

REBORN – sample chapters

A Naomi Mandisa Nel Story

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Chapter 1 – Bloody Wine

‘It’s all about money and power, and what you’re willing to do to get it.’ Todd explained, looking smug, his chest out. ‘Courage! Grit! I started out with nothing.’

‘From the bottom, huh?’ Naomi asked, engaged in his dialogue.

‘Yup. My mom was a petrol attendant. I’ve never met my dad.’

‘And now look at what you’ve built,’ Naomi said, spreading her arms out wide at the vastness of his wine farm.

Todd Davids, a prominent wine farmer had offered Naomi a tour of his luscious Stellenbosch vineyard. The grounds were massive, with diligent staffers and machinery that worked the land. Everything ran like clockwork. Todd had delivery pickup trucks parked

outside, protected by armed guards in uniform. The entire farm area was monitored by long-range surveillance cameras, with someone devoted to the footage monitors. Their uniforms consisted of a blue T-shirt, a blue shirt or overalls, with a *TD Chateaux* logo embroidered on the chest area. He even had the logo constructed at the main gate in typical billboard fashion, complete with 3D LED lights flashing *TD Chateaux*.

The skies were overcast, threatening with mild showers. Sharp tangy grape fumes filled the air. Naomi wore dark shades and a brown woollen blouse, as if to match the soil. She wore tight black jeans and sneakers. She refused Todd's offer of a farmer's overall, and instead accepted only their vineyard hat.

'Took me fourteen years to build all this,' he continued proudly, in his baritone voice. Todd was a short chunky man with a closely shaved crew cut. Just like his farm, he kept a clean look – no moustache or beard. The only thing suggesting that there may be more to his spotlessness was a tattoo protruding from his shirt collar. Naomi couldn't make out what it read. Even at the gym, where they'd first met, it was hidden under a golf shirt collar.

The grapevines were luscious and erect, reaching their waist height. Naomi marvelled at all the splendour around her. The only difference between here and her dad's farm was the pungent wine smell.

'My mother was very poor. She did her best to raise six kids, the poor thing. The one line she'd repeat to us, every day, drumming it into us night and day, was that hard work is the answer. She'd say it obsessively. She'd say that we live on Earth. There are eight other planets in our solar system. There are billions and billions of solar systems in our galaxy. There are billions of galaxies in the universe. This tells us that we, humans, are tiny creatures, and we know nothing. But the one thing that she knows for sure, is that hard work pays off. That's a sure path to success.'

'She was smart.'

'Yes she was. And whoever taught her astronomy must've made a big impression on her,' Todd joked, teary eyed. He plucked a bunch of grapes and handed some to Naomi.

'Thanks,' was Naomi's response, gazing out at the surrounding vineyard. She shut her focus from his chatter now – calculating. She was fifty seconds away from the fence, where she would escape through. *It's going to be a steep mountain climb, to the top.* Her second problem were the workers. She'd need to pass through at least two, to make it out.

'You okay?' asked Todd, tapping her on the shoulder.

She shook herself out of her reverie and came back to him. 'I'm sorry. I'll be fine. I'm just a bit preoccupied.'

'You sure?' He asked, stepping right up to her, placing his hand on her hip. 'What's on your mind, babes? Maybe I can help. D'you wanna stomp on some grapes? I'll show you the yeast, straining and fermentation process ...'

'No, I'd rather not,' she replied, shaking her head.

'What's the matter?' He asked, stepping even closer now, within inches. Naomi noticed that he was observing her lips. Yearning.

'You don't wanna hear my boring issues ...'

'I do. Talk to me, love.' He held both her hands, looking serious now. 'I'm here for you.'

Naomi stared him square in his eyes. She felt his rough gnarly fingers on hers. She took a deep breath and let out, 'Okay sure, why not? Maybe you can help me. There've been nine cases opened against you, over the last three years, for paying your staff with booze. Not just that, you also manufacture Gambu Harvest Wine; a toxic drink that's four times more potent than standard regulations. Plus, you pay local judges off to clear your name. I have proof.'

Todd dropped her hands and took a step back. He wore a disgusted frown, eyeing Naomi up and down like an X-ray, discerning every inch of her cheeky frame. 'Who are you? Who the fuck do you think you are, talking to me like that?' He asked it in a high-pitched tone, looking both scared and confused. 'You a journalist or something?'

Naomi glanced around, making sure his farm workers were still focused on their chores.

They were.

She wanted to respond and tell him that she was in fact a trained vigilante assassin, focussed on ensuring justice when the legal courts fail; but she continued with her dialogue instead.

'You even pay your pregnant staffers with booze,' Naomi added, making sure to hide her face from the surveillance camera aimed their way. She ripped off a Velcro pocket from her inner thigh, pulling a thin shiny dagger out.

