING, WALKING
SPEEDILY OVER GRAVEL AND MUD.

THEMBISA: Okay, we're about fifty metres away.

FX: GUN COCKING BACK.

THEMBISA: All you do is push the knob forward to remove
the safety lock, cock it back once to get the
first bullet in the chamber, then pull the
trigger.

MARIA: So I have to pull the top part back every
time, before I pull the trigger?

THEMBISA: No you don't. Once you've cocked it the first
time, you can fire until the magazine is
empty.

MARIA: Magazine?

THEMBISA: Oh my word! Until there aren't any more
bullets left in the gun. Have you never
shot before?

MARIA: No I haven't, Thembisa. I'm worried that
you obviously have.

THEMBISA: You're spending too much time in the suburbs.
Anyways, shove it in your waist, behind you.
Let's go.

FX: A HAND SLAP.

MARIA: Hold on. You can still walk away from this.
I shouldn't involve you. Really, I
can handle it from here.

THEMBISA: I'm flattered but you didn't force me into
anything. There's no place I'd rather
be. By the way, when we do this; if we walk
out of this alive, it makes us sisters. No
Sis' Ria and little girl crap talk anymore.

MARIA: Then maybe you should really turn back and go
home.

THEMBISA (giggling): Comedian huh? Just remember, we do
it when he's all relaxed, flirting freely,
thinking that he's about to get some. Not a
moment before. Sango's very alert and
suspicious. We gonna have to take our time
with it.

MARIA: Got it.

THEMBISA: Let's go.

FX: FAST WALKING THROUGH MUDDY GRAVEL. HEART
BEAT.

FADE TO:

FX: RAIN DRIZZLE. SOFT REGGAE MUSIC. SOFT HEART
BEAT.

SANGO: Come on in ladies. Out here in the cold and
rain - get in, get inside please.

FX: THEY WALK IN. MUSIC GROWS LOUDER, ECHOING IN
THE ROOM.

THEMBISA: Oh, Sango this is my cousin Wendi. Wendi,
Sango.

SANGO: Pleased to meet you baby. You're kinda cute.
I like that.

MARIA: Right ... Thanks.

FX: SITTING ON COUCHES.

SANGO: You're so scarce Thembi dear. You just
abandoned me, out of the blue. Heartless.

THEMBISA: I abandoned you? Good one. Look, I didn't
come here for that. My cousin's from Cape

Town and she hasn't tasted our weed yet. I told her that you ...

SANGO (interrupting): Oh ... why didn't you say? I sell the best stuff, love - top quality blunt. Give me a sec. Let me just get somethin' somethin' from my goodies box. Coming back now.

FX: WALKING OFF TO ANOTHER ROOM, FOOTSTEPS GET FAINTER, MOVING AWAY FROM THE MIKE.

THEMBISA (whispering): Not now. When he's all relaxed, with his guard down. Wipe that sweat of your forehead, damnit.

THEMBISA (loud): So where's your housemate this evening?

SANGO (yelling back): Doesn't stay here anymore. Found out the fool was snitching. Can you believe it? After everything I did for that fat prick.

FX: WALKS BACK IN, HIS VOICE SOUNDING CLEARER.

SANGO: Here you go, take. One for each of us. Jah Rastafari. Praise be to the Emperor Haile Selassie, the most high.

FX: SPARKING OF CIGARETTE LIGHTERS. INHALING OF SMOKE.

SANGO: I see you've still kept that figure, Thembi.
Your curves are still banging.

THEMBISA: I guess so.

FX: DRAWING AND BLOWING OUT OF SMOKE.

SANGO: I've been meaning to call you, y'know. It's
just that -

THEMBISA: Yeah right. I'm not trying to hear your crap
tonight, dude.

SANGO (giggles): I'm serious. I lost all my numbers when
my phone got stolen.

THEMBISA: You're still a lousy liar.

SANGO: Both hands on the bible. I've been asking
around for your numbers. I kinda miss you.
Infact, I don't kinda miss you. I miss you,
straight up.

THEMBISA: We'll get into that just now. Let's enjoy the
weed for now.

CROSS FADE: FX: SLOW REGGAE. PUFFING AND BLOWING OUT OF
SMOKE. A DISTANT AND TWISTED DRONE IN THE BACKGROUND.
SCREAMS OF TWO YOUNG GIRLS.

SANGO: Come sit next to me, Thembi.

FX: THEMBISA SHUFFLES OVER TO HIM.

SANGO: So how about we pick up from where we left off. We were good together.

