

# MR AND MRS LETSWALO



First impressions last... but will Palesa be what Constance wants for her son?

How do you do... Palesa gets acquainted with her seemingly nice mother-in-law

Family Affair... Maletsatsi and Palesa have lunch with Constance

It all started with that stolen kiss...

Men Talk... Lefa discusses matters with his father

Don't you look pretty... Benjamin checks out his son's bride-to-be

I come bearing gifts... Benjamin doles out gifts to the Khumalos

## Scandal! PALESA'S TERRIBLE TROUBLES WITH FUTURE IN-LAWS

### People Pleasers Palesa and Lefa

TX TUESDAY NOVEMBER 18

In November, we finally meet Lefa's folks, Constance and Benjamin Letswalo, the owners of the esteemed family business, Ever Shine Ministries.

Pastor-in-training Lefa (Aubrey Poo), and NZH receptionist Palesa (Refilwe Madumo), have decided to marry on December 18, so there's not much time for the two families to be formally introduced to each other, never mind in which to prepare for the wedding.

Lefa's parents travel far and wide in their mission to spread The Word, so the lobola negotiations are only now taking place. For these discussions, it's decided that editor of The Voice, Eddie (Sandy Mokwena), will represent Palesa, his stepdaughter, in conjunction with Palesa's grandparents, who raised her during the absence of her mother Maletsatsi (Joyce Skefu).

Before the official talks have even begun, Benjamin (R Francis) reveals to Lefa that he has reservations about mixing religion with cultural practices and is shocked when Lefa confesses to adultery – he and

Palesa were both in committed relationships when they acted upon their physical attraction for each other. Dad, on reflection, decides not to tell Lefa's mom.

Eddie and Maletsatsi debate whether to do the honourable thing and reveal Palesa's HIV+ status. Lefa, an only child, suggests his demanding, controlling, judgemental parents get to know his bride-to-be a little bit better before that is done.

Palesa is stunned by the hefty lobola finally agreed upon. It only places further strain on her already loaded relationship with Lefa: apart from him being a poor pastor who is now going to have to obtain a bank loan to pay the amount, there are the issues of her faith – or rather, lack of it, considering she's not a practicing Christian; her medical condition; her recovering alcoholic/pill addicted stepdad, her former sex worker mom – now a pious church treasurer...and her affair with Lefa, that hurt their respective partners. In between Palesa's bickering with Maletsatsi over cake and dress details (her mom is making up for the wedding she never had), and the sniping between

critical Constance (Tinah Mnumzana) and an inferior feeling Maletsatsi, the young couple find out they are obliged to go to pre-marital counselling, too.

Lefa thinks it's actually a good idea. They will be building the right foundation for a life together. There's more training for flipping burgers than in becoming a husband or wife. Armed only with guesswork, family history, and media imagery, thousands of hopeful couples find they simply lack the resources to go the distance. Ultimately, they settle their differences in court rather than in prayer.

We already have a strong relationship, adds Lefa, so this will only cement our future.

*Will Lefa's opinion still hold firm when Pastor Matlala, Lefa's uncle, refuses to marry the couple until they have revealed Palesa's HIV+ status to her parents-in-law? Will he remain by her side when their reaction to her news makes Palesa – literally – ill?*

*Is this another wedding that won't happen?*

Born in Bloemfontein, the multi-talented R. Francis, got his drama training through protest theatre.

"I have always been fascinated by making a living using pen and paper – hence my journalism studies, but it turned out to be a deadly profession where the truth is only the truth if it is in the interests of certain people...and consequently, one saw colleagues being murdered, others deported. Being involved in protest theatre, which required script writing, improvising, and acting, offered other means of communicating the truth.

"I went to a Anglican Church school, which I enjoyed. It was such a science orientated campus that I had thoughts of a career in that field... the only problem was that I was more athletic and outgoing, and so when I saw John Travolta in Saturday Night Fever it totally erased that idea and made me focus on the performing arts.