'What the hell are you're gonna do with that? Am I supposed to be scared?'

'Last year, six of your workers died from Gambu Wine, but you still make it. Even after the damning *Cape Times* article, you still sell it, underground.'

Todd stood bold with his chin up, frowning at the pretty girl with a knife. 'So, you're recording this, huh? You're wearing a wire? I'm supposed to incriminate myself. You're

looking for evidence, you bitch. Well, that's all crap. I don't pay my staff with booze. I don't know anything about this wine you're talking about. I want your ID right now! I'm calling the cops. Trespassing and threatening me with a deadly weapon, you whore,' he spat, pulling his cell phone out. 'Think I'm joking...'

Naomi flung the blade, planting it above his left kneecap. Before he could screech out in pain, she leapt on the same left leg and swept him off his feet. She needed him on the ground to tussle away from prying eyes.

'AAH!' he screamed out, reaching for the knife that was jammed in his leg.

Naomi punched his Adam's apple repeatedly, choking him, disabling him from shouting for help. Her hat and shades flew off as they scuffled, wrestling in anger, both trying to manoeuvre a headlock.

They were covered in dirt, brawling. He caught her mouth with his shoulder, still trying to grab her neck.

As they wrestled on dirt, the blade on the ground now, Naomi snatched it and stuck it inside his ribs, puncturing a lung. She went for his lower back too, stabbing a kidney and possibly his bladder. She stabbed him viciously, over, and over and over. As soon as he stretched back to grab the knife from her, she pierced the side of his neck and twisted the blade. Blood rushed out of him profusely, staining the earth the same colour as his wine.

He grew weak, clutching his bloody collar.

Still on the ground, Naomi found her hat and sunglasses, and put them back on.

She stood up slowly, checking the coast through the grape trees, and caught the eye of an old coloured man, in his mid-sixties, staring straight at her. He was a fair distance away, carrying a bucket. He stared at her with a puzzled *what the fuck's going on* look on his face.

She simply ignored him, put her head down and sprinted through the vineyard towards the east side of the farm. On wobbly damp soil, she raced past another worker who squatted with his back towards her. She heard the old man yelling something to the tune of 'HEY STOP! KOM HIER JY! KOM HIER! DIEF!'

Naomi wouldn't even turn back to see. She dashed through the winery, high up a steep muddy mountain incline, towards the palisade fencing. Exhaustion kicked in as she paced on forward, trying to focus and ignore her frustration. She had lost the element of surprise. There were people watching her. It felt clumsy.

Reaching a hole she cut weeks prior when she was scouting the place, Naomi crawled head-first underneath it. She had used an oxy-acetylene torch in the wee hours, to cut the steel.

She slid under and made it out the other side.

She took a second to catch her breath ... She then ran down the mountain; down a slippery slimy grassy slope. She had modified her sneaker soles for maximum grip down this hill. She ran past an open soccer field to her right, straight to her parked car on a gravel road.

She had hired an Audi RSQ8 for this op - *speed over rough terrain*, she reasoned.

Two teenage boys approached her from the opposite direction. They looked drunk and rowdy, sharing a jug of something. They paused, stunned, watching Naomi with keen interest.

Unfazed, Naomi opened the car door, stepped in, fired the engine up, and sped away.

Chapter 2 – A Generous Queen

The day was blazing hot in Bonteheuwel, Cape Town. The sun shone mercilessly, clocking 39 degrees Celsius.

Isabel Peters stood on the main foyer of Desmond King High School, addressing local masses and journalists.

It was a tattered school in the heart of Cape Town's crime capital. The institution was riddled with guns, drugs, and gangsters, and it seemed to be getting worse by the day.

The principal, Mr Dwight Strauss, had called Mrs Peters to see things for herself. He had begged the business woman to intervene, and perhaps inspire the insolent bunch.

After weeks of pleading, she finally agreed.

Isabel's arrival caused quite a stir in the community. Local media reporters and fascinated students swarmed around her like bees; all thirsty for her attention. The Queen, as she was affectionately called, had come to see *them*.

As Isabel was born and raised there, it was a dream for the meagre community to see one of their own shine bright and bask in the splendour of opulence. Her name, Isabel Peters, was now synonymous of wealth and power.

She was a 58-year-old multimillionaire coloured woman, who had built everything she had from scratch. She was a polarising figure to most - you either loved or loathed her.

She stood at the school, trying to act calm. She had enemies from all walks of life, hoping to pounce at any given opportunity.

Her security team stayed vigilant. Reporters and local fans swarmed around her with their mics and camera phones out, recording. Their unrest frustrated her bodyguards. It made their job impossible, with all the pushing and shoving, and the endless requests for selfies.

