

Buhlenkosi Malinga

My plans were not going to be thwarted by Simnikiwe. I had formulated a plan with precision beforehand and I was going to go through with it. Come hell or high water, my stepmother was not going to have the final say.

I kept glancing at my laptop laid on my bedside table. I hoped it brought good news for me. I needed them. I reached for it, and powered it on in anticipation. My heart drummed in nervousness.

I went to my emails and accessed one, top of the list, from University of Johannesburg. I opened it, and started reading.

The words that made my heart soar in happiness was 'Congratulations. You've been accepted.' I closed the email, I didn't need to read more. Instead I looked for the university's bank account which I transferred the first year's tuition and accommodation fees to.

I received a notification on my cellphone of the payment, and transferred the remaining money I had in an offshore account that couldn't be easily traced.

As a sigh escaped my lips, my half sister, Kamvalihle walked into my bedroom with a tray of food. She came to lay the tray on the bedside table.

Kamva: I brought you breakfast.

Me: You didn't have to. I was about to come down, but thank you.

Kamva: You seem busy. I hope I'm not disturbing.

Me: I'm done. I was going through my mother's

photos and albums. I woke up missing her badly.

She nodded, and I closed the laptop; pushing it aside on the dishevelled bed.

Kamva: So you're getting married tomorrow. How do you feel about that?

Me: It isn't my ideal wedding, but I'll make it work. Hopefully.

Kamva: Don't worry, you'll be okay. You're marrying a prince. They will treat you well.

Me: A crippled prince.

Kamva: You know how royalty works. You're a princess and you have to marry someone with royal blood. He might be crippled, but I'm sure he'll take very good care of you.

Me: I still don't like any of this.

Kamva: Let me leave you to it then.

Me: Thank you for the breakfast.

She smiled, and my own faded away as she walked away. Kamvalihle was Simnikiwe's daughter, and for that simple reason, I didn't trust her but yet I ate her food because I was certain that they'd not poison me as their plan to get me married to a crippled prince was working. But I had other plans of my own. I dug in, and after I had finished, I went to take a bath.

After a much needed bath, I went downstairs where servants paced around the palace making preparations for my wedding. Flowers and traditional colours decorated the palace. I didn't say anything, as I decided to help around. It wouldn't hurt. A female servant said that I should sit down, as they had enough helping hands but I politely insisted that I'll assist.

Me: It's my wedding after all. I just want to make sure everything goes according to plan.

She nodded and carried on. After a good ten minutes of assisting, Simnikiwe approached me with a smile that hid sinister plans for me.

Nikiwe: I see you're helping out. You must be excited.

Me: That doesn't even come close to it.

Nikiwe: I thought you were not happy about this wedding.

Me: Can't a girl change her mind?

Nikiwe: Okay, that's good. I can't wait for tomorrow.

Me: I can't either. I have a feeling that it's going to be a good day.

She stared at me for a minute longer; but I merely smiled and carried on. She walked away.

Later on, I was standing near my mother's gravestone, inked Nomthandazo Malinga, 1979 - 2019. It had been 11 months since she passed away.

Shortly after her death, a letter was rendered to me written by her from a good friend of hers about the identity of my biological father which was concealed from me for my entire existence and it turned out to be the Chief of this valley. Chief Mvelo Mkhize.

It had been a shock to me, and the valley as I was introduced to the inhabitants as his 'illegitimate' daughter.

A month ago, he passed away due to an unknown cause but my intuition suspected that Simnikiwe was behind her husband's death.

The news shattered me, as I had only discovered my father and my mother's death had already hit me hard.

It was already hard living with Simnikiwe with my father present in the palace; it became harder after his death as the Queen was determined to get rid of

me, hence the arranged marriage to a crippled prince. Initially I had refused, but I wanted to teach that woman a lesson so I agreed, with a plan in mind of course.

I laid down the lilies I had harvested from the royal garden on the tombstone. Sadness settled in my heart once again.

Me: Ma, we meet again. This will probably be the last time I come here in a long time because I've decided to go to the city to reclaim my dream. You have always pushed me to dream, and ensured that I pursue my ambitions. My departure from this place is the first step towards achieving those dreams. However, midst chasing all my dreams, I will never forget who put you here. I never forgive Kwanele for taking away the only person who was always there for me.