"My first professional acting on stage was in Bloemfontein in a musical called, Moses the Freedom Man...but it was American Ninja IV that gave me my break into the movies. I assisted in the coordination of extras. Then I decided to do a MA in Film and Drama at Reading University in the UK, because during the shoot I befriended the son of the writer and executive producer, and he said to be able to survive in the industry one should have a good education – he was going to New York to study after the shoot.

"Another international project I was involved in was, The Seven of Daran, which we shot at Nas Farm two years ago. I liked the character I played, Sibaka, a huge moron like character, who is big headed in the sense that when other guys take AK 47s to war, he takes a panga/machete because he believes a true Mombatha warrior should master the weapon."

R. Francis has been on South African TV shows such as Going Up, Home Affairs, and Justice for All.

"My character, Benjamin, is inclined towards humanity...caring for the weak

and poor. I get a sense that he's someone who strives towards the upholding of morals and unity – that African spirit which seems to be eroding.

"Unlike feature films and television series, daily dramas are much closer to real life in the sense that they are like a never ending story. Characters are pounded by challenges and they have to be on their toes to deal with them – or sink.

"I try to make myself as comfortable as possible in whatever situation. In writing, one pours his or her heart out and frees his or her soul. As they say, there can be no film or television without scripts; it is a very important area. At the same time I love acting; it provides opportunities for imagination and challenges one's capabilities. This widens one's horizon which, at the end of the day, makes one a better human being."

As a child, **Tinah Mnumzana (Constance)**, always knew she would end up a professional performer. "I started at church, acting bible stories, and started writing sketches in high school, which I performed at fund raisers. After school, in 1987, I joined the Performing Arts Council of Free State (PACOFS), now called the Performing Arts Centre of Free State, and the first show I was in was an adaptation of the Greek tragedy, Iphigenia at Aulis, called Dikeledi.

"My becoming an actor came as a surprise for a lot of people because my family worked in the health sciences: my mom was a matron, my sister went on to be a nurse, my dad worked as an administrator in a hospital, even my brother went on to join the profession, and so it was as if my following in their footsteps was a given, I mean, my best friend became a physiotherapist. She says I spoke of it so much she became one, but I hated hospitals!

"I know I'm going to enjoy Constance because she's different from any of the characters I've played on TV." Many will remember Tinah as the nosey domestic, Florence, on Isidingo and as Rebecca – again, a domestic worker – on 7de Laan.

"When they asked me to play Rebecca,

I wasn't interested initially, because I thought I had done something similar, but when I read the script and how it was about a woman who has worked as a domestic all her life to provide for her son's education and how he was now em-barrased by her, I was sold on the role as these things do happen in our society.

"Constance is a bit extrovert and she's removed from her culture. I will try and incorporate my own interpretation into the role. Learn and live the role, that's what I say. I also teach, and I always tell my students: don't act, be the character. I taught at FUBA in 2001, and I do workshops at Soyikwa Arts Centre in Diepkloof, and at Vaal Tech as well."

A rape survivor, Tinah ran a workshop at Macufe (Mangaung Cultural Festival) on poetry, based on an anthology of poetry she had published in 2004 called Thakgotha (the Southern Sotho word for 'when horses are about to sprint out of the starting gate') that she had written to deal with a difficult past.

"I'm looking at re-launching it soon, the last run was very nice, and I performed the poetry with Pastor Benjamin Dube and the Her Royal Highness La-Mbikiza's Redemption Choir from Swaziland.

"I'm happy to have joined the Scandal! family because I'm such a fan of the show. Acting for me is fun because I get the idea of how other people live so that I can say whether I would like the person's life, or not. For instance, when I did Phamokade, which was about teaching people about living with AIDS, I got a glimpse into the ignorance of some people, and with Florence, I was like, this woman is hectic, and I wouldn't be friends with someone like her ordinarily.

"I always tell my students: don't go into acting because of the supposed money and fame. I've had the most difficult years so I always recommend they study, have something as a backup. As a stage and film student nowadays, you have a choice of learning other aspects of the craft like set design, or directing.

"I've recently been in Ten Bush at the Market Theatre."

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