THEMBISA: You hurt me dude.

SANGO: I know, I know. But that was the old me. Forgive me, love. Please!

BEAT.

THEMBISA: I'll think about it. First go put on some softer music, then come back and sit down next to me.

SANGO: Anything for you baby. I mean it Thembi; I've changed.

THEMBISA: Okay go and come back.

FX: SANGO SHUFFLES AND STANDS. WALKS OFF, FOOTSTEPS GET FAINTER. A KNIFE IS DRAWN. THE MUSIC CHANGES TO SLOW RNB.

THEMBISA (Whispering): When he sits.

MARIA: You or me? Who's gonna do it?

FX: FOOTSTEPS ARE AUDIBLE. SANGO COMES BACK.

SANGO: So, where were we?

THEMBISA: I was just saying how you and your friend raped two fourteen year olds, back in the day.

SANGO: What?

THEMBISA: Wendi's real name is Maria Sebe. She grew up at Gomorrah village. She knows you, pretty well.

FX: DRAWING GUN OUT.

MARIA (trembling speech): Don't move, you filthy swine.

SANGO: Wendi babe, what the hell's going on? I think you've got me confused with someone else.

MARIA: Seventeen years ago, you and your friend ran into two girls at the river crossing, between Gomorrah and Berlin ...

SANGO: I don't know what you're talking about. It wasn't me. I never even walked that ...

MARIA: KEEP YOUR HANDS UP, DAMNIT!

SANGO: Okay okay! But babes, I hardly ever went that side. It wasn't me. I can help you find whoever ...

FX: TWO GUN SHOTS. BODY DROPS TO THE FLOOR. VIVID HEART BEAT.

BEAT.

THEMBISA: Two in the chest! You're cold, sister. Hurry, let's go. Someone might have heard. Wear your cap. Cover yourself. Let's go.

FX: SHUFFLING. OPENING DOOR. RAIN. FOOTSTEPS RUNNING AWAY.

FADE TO:

FX: HOLLOW ROOM WITH STEEL DOORS SLAMMING AT A DISTANCE. PEOPLE CHAT IN THE BACKGROUND.

LAWYER: Wow, okay. So did anyone hear?

MARIA: What, the guns shots? I don't know. I don't think so. It was almost midnight ... raining ... I doubt it.

LAWYER: And to think that you're in here for something else. Just by the way, do Sarah and Peter know about this ..?

MARIA: No they don't. And I'd like it to stay that way, please. What do they call it again ...?

LAWYER: Attorney/client confidentiality.

MARIA: Yes, that. I'm grateful that they hired you for me, but let's keep things between us please.

LAWYER: Understood. So what was your next move? I assume you started looking for the Pastor's contact details and address? Don't leave anything out please.

MARIA: To be honest, I kinda wanted to stop, at that point. I got scared, y'know. I'd just killed someone. And, when I got back home from what we'd just done, I found out my brother had just been taken to the ICU, in an ambulance. He has AIDS. I connected the dots. It felt like I'd played a role in his worsening condition. At the same time I started looking over my shoulder, like cops would figure it all out and arrest us. And it bothered me that I wasn't completely happy with killing Sango. I sort of felt ashamed of what I'd done, but I hid it. I was just in a terrible state, still with nightmares.

LAWYER: But you guys got off Scott-free, right? No cops, no investigations..?

MARIA: Yah. We managed to fool the cops, no-one even came to ask questions; but someone else wasn't buying my act. She came to visit me at my mom's place the next evening. I nearly peed myself I was so scared.

LAWYER: Who?

FADE TO:

FX: INTERIOR. LATE AT NIGHT. TV PLAYING IN THE BACKGROUND. A KNOCK ON THE DOOR, FROM OUTSIDE.

MARIA (fearful):Who is it?

FX: KHANYA SOUNDING DISTANCE, FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR.

KHANYA: It's me Ria. Open up.

MARIA: Khanya?

KHANYA: Uh huh.

FX: FOOTSTEPS. DOOR OPENS. SOUNDS OF THE NIGHT. KHANYA BECOMES CLEARLY AUDIBLE.

KHANYA: I'm so sorry to come barging like this, at this hour.

MARIA: Yah ... What's going on?

KHANYA: Don't get mad. I'm with the social worker I told you about. I just wanna introduce you two. Please.

MARIA: What? No. No Khanya. Cheers. Goodnight.

KHANYA: It's just an intro. You won't commit to anything.

MARIA: Oh my word, Khanya. Are you for real? I shouldn't have gone to you ...