Tears pooled in my eyes, with anger building up

within.

Me: Ma, you always said that one should never run back to what broke them, yet you failed to follow your advice. That's the strongest advice ever relayed to me, because it has instilled strength in me. You taught me that I should never allow anyone to play on my head... Ma, if only you had never went back to Kwanele, perhaps you'd still be alive.

Kwanele was my mother's husband. I was introduced to him when I was 10 years ago, and they were engaged. I never really liked the man. When I was 13 years ago, they got married and my mother's worst nightmare came true. His true colors were revealed as he started to abuse her. At first, it was emotionally and verbally; overtime it leaped to physically. At times, my mother was hospitalised when the injuries got bad, and everytime her best friend attempted to convince her to alert the police, she didn't. I was young myself, but I understood

everything going on.

Until the fateful night whereby she fell off the balcony. I had discovered her and called for an ambulance. Her last words to me from her hospital bed were 'He did it. He pushed me. He finally killed me.' The police never had a chance to question her. Those words haunted me everyday. Prior to her death, she had taken a decision to leave Kwanele. But the bastard said that the only way that she would leave him was through death, and in the end, he killed her.

When I informed the police, nothing was done. Apparently there was a suicide note. I didn't dispute that the handwriting was my mother's but things didn't add up. For Kwanele to go scotch free, he provided an alibi and the alibi checked out and the case evaporated into thin air with the verdict that it was a suicide. The woman who raised me wouldn't kill herself.

Me: I will always love you, ma. And I promise I'll be back to avenge your death. I'll get to the bottom of Mvelo's death. And then both of you will finally rest in peace. But for now, I need to go and regain strength, formulate a watertight plan and strike when they least expect it.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Zenani, my younger sister walked in and closed the door behind her. She came to join me on the bed.

Zenani: So tomorrow, that girl will finally be out of our lives.

Nikiwe: I just can't help but think that she's planning something.

Zenani: What do you mean?

Nikiwe: She was not happy about this wedding. Now she is even helping out with the preparations. I smell a rat.

Zenani: I think you're worrying for nothing. She had all the time in the world to stop the wedding, but she didn't. Why would she do it now? What's the worst she could do?

Nikiwe: You're right. That girl will finally be out of our lives and we can move forward with the plan.

Zenani: The plan will be a success.

Nikiwe: I just wish you didn't have to leave tonight. I need you to be beside me tomorrow when I face the Mkhize uncles. You know how hard headed they can.

Zenani: I know, but duty calls. And don't worry, soon they will be eating out of the palm of your hand.

I chortled.

Nikiwe: Are we still talking about the same people here?

Zenani: Don't let them stress you. You shouldn't forget that you're carrying a little one.

Her hand trailed down my stomach, and settled on one spot with a smile.

Zenani: You hear that, little one? Don't be too hard on your mother.

Nikiwe: Have a safe journey, and call me when you get home. I don't feel good about you travelling in the night. Perhaps you should go in the morning.

Zenani: I can't do that. I have an early meeting. Have some rest. You'll need strength for tomorrow.

Nikiwe: With the wedding and the meeting pending, you're right.

Zenani: I'll go and say goodbye to Kamva, and hit the road. Keep me posted.

Nikiwe: I will.

She rose from the bed and walked out of my bedroom, and soon after; I drifted off to sleep.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I blended in with the nightfall as I used a long rope which I made by interwining numerous sheets together to climb off my balcony. I knew it was risky, but I couldn't use any of the entrances because guards were posted 24/7 there. I had a backpack on with a few essentials I needed inside. The rest I would buy in the city. My heart drummed in fear, as I went down the sheets I had tied to the railing. The palace was a double story, but it was still pretty huge and beautiful. I finally made it down on the ground and checked for incoming guards. But I heard no movements. It was probably a bad idea to leave the rope of sheets here, but I didn't have time and the means to hide it.

I swiftly and quickly made it to Zenani's car. It was a SUV, and it would accommodate me for the time being. I opened the trunk and there was only a few small bags. And luckily since I was flexible and slender, I'd fit. I made space for myself, and ascended the trunk. I slowly closed it, careful not to make a noise. I just hoped I didn't suffocate inside.

