

Teaser: CHLOÉ - DIVING BOARD



December 15, overcast, 23°

A convoy of intimidating black cars with windows so tinted they might as well have been blindfolded began to roll, followed by a minibus that looked like it had seen things and chosen silence. The sky sagged into a dull grey, like it didn't want to be associated with whatever was about to happen.

They peeled off the main road and slipped into the city's underbelly—lowlands stitched together with narrow lanes, shacks leaning into each other like gossiping aunties, and unpainted bungalows that had clearly given up trying. They passed a stadium that looked retired against its will, then crawled through even tighter passages until they reached a place locals, for reasons known only to them and possibly no one else, called Campus.

Chloé sat next to Zahra, who was driving the lead car like she owned not just the road but the very idea of roads. They stopped just outside the settlement, idling on a dusty lane beneath a few scraggy trees that looked like they'd filed complaints about their working conditions. The engine grumbled like an old man with opinions. In the distance, a high wire fence crowned with spirals of barbed wire guarded a row of low barracks—very welcoming, if you ignored everything about them.

Behind them, the rest of the convoy lined up neatly, like a funeral procession.

Chloé had no clue what the plan was. Just the headline version. And strangely, she didn't feel like asking. She felt like luggage. Expensive luggage, maybe—but still luggage.

Zahra, meanwhile, looked mildly bored, like she'd been promised drama and got paperwork instead. She stared ahead for a few seconds, then reached into the back seat, pulled out a stack of documents, and flipped through them with the calm of someone reading a brunch menu. She flashed Chloé a quick grin and a nod—encouragement, or maybe just *try not to fall asleep*—then disappeared back into her pages.

Chloé rolled her window down. In the wing mirror, a thin ribbon of grey exhaust drifted upward, dissolving into the evening air as though it were happy to be free again. A few locals began drifting closer, slow and cautious, like cats pretending they weren't curious.

A couple of skinny guys hovered across the road, doing that universal dance of *we want to see but also not get involved*. One of Zahra's khaki-clad heavies stepped out, took one look at them, and casually strolled around the huge black vehicle like he was running a Sunday errand. He popped the boot, pulled out a handful of peace offerings—cigarettes, beer, and packets of pastries—and started chatting.

Just like that, the tension downgraded to small talk.

The guys accepted the goods, then retreated beneath a low tree decorated with what could generously be described as "community rubbish" and settled in. They ate, drank, murmured, and every now and then shot glances at the convoy—half awe, half *this is definitely going to be a story later*.

Chloé glanced back at Zahra, who hadn't even blinked. Still reading. Still calm. Still dressed like she was about to attend a minimalist fashion shoot in a war zone—light grey sweatshirt, matching joggers, crisp white boots that had never known suffering.

"Put this on, honey. Out there, it can get dirty."

Chloé almost snorted at the memory. She looked down at her own outfit. Same tone-on-tone nonsense. Stylish, yes. Practical? Debatable. She would've trusted her old, half-dead clothes more. At least those had already survived a few bad decisions.

The rest of Zahra's crew had also switched their look. The heavies now wore khaki trousers and dark sweaters, thick belts loaded with enough metal to start a small orchestra. Clink here, clank there. Subtle as a marching band.

Chloé was fairly certain the car boots were packed with enough weaponry to start a minor revolution—or at least a very serious argument.

Darkness began creeping in, slow and sticky.

Finally, Zahra lowered her window, leaned out, and signalled something quick and precise. No speech, no drama. Just a flick of the hand.

Then she dropped the car into gear.

The engine roared to life like it had been personally insulted, and suddenly they were flying down the hill. No hesitation. No warning. Just go.

Chloé blinked.

Five seconds ago: composed businesswoman with paperwork.
Now: full action-movie Amazon.

“Yoh... okay then,” she muttered. “Who are you now, Halle Berry’s cousin on steroids?”

In the rear-view mirror, the rest of the convoy followed, snaking behind them in a loose formation that looked like a black metal worm that had got out of bed on the wrong side. They tore through the neighbourhood, scattering dust, dogs, and probably a few expectations about an entertaining evening.

Landmarks flashed past—some familiar, some best forgotten—until Zahra slammed on the brakes at the studio gate.

Tyres screamed. Dust exploded upward, wrapping the car in a thick, gritty cloud.

Within seconds, the convoy had sealed off both sides of the road.

Showtime.