SUSAN: Hello Maria.

BEAT.

FX: MARIA STEPS OUT AND SHUTS THE DOOR BEHIND HER.

MARIA: No guys, c'mon! This is my mom's house. This isn't on.

SUSAN: I apologize. I just wanted to introduce myself to you. I'm Susan Abrahams, a private psychiatrist and social worker.

MARIA: Hi Susan. Khanya dear, I really appreciate that you're trying to help, honestly, but I'm fine. I'm just here at home to relax, regroup, take care of my bro - that's it. Now go please, before my mom suspects something.

KHANYA: At least have one session with Susan. It's free. Please Ria.

SUSAN: Just one session, Maria.

MARIA: Thank you Susan, but I don't need a psychiatrist, okay. I need a bit of space to gather my thoughts. I'm touched that you'd come all the way here, risk your lives, but please guys. Some breathing space.

SUSAN: You're in denial Maria ...

MARIA: What?

SUSAN: You're resisting help because you've dealt with it on your own for so long. You're afraid that ...

MARIA: Lady, don't even try that psycho analyzing crap, please. Goodnight guys. Thanks for the visit.

KHANYA: Ria, you scared me, last time we met. You're up to something, and you're gonna get yourself in trouble. Those bastards aren't worth it.

SUSAN: Yes, there're other ways to move forward.
Better ways. We're here to help. At least
take my business card.

FX: SUSAN FIDDLES IN HER PURSE FOR A BUSINESS
CARD.

MARIA: Like I said guys, I'm just here to visit my
mom and take care of my brother. I'm sorry if
I scared you, Khanya. I was a little upset,
that's all. Nice to meet you Ms Susan.
Goodnight.

KHANYA: One session won't kill you.

SUSAN: Here's my card.

FX: TAKES CARD.

MARIA: Thanks. I'll think about. Cheers guys.

FX: STEPPING AWAY. DOOR OPENING. INTERIOR SOUNDS
OF A TV AND FRIDGE. DOOR CLOSING.

FADE TO:

FX: HOLLOW ROOM WITH PEOPLE TALKING IN THE
BACKGROUND. STEEL DOORS CLASH AT A DISTANCE.

LAWYER: So Khanya was on to you?

MARIA: I guess. Smart girl that one. She always was.

LAWYER: And I take it you didn't go for the session, with the shrink..?

MARIA: I didn't. I didn't even consider it. Maybe it's pride, but it offended me that someone would even suggest that I need to. I quickly brushed those thoughts aside, and went to go see Sindi the next morning.

LAWYER: Sindi ... the woman you were with, when you found your first attacker, the Pastor?

MARIA: Yes. But she didn't know anything, at the time. She's a born-again Christian. She genuinely took me to a church service to give thanks. I'd just passed my driver license.

LAWYER: Okay, please give me Sindi's name and surname, and her address.

MARIA: Sindiswa Ngoma. She works at 35 Chestnut Crescent, Beacon Bay.

LAWYER: Thanks. Must've been insane, huh? Seeing your attacker as a man of the cloth, all holier than though, preaching the word.

MARIA: It was. But I didn't even stay long enough to hear him preach. I saw him and I was outta there.

LAWYER: You just left?

MARIA: Yup.

LAWYER: And your buddy? What did she say?

MARIA: I don't know. I was in a daze, nauseous. The world spun. I actually got a bit sick in the churchyard.

LAWYER: What d'you mean?

MARIA: It's kinda embarrassing ... I vomited in the yard, with people watching me as they walked in. T'was bad.

LAWYER: Ouch?

MARIA: Yah.

LAWYER: And that's when things spiraled out of control..?

MARIA: Yes. Shortly afterwards I messed up the job interview, and decided to go back home to the township.

LAWYER: Okay let's move on. What happened after your meeting with Khanya and her social worker psychiatrist friend?

MARIA: The next morning I went to go see Sindi, for the Pastor's home address. She's a nanny too - a few houses from my workplace.

FADE TO:

FX: INTERIOR. GOSPEL MUSIC PLAYING SOFTLY IN THE BACKGROUND. STEAM IRONING.

SINDI: No, first answer me. How do you just up and leave like that, in church? You dirty heathen.

MARIA: How'd I know you'd bring that up, immediately? Can we just let it go, please my friend?

SINDI: No I'm not letting it go. I want an apology, and a decent explanation first.

MARIA: I'm very very sorry, okay.

SINDI: For what?