Even if Zenani was not going back to the city tonight, I'd have found another way to escape. But her departing the night before the wedding day was convenient for me and the fact that she is in cahoots with her sister to get rid of me, yet she'll unknowingly help me escape was a cherry on top for me.

I heard voices seconds later.

Zenani: Okay, put that in the boot.

My heart started beating fast. This couldn't be

happening. Footsteps approached.

Zenani: You know what. Just put it in the backseat. I'm running out of time. I need to get going so I can quickly take a rest before I go to attend my meeting.

I let out a sigh of relief. The engine ignited, and soon it had eased down on the road to my freedom.

I'll post the next insert once the page has 100 likes. I hope you enjoyed.

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Simnikiwe Mkhize

I was sitting at the dining table with my daughter and a scrumptious breakfast had been served to us

minutes ago.

Nikiwe: I wonder where that girl is. I don't know why she thinks she's special. We're not going to make a habit of taking food to her.

I clicked my tongue.

Kamva: Ma, it's her wedding day. Please go easy on the girl.

Nikiwe: She should start getting ready. I don't know why she's still sleeping.

A servant walked in, and slightly bowed.

Her: My Queen, the princess is not in her room. She is nowhere to be found and one of the guards found something that she used to climb down from her balcony. They think that perhaps she has run away.

I choked on my juice.

Kamva: Ma, are you okay?

I regained my composure. I knew that girl was up to something. Anger boiled within me.

Nikiwe: Call all the guards to the throne room. I want to have a word with all of them.

She bowed again, and with heightened speed departed. I needed to find that girl. I couldn't let her embarrass me in front of everyone.

Kamva: Perhaps this is a sign, ma.

Nikiwe: What do you mean, Kamva?

Kamva: This wedding shouldn't be taking place so

soon after baba's death. Maybe this is a sign that our ancestors are not happy with us. As we're speaking, the throne is vacant of a ruler. Perhaps we didn't do things right.

Nikiwe: I hear you, my child but your uncles will be arriving this evening and we'll discuss a way forward. This has nothing to do with the ancestors. Buhlenkosi is just a selfish prick.

I paced to the throne room where the guards had gathered. I demanded their attention the minute I walked in.

Nikiwe: Will anyone care to explain to me how the hell that girl managed to leave the palace without your knowledge? So all of you were sleeping on the job? Is that what we pay you to do?

They didn't say anything, as my voice kept rising. I was livid.

Nikiwe: Now, you'll go out there and look for that girl. You shall not leave any stone unturned and if she is not found, don't bother coming back. You do realise that the wedding is in two hours, what will I say to the Ngubanes? They'll be expecting their bride to be ready when they arrive. Make sure you check her late mother's house and grave. Keep me updated... What are you waiting for!

They filed out of the room, and I took out my cellphone from my breast area and called a good friend of mine.

Nikiwe: Sifiso, I need a favour.

Sifiso: What can I do for you?

Nikiwe: How fast can you track down someone for me? I'll send you her details. I need her location as in yesterday. I'll make it worth your while.

Sifiso: I'm on it.

An hour later, there was still no news on Buhlenkosi.

I was on another call with Sifiso.

Sifiso: It seems that her cellphone is at the palace. It seems like she knew what she was doing when she ran away.

Nikiwe: Okay, is that all you have?

Sifiso: If only she made transactions and payments with her cards, it'd narrow down her location for us. The only transaction I see here was from yesterday whereby she transferred a hefty amount to UJ for her tuition. It could only mean that she's headed there.

Nikiwe: Do you think she's already there?

Sifiso: I have a friend that works at the university. I'll call in a favour and ask her to inform me when the girl checks in. But it might not even be today. And you said that the wedding has to take place soon.

Maybe you need to call it off.

Nikiwe: Thank you, Sifiso. I appreciate it.

Sifiso: I'll keep in touch.

My anger was swiftly rising. A lot was at stake here.

A servant walked in with a glass of minute.

Her: My Queen, you asked for a glass of water.

I took the glass from her, and gulped down its contents.

Her: My Queen, the guests have started to arrive.

Nikiwe: Keep them occupied. I'll think of something.