A casual Isabel stood inside her bodyguards' perimeter. There were several microphones from various media houses, all aimed at her lips. She was calm and collected, draped in a silky cream pinstriped blouse and beige leather pants. A pinned white flower on her lapel. She was a pretty woman, with a regal air about her. Tall and slender. The few wrinkles around her hazel eyes couldn't mask her natural beauty.

Her black Mercedes Benz S-Class was parked a short distance away, between her bodyguards' bulletproof Range Rovers.

'Ms Peters!' one of the reporters yelled out. 'Why have you given these kids new school bags with stationery inside? Would it not have been better if you revamped their dilapidated school instead? Fixed it up, painted and maybe built them sports facilities?'

Isabel smiled. She cleared her throat and let out, 'When I was their age, I remember the shame of coming to school with a torn book bag, and no stationery inside. I couldn't afford to cover my books. I had a low self-esteem. I felt humiliated, darling. It starts with the kids as individuals, first, before the problems with their school premises. And if you must know, I left a small donation with the headmaster for some of the damages you're referring to. Next question.'

The star struck Mr Strauss stood behind Isabel, ready to cry. His gratitude was written all over his chubby face. A bald scruffy man wearing thick glasses and a grey oversized suit that fitted him clumsily.

Another reporter shot a question. She was a petite but confident black girl, 'Ms Peters, what do you say to those people who say you're doing this just to gain favour for the political party you're starting? That this is only for publicity and votes.'

Isabel retorted with a muffled giggle. 'I'd ask *those* people if this is my first time giving to the community. I'd ask them to show me one man or woman who gives to the people more than I do.'

To this, she received a roaring round of applause.

'It's no secret that for the last couple of years I've built homes and supplied our people with pipelines for fresh water. I have, and will continue, to spend millions on my people, with no apology or hidden agenda.'

An intense looking wiry journalist, who had her hand up, bellowed out, 'But what about your links to drugs?'

Her question muted the entire crowd.

Everyone froze.

It was as if someone pressed pause.

'Your son, or stepson, Clinton, is alleged to be a major supplier. There are photos of him associating with known drug dealers. Do you have any comment on it Ma'am? Or should I say, Queen?'

Everyone held their breath in anticipation of Isabel's answer.

Principal Strauss stepped around Isabel, 'Those are lies! Mrs Peters is a generous kind-hearted saint. It's disrespectful of you to ...' Isabel gently shoved him aside, tapping his shoulder, motioning that she can handle it.

She gave a soft smile through the side of her lips and cleared her throat once more. 'Those rumours are perpetuated by jealous people within this very community I love. It's idiots who don't want me to keep serving the people. It's propaganda, darling, created by people who want to see my demise. It doesn't matter how kind you are to people, there'll always be the few who don't like it, and you, the media, are fuelling these silly utterances. I dare you to write a completely positive article about what we've done here today, without smearing it with unsubstantiated rumours. Let's see. Thank you, guys, goodbye,' was Isabel's closing remarks as she waited for her men to clear a path to her car.

The reporters were still yelling questions at her, pleading for attention.

Isabel simply smiled and waved at them like a bishop to her congregants.

As she walked on forward, protected and overwhelmed by the flashing cameras, she turned back and found her assistant behind her. Isabel whispered in her ear. 'Bianca, find out who that last reporter was. I want her name and home address.'

Chapter 16 – **The Formula**

The harsh Peruvian sun pounded on Clinton's face. Spider and his pilot had their tops off, loading drugs inside their hired Cessna Citation M2 private Jet.

Helping them were two other stick-figured locals who couldn't speak a word of English. They all sweated profusely, loading over three hundred kilos of product - cocaine, crystal meth, Galaxy, chlorine, ammonia and sulphuric acid. They also loaded a few machine guns.

Isabel stood with Marco Sanchez at the entrance of a barn, shadowed from the sun, watching the men slave away. She was proud of Clinton this time around. He arrived a day early to ensure that everything would go smoothly with air traffic authorities – which simply meant bribing them. Their arrival had gone off without a hitch.

Dressed in jeans, sneakers, a red linen blouse and a matching hat, Isabel observed the bulky loads as her men stacked and packed.

She held a bottle of wine, exotic chocolates and a small but heavy gold bar. It was approximately the size of her palm. She marvelled at how radiantly it shone. It looked and felt expensive.

'It comes from our most profitable goldmine, Lagunas Norte,' Marco explained in a thick Peruvian accent. A burning cigarette hung on the side of his cracked lips. 'One hundred percent pure twenty-four carat gold. You'll never find anything more pure. Not contaminated by any other metals.'