MARIA: Come now Sindi, I said I'm sorry. Just let it go.

SINDI: Do you know what they call people like you?

MARIA: No I don't, but I'm sure you're about to tell me.

SINDI: Confused atheist heathens. You're lost Sisi.

MARIA: Is it, is that what they call us?

SINDI: Yes it is, but I'm a Christian, unlike you, so I must forgive.

MARIA: Thank you Ms. Christian.

SINDI: If you strike me with your fist on the right side of my face, I must offer you my left. It's a scripture about forgiveness, moving on and not taking revenge.

MARIA (giggling): Great, I won't strike your face again.

SINDI: Ha Ha, funny. Now this coming Sunday, the sermon is gonna be about the power of prayer, and exactly how to pray. I want you to come along, please Ria, you'll love it.

MARIA: Fine, I'll come.

SINDI: Seriously, please come.

MARIA: I will Sindi, I promise. And I'll stay for
the full thing this time?

SINDI: You better, I also want to introduce you to
my Pastor.

BEAT.

FX: HEART BEAT. DARK EERIE ATMOSPHERE IN THE
BACKGROUND.

MARIA: The same light skinned chap from last week's
sermon?

SINDI: Yup, he's gonna be preaching again this
Sunday. Didn't you see him, last week?

MARIA: Briefly, just caught a glimpse.

SINDI: He's cute too.

BEAT.

MARIA: So Sindi, you said he stays at the missionary
houses at the back of the church hey? That's
where all the Pastors live?

SINDI: Yes with their wives- why?

MARIA: Uh ... no ... well, I was wondering if the church rents the flats out. Just thinking of accommodation for my brother Thabo, once he gets better. The township is doing nothing for his condition y'know. I reckon he needs some peace and quiet, surrounded with blessings and that sort of thing.

SINDI: Shame man, poor T-Boz. I don't know if they rent out. We'll ask on Sunday.

FX: MARIA STANDS, PULLING CHAIR BACK.

MARIA: Sindi my friend, I must love and leave you.

SINDI: Leaving so soon?

MARIA: Yeah, I have a few errands to take care off. Don't bother walking me out, I'll be okay. It's freezing outside anyway.

SINDI: Don't forget your promise, Maria.

MARIA: I won't. We'll go together. I'll start picking out my dress tonight.

SINDI: Okay great.

MARIA: See ya.

SINDI: Bye.

FX: OPENS DOOR. EXTERNAL DAY SOUNDS. WALKS OUT.

FADE TO:

FX: STEEL DOORS SLAMMING IN THE BACKGROUND.
HOLLOW INTERIOR. MEN HOLLERING AT A DISTANCE.
PEOPLE CHATTING.

MARIA: Later that very same day, in the evening, I took a cab to the Pastor's house. It was past 23:00 I'm sure. I didn't even excuse myself to my mom. I just up'd and left. All I could think about was that rainy day, all those years back at Gomorrah Village.

LAWYER: If you don't mind me asking, Maria, please tell me exactly what happened that day. You don't have to go into explicit details if you'd rather not.

BEAT.

MARIA: It's okay. I can speak on it now. So ... a fourteen year old Khanya and I had been sent to the shop to buy candles, paraffin, milk, steel wool, meilie meal and matches. Strange how I remember the exact grocery list, huh?

The shop was about 2 kilometers away, at the next village called Berlin. Anyways we got the stuff and started walking back. It must've been about 18h00 then, not too dark, but drizzling. A shortcut back home, from where we were, was through the forest, over a narrow river. We decided to take it, on account of the weather. As we got to the river, two guys came from the opposite direction, walking fast also. They looked like they were on their own agenda, hurrying because of the rain. But we stopped.

LAWYER: Why?

MARIA: That area was ... in fact is, notorious for rape, death, buried bodies and so on. Khanya asked me if we should go on or turn back. Mind you, we're wet and it's getting dark. I figured if we turn back and go the long route, it'll be worse - it'll get pitch black dark. 'Let's hide in the bushes and let them pass,' I said to Khanya. But then Khanya recognized one of them. He was apparently friends with her uncle. We breathed a sigh of relief. Khanya yelled out for his attention, calling his name and reminding him who she is. They got closer. We then realized that they were pretty drunk, wobbling all over the place, eyeing us weirdly. They didn't say a word, not a word. The guy Khanya knew punched Khanya so hard on her face, she practically

flew away. I tried to run but it was too late. His friend, the Pastor now, grabbed me, and they both had their way with us. But not before beating us into a pulp.