Her: My Queen.

She bowed down as she walked out of the lounge. A guard walked in, uninvited. He bowed down.

Nikiwe: What do you have for me?

Him: My Queen, we have looked for the princess all over the valley. We have not found her yet.

Nikiwe: Didn't I say that you shouldn't bother coming back if you don't find her? I'm surrounded by useless people. Get out!

I hurled the glass to the wall, and it shattered into pieces on the floor as frustrations took control of me.

Nikiwe: Damn you, Buhle!

Another hour passed, and people were starting to ask questions. The Ngubanes walked inside with anger deciphered on their faces. The groom was

wheeled in by a guard on his wheelchair. They sat down, and I offered them something to drink or eat but they declined.

Nkosiyabo: Care to explain to us why the bride has not yet come down.

The King addressed me.

Nikiwe: There has been an emergency that my daughter had to attend.

Nkosiyabo: Why are we only hearing this now?

Nikiwe: I'm sorry, my King. If only you could give us one more day, everything will go perfectly.

Nkosiyabo: Are you hearing yourself? We've travelled a long way. And we're not leaving here without a bride. So it's either you bring the initial girl, or your daughter takes her place. We didn't pay lobola to be made fools of.

I looked at his wife, her face expressionless.

Nikiwe: I understand your frustration, my King but I'm asking for one more day. I'll fix this.

Nkosiyabo: Listen here, woman. The minute we walk out that door, there's no turning back. This marriage was meant to bring peace between the two kingdoms and if we leave without a bride, that means that you're going against your word. The deal will be lifted, and I'll declare war. Now, is that what you want?

He backed me against a corner. Our army was not as strong as theirs and it didn't help that the throne was vacant. It would not be a good call for me to allow him to declare war. I didn't like what I was about to do.

Nikiwe: Okay, I'll have a word with my daughter.

Kamva was not having it. She didn't like the idea. I felt bad that I had to sacrifice my daughter for the safety of the kingdom.

Nikiwe: We can't afford to go to war with the Ngubanes. We'll be fighting to lose.

Kamva: I hear you, ma but to go as far as saying that I should marry that cripple. I don't love him, and I don't even know him.

Nikiwe: Look, Kamva. Please do this for me. I'll make sure I find a way to get you out of that marriage soon.

Kamva: But ma, why must I pay for Buhle's mistakes?

Nikiwe: It will be okay, my child. We don't have any other choice here.

Kamva: Okay, I'll do it. But you better have a plan on how you going to get me out of that marriage.

Nikiwe: We're doing it to save face. I'll find a way. I promise. Have I ever let you down?

She shook her head.

Nikiwe: Good, let's get you ready.

I walked to the door, and the servants filed into the bedroom to help Kamva get ready.

Nikiwe: I've kept the attire in my room. I'll go and get it.

Kamva nodded. I turned my attention to the helpers.

Nikiwe: Be quick. I need her ready in the next 20 minutes.

Unison: Yes, my Queen.

I walked out. It was safe to say that my plan

backfired on me and Buhle was going to pay.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

It had been a long journey to make it to the city, and I was finally glad to be standing here, at res. I had checked in, and was assigned a room. It was still orientation week. I knocked on the door of the room I was supposedly sharing with someone else. Music was softly playing inside. I knocked again, and there was no answer. I turned the doorknob and walked inside. There was two beds pinned against separate walls, and a vanity table between them where a speaker blared some music. I looked around the room, and put my bag on the bed that was not occupied.

I took a seat on the bed, and finally let my body and mind rest. I was glad that I would not get married. I

just wonder how things played out. A song with a great lyrical flow and rhythm played next. I actually interested myself in listening to the lyrics whilst I didn't know the song.

"Mama getting high up in the kitchen

Daddy wasn't there, yeah, he was missing

Nobody was there to even listen

I kept all my problems and kept my feelings hidden,
yeah, yeah

And I put the blame on me

I put the blame on me, yeah

I put the blame on me

[Verse 1]

Only 10 years old

I'm already numb, yeah, my heart's getting cold

Saw my mama getting weaker, hurt me to my soul

The only man she loved, how could he do this to his
girl?