He was an odd looking elderly man – tall and wiry. He wore a grey ponytail behind his chiselled face. His piercing green eyes sat near each other like marbles; a bit too far from his crooked nose. He had an intimidating, yet cartoonish look about him. He was kitted out in white - white shirt, white shorts and white sandals to match.

'Contaminating? Have you been taking English lessons?' Isabel joked, pulling her tongue.

Marco laughed out loud, clapping and rubbing his hands together. 'I watch Hollywood soap operas, to learn the language. I'm old man, what else should I do?'

They shared a sincere chuckle.

'You're too kind, my friend,' Isabel thanked, still amused. 'Nobody's ever given me a gold bullion bar before.' She wanted to ask how he got it, exactly, but chose not to. She didn't imagine he would tell her the truth anyway.

'I wasn't sure if you'd like it. Ladies usually want watch or necklace or ...'

'This is perfect, Marco. Solid and pure, just like you are. I'll cherish it.'

'Cherish?'

'It means treasure. I'll love and treasure it, just the way it is,' Isabel explained. 'I won't melt it and make something else with it.'

Marco placed a hand over his heart. 'Thank you, my Isabella.'

Clinton approached. He breathed heavily, carrying two bloated luggage bags. His sweat dripped on the ground. Veins protruded from his wet arms.

'You are big man now, grown with a beard,' Marco joked as he greeted Clinton.

Clinton responded with a stiff smile out the side of his lips. He unzipped the bags. 'Two million dollars, US, Sir,' he said, standing back for a breather. 'American dollars, just the way you asked.'

A warm smile emerged from Marco's lips. It grew wide, exposing his teeth. He flicked his smoke aside and bent down. He stuck his hand deep in one of the bags and pulled out a ward of cash.

Clinton threw a quick glance at his mother, which she didn't reciprocate.

Marco examined a banknote by raising it to the sun. 'I have to be careful, my Isabella. No offence. This business of ours is ...'

'No offence taken. I understand.'

Isabel watched him closely. He was looking for security threads, the faint watermark image of Benjamin Franklin, colour-shifting ink and micro prints. She had anticipated this inspection. She wouldn't stiff him. She couldn't. The old man knew exactly what a *\$100 dollar bill*, printed after 2013, looked like.

Marco held it up for a while and murmured something in Spanish. To Isabel, it sounded like a prayer. He then turned back to Isabel and said, 'Thank you my friend.'

He stood and whistled to his men to collect the bags and then produced an envelope from his pocket and handed it to Isabel. 'For you. The formula. With step-by-step measurements. With some pictures to help.'

Isabel couldn't contain her excitement. She ripped the envelope open and read the letter. It was hand-written, clearly, in point form, seemingly written by a woman. The images below were also crystal clear and informative.

A wide childish grin emerged from Isabel's lips. 'Wow! Thank you Marco,' Isabel retorted, folding the note. 'You can't know how grateful I am. You didn't have to give me the formula, but you did. I will never forget your generosity, Sir,' she said, teary eyed. Truthfully, she doubted if he would've sold her the formula if he wasn't retiring.

'You are family. You and Vincent, rest in peace, were like my children. You still are,' he said, pulling her in for a hug.

'I love you.'

Clinton watched him with cold suspicious eyes.

'I love you too,' she responded, with the need to move past any mention of Vincent. 'We have to go now.'

'Yes, and all is one hundred percent. You will have safe journey. No aviation police or Interpol. Young Clinton will tell you.'

Clinton shook Marco's hand. 'Thank you, Sir.'

'My pleasure, big man. You take care of your mother.'

'Of course,' Clinton responded with respect, taking Isabel's gifts for safekeeping.

They stepped closer to the jet as Marco's man collected his money.

Spider and the pilot were already inside, ready to get out of there.

'So when are you coming to Cape Town to see me?' Isabel asked, slapping him lightly on his arm. 'You've been promising for years.'

'Very soon. Very soon my Isabella. Promise.'

They both laughed out loud and hugged again.

'Cheers my friend,' said Isabel, climbing up the jet plane's stairs, behind Clinton. 'Take care of yourself, Marco,' She turned back and blew him a kiss.

'Travel safe my Isabella.'

Clinton pressed a button to wind up the airplane steps as his mom stepped inside.

Their pilot fired up the engine.

As she sat down, Isabel saw Clinton giving Spider an odd suspicious look.

The hell are these two kids up to? She thought, fleetingly, still chuffed about the formula. She felt genuine love for her old pal, Marco. He'd handed her keys to the entire Western Cape drug scene. It wouldn't be long before she spreads her wings to other provinces – national domination, a monopoly.

She would now afford to buy anything she wanted, including high-ranking government officials, and votes too.

A cheerful Isabel sat back and strapped in for the ride.