LAWYER: I'm so sorry to hear that, Maria. Thanks for sharing.

MARIA: And I've had that play in my dreams, ever since. I have terrible nightmares. A week doesn't go past. For 17 years.

BEAT.

LAWYER: Wow. Wow, I don't know what to say.

MARIA: You don't have to say anything. So when I saw that Sindi's Pastor is the same bastard who attacked me, I lost it.

LAWYER: I'm sure you did.

SECURITY GUARD (Yelling): 5 minutes left. Wrap it up.

MARIA: The joys of prison, right. I'll speak quickly. After I met up with Sindi, that night, I took a cab to the Pastor's house. Got there at about 23h45. His house is a walking distance from the actual church. Anyways, I jumped over the gate and acted

like a desperate congregant member. I
knocked, pretending like there was something
wrong with my child - like I needed prayer.

LAWYER: And they opened for you? Just like that?

MARIA: Yes, his wife. She's bound to a wheelchair.

FADE TO:

FX: NIGHT. EXTERNAL NIGHT SOUNDS. HEART BEAT.

FEMALE VOICE (shouting/muffled): Who is it?

MARIA(panicking): It's me, Wendi, Mama. I'm a congregant
member. I have a problem with my child.
Please could I see the Pastor? I'm so sorry
to come at this hour.

FX: DOOR OPENS.

PST.WIFE: Can I help you, dear?

MARIA: I need the Pastor please ma'am. I'm so sorry
to come at this awkward hour. My name is
Wendi. My teenage boy's going crazy. He's
threatening us and waving a gun. Can I see

the Pastor please. He usually assists me with this...

PST.WIFE: Yes of course. Come inside my dear, I'll go call him. Take a seat please.

FX: WHEELS ROLLING FORWARD. DOOR SHUTS. INTERNAL, INSIDE HOUSE. WHEELCHAIR ROLLS AWAY FROM MIKE.

MARIA: Thanks so much.

FX: HEART BEAT GETTING LOUDER. HEAVY BREATHING.

BEAT.

FX: FOOTSTEPS DRAW NEARER.

PASTOR: Hello, good evening my child.

FX: A GUN IS COCKED BACK. LOUD HEART BEAT.

MARIA: Stop talking you piece of shit, get down on the ground with your hands up.

PASTOR: Wait ... wait hold on. What's this about? We don't have money. I have a little cash in the room.

MARIA: I don't want your dirty money, idiot. Just go on your knees and shut up. Don't try anything or I swear to God ...

FX: SHUFFLES TO HIS KNEES.

PASTOR: What is this about, my girl?

FX: A THUMP. MARIA KICKS HIM HARD.

MARIA: You don't ever call me your girl, you scumbag, now keep your hands up.

The priest groins painfully, struggling to breathe.

FX: WHEELCHAIR PULLS IN.

PST.WIFE: What's going on here?

MARIA: Lady, I'm sorry but I need you to get off your wheelchair and sit next to him, with your hands behind your head. Now.

PST.WIFE(howling):NO! WAIT!

FX: HEART BEAT IS LOUDER.

PST.WIFE: We don't have much my child. We just ...

MARIA: Keep quiet, ma'am, and do as I say.

FX: WOMAN SHUFFLES OFF HER CHAIR, TO THE GROUND.
 DRAGS HERSELF.

PST.WIFE: Please, my girl. We have no money.

MARIA: You shut up about money.

BEAT.

THE PASTOR'S WIFE WOMAN CRIES.

MARIA: So, does the congregation know what you were,
 about seventeen years ago, Mr Pastor? Mr
 Holier than though! Does your wife know the
 real you?

PASTOR: Yes, I don't hide my history.

PST.WIFE: My child that was a long time ago ...

MARIA: You shut your face up, this has nothing to do
 with you, do you hear me? And quit calling me
 your child!

FX: A DISTANT MUMBLE. A MUFFLED BOY'S VOICE.

MARIA: What was that? Who else is in here?

QUIET.

MARIA (yelling): I'm giving you three seconds. Get the hell over here or these two die! Is it your kid or your help? WHO THE HELL IS OVER THERE?

FX: GUN COCKS.

The Pastor's wife screams.

PASTOR: You don't have to do this, Wendi. Please.

FX: THUMP! SHE HITS HIM ON HIS HEAD WITH THE GUN.

MARIA: The next one will be a bullet in your brain. Call him or her here, now!

WOMAN (shouts out desperately): Mkhusele, Mkhusele come here boy.

