



Drama

Pule and Zinhle's romance started off sweetly...

It was rape!

Soul City's cute couple is destroyed when Pule believes "no" mean "yes" and he rapes his girlfriend Zinhle.

Soul City
Season 12 Tuesdays 5A8C1 2030

! SPOILER ALERT!

We've been watching this sweet romance with hearts in our eyes ever since 17-year-old school-girl Zinhle's (Tsholofelo Maseko) controlling dad introduced her to Pule (Austin Shandu), the 23-year-old artist at the gym on Tuesday 18 November. The couple agree to "take it slow" on Tuesday 2 December, so we're devastated when the relationship takes a violent turn on Tuesday 9 December. But as Zinhle breaks down from the trauma of rape, Pule wonders why his girlfriend suddenly isn't talking to him.

SHE SAYS NO

Pule and Zinhle are making out in his studio on 9 December and Zinhle doesn't want things to go any further. But when she says no, he ignores her and counters her struggles with force. Afterwards Pule has no idea of the damage that he's done,

or why Zinhle's crying. Tsholofelo says, "For him it's 'not really rape'. He thinks, 'She's my girlfriend and she loves me, I love her, so why not?' The fact that she says no doesn't even factor." Austin adds that "when she says no, I don't think that Pule's actually listening at any point. He just wants to show her how much he loves her in another way. He just wants to hear what he wants to hear. Even afterwards, he doesn't think that he's done anything wrong". And he's not the only one. Even within their own social circles, Austin and Tsholofelo are aware that what Pule does happens far too often. "Men don't entirely understand that even though a person is your girlfriend, you still have no right [to abuse them]," says Austin. Tsholofelo adds, "They don't know where the line is. And as a girl, you feel very guilty for saying no."



Pule's a gentle and sensitive artist with a dark side.

FRIENDS CRY FOUL

With so much of the public and legal dialogue still shifting the blame for rape from rapists onto their victims, Soul City was determined not to tell the story of a "slut provoking a monster". "We were very conscious of this and anxious to shift attention away from any possible blame on the Zinhle character," says Soul City series manager Raashied Galant. Pule's behaviour in the relationship has never been shown as predatory either. "What's important in our story is that they are really in love. Pule is portrayed as compassionate and sensitive, as an artist, not violent and a brute of sorts. This was important so that men don't distance themselves from Pule. We were speaking to young men in many ways where there is still the perception that 'no' actually means 'yes'."

And since part of the heart of the problem is men not actually listening to women in the first place, Soul City shows Pule finally getting the message when it comes from other guys. "In the aftermath, we have Pule confronted by his peers, the young men in his circle, who really bring home to him how wrong and criminal his actions were," reveals Raashied.



Zinhle wanted to take things slowly.

HELP & HOPE

While many TV shows unwittingly discourage victims from seeking help by emphasizing how difficult it is, Soul City is alerting viewers to what can be done. "We depicted the support and care that survivors of sexual violence can receive at the Thuthuzela Care Centres (TCC)," says Raashied. "These include not only counselling and medical support, but also legal support. A woman need not feel under pressure to lay a charge, but the TCC keeps her file and all evidence safely if she should wish to lay a charge in the future."

If you find yourself needing help, find your nearest TCC at www.unicef.org/southafrica/protection_5080.html

BY GENEVIE TERBLANCHE. PHOTOS: SABC1.