FX: FOOTSTEPS APPROACH, GETTING LOUDER. HEART BEAT. NERVOUS JAGGED BREATHING.

MARIA: Sit next to your mom, boy, and keep your hands up. You try anything cute, you die.

PST.WIFE: I plead the blood of Jesus, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, I plead the blood of Jesus, the fellowsh ...

MARIA: SHUT UP MAN!

BEAT.

MARIA: This is really difficult for me, y'know, I'm not a violent person, I ...

BEAT.

FX: MARIA CATCHES HER BREATH.

MARIA: Sir, do you remember exactly seventeen years ago, at Gomorrah village. You and a friend of yours approached from Berlin through forest to get to Sondlo village. There were two young girls, coming from the opposite direction at the same time ...

PASTOR: In those days I was a servant of the devil. I must have wronged you somehow, I know, and for that I'm sorry. I truly apologize young lady. My calling came when I was in prison, sentenced to six years for various counts of robbery and assault. I should have been given sixty six years considering all my ...

MARIA: Your 'I'm sorry, I'm a good man now and I'll repent' story doesn't take away what you did.

You destroyed lives, Pastor. You destroyed mine.

PASTOR: Wendi, the only way to heal emotionally is to learn to forgive.

MARIA: How convenient for you. The nerve! This is the end, Pastor. Say goodbye to your family.

THE PASTOR'S WIFE SCREAMS.

FX: A TACKLE. A STRUGGLE BETWEEN MARIA AND THE BOY. A TUSSLE. GROINS AND MOANS. WRESTLING. A TUSSLE.

PASTOR: Mkhuseleli, no. No boy, get off her.

PST.WIFE: Don't Mkhuseleli. Stop it.

The Pastor's wife screams again.

FX: GUN SHOT.

Quiet.

FADE TO:

FX: STEEL DOOR SHUTTING. HOLLOW STRUCTURE. MEN CHATTING IN THE BACKGROUND.

LAWYER: And you'd shot the Pastor's son, dead. And now we're here.

MARIA: Yes. Accidentaly. He tried to reach for the gun and we wrestled.

BEAT.

LAWYER: Let me ask you - why didn't you shoot the Pastor anyway? You'd gone there for him, right?

MARIA: Right. I don't know. I guess I kinda felt like he got what he deserved. He lost his only child, just like I have. And he had to witness it, with his wife right there. That scar will never fully heal.

LAWYER: You say they lost a child, like you..?

MARIA: I've had two miscarriages as a result of severe stress, as I'd said earlier. With the last one, the Doc told me I have an issue with my uterus and pelvis. It'd take a miracle for me to give birth.

LAWYER: Well, you never know. You might just get that miracle.

MARIA: We'll see ... after my looong nine year stretch in this hell hole.

LAWYER: You're not a murderer, Maria. You were pushed to an extent which no women should ever be pushed to. That's gonna be our angle when I lodge for an appeal. They will reduce your sentence, you have my word on that. You're a first-time offender.

MARIA: Thank you. And I just wanna clarify, for what it's worth - I'm really not a murderer. I hate myself for what I did. I shouldn't have. I feel like ... I did exactly what they did to me, so like ... how am I any better than my attackers?

LAWYER: Don't beat yourself up. You right though, you shouldn't have taken the law in your own hands. You have a criminal record now, and a few years behind bars.

MARIA: And practically no chance of ever getting a decent job again.

LAWYER: But like I said, you were pushed. You're not a killer, Ria. I'll do my best to get you outta here, soon ... well soonish.

MARIA: Thank you. Please thank Sarah and Peter for me also. Needless to say, I wouldn't be able to afford you.

LAWYER (giggling): No you wouldn't.

FX: COLLATING PAPER, PACKING UP, PLACING PAPER IN A BRIEFCASE AND CLOSING. SOUNDS OF CHAIRS SHUFFLING BACK AS THEY STAND.

MARIA: Thanks so much again.

LAWYER: My pleasure. I'll be in touch. Keep your head down in here.

FX: WALKING AWAY.

LAWYER: As a matter of curiosity. Do you still have those awful nightmares?

MARIA: Nope. I sleep like a baby in here. With all the violent madness of this place, I've had four full months of peaceful sleep. Ironic right? I'm in a good space, Mr Miles. D'you know what I mean?

LAWYER: I do. Good for you, Ria. Okay, see you later.

MARIA: Goodbye.

FX: WALKING AWAY. STEEL DOORS FINALLY SHUT.

The End.

Written by Lukhanyo Sikwebu