He put that pistol to her head, I swear he could've
shot her dead

Man, that liquor made him evil

I swear that man ain't have no reason

That shit just turned him to a demon, yeah

Fast forward a couple years, I done turned 12

Living life one hell to the next hell

I got cousins touching me inappropriately

And don't nobody believe me when I tell

When you learn that your heroes ain't no one to look
up to

And the same people hurting you telling you they
love you

Before too long, you start believing

That maybe you're the reason, yeah"

I felt like some words were directly talking to me. Someone walked in, and I craned my head to see my roommate. She was wrapped in a towel, seems like she had just taken a bath.

She was beautiful. I didn't want to lie. Her short hair was dyed white, and it actually suited her. She was light skinned whereas I was an exemplar of melanin.

Her: You must be my new roommate.

I nodded and she smiled.

Her: Nice to meet you. My name is Thabile Felicity Mampane. Call me Thabi.

Me: Buhlenkosi Malinga. You can call me Buhle.

She went to the bed occupied by a fresh set of clothings and cosmetics, and started applying lotion on the visible parts of her body.

Her: So what brings you here?

Me: What do you mean? I'm here to study just like everyone else.

Her: I know that. What I meant to say is what are you majoring in?

Me: You should've just said so from the beginning.

She chuckled.

Me: But to answer you question, psychology.

Her: As in you want to be a psychologist?

Me: Yes, is there anything wrong with that?

Her: No, I'm just surprised.

Me: And you, what are you studying?

Her: Journalism. It's my second year.

Me: Interesting.

Her: Let me finish dressing up. I'll show you around campus and introduce you to some people. I think that my friends are going to like you.

Me: I'd like that. Do you need some privacy?

Her: No, it's okay.

I looked away as she dropped the towel.

Me: I'd appreciate it if you showed me around the city. I do need some clothes and necessities. But when you have free time.

Her: That's not a problem. You're from the village?

Me: Yes, why? Is there a problem with that?

Her: No, there is no problem. We just get a lot of those here.

Kamvalihle Ngubane

We travelled through the nightfall. We were following behind one car which had the King and his wife, my mother in law. Silence engulfed us as the driver concentrated on the road, and me and my newly wedded husband occupied the back seat. His wheelchair was placed in the trunk along with my suitcases.

Kamva: So perhaps you could tell me about yourself?
What do you think?

He didn't say anything.

Kamva: We're married now. It'd be a good idea for us to get to know each other.

I was getting frustrated.

Kamva: Would someone talk to me here? Even if it's you, driver. The silence is uncomfortable for me.

My husband spoke.

Senzokuhle: You better get used to it, or else you're not going to survive this marriage.

I looked at him with the moonlight casted upon his profile. He was very handsome, I didn't want to lie but his words were unsettling. I leaned back on the seat, and closed my eyes the remainder of the journey.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

The Mkhize uncles arrived an hour after the wedding had commenced. They were 3. Uncles to my late husband, Mvelo and trust me when I say that they aren't very easy people to deal with. Dinner was served an hour ago, and we were now seated in the lounge, discussing the future of the kingdom.

1st uncle: I don't like what has been happening in my brother's house.

He was referring to my father-in-law who passed on a few years ago.

2nd uncle: They've turned this kingdom into a joke. A playground.

He shook his head.

3rd uncle: I think it's safe to say that this kingdom has failed under the leadership of Mvelo.

Nikiwe: What do you mean, uncle? My husband worked hard and sacrificed a lot for this kingdom.

3rd uncle: What do we have to show for that? Mvelo died without producing an heir for the throne. He failed to abide by the laws and traditions set generations and generations ago.

1st uncle: You on the other hand didn't fulfil your role as a wife.

Nikiwe: I did everything I could for my husband and this kingdom. What makes you say that?

2nd uncle: You've been married to Mvelo for 25 years, and yet you have not bred a son for him. We've tried to convince him to take a second wife from a royal family for years, and he didn't heed our advice. Now look where we are.

1st uncle: I don't know what you fed him, but that is not how we taught him to behave. He even had a girl out of wedlock. If only the girl was a boy.

3rd uncle: I'm deeply disappointed in him.

He shook his head. I was getting agitated with their backward thinking.

Nikiwe: It doesn't help talking about the past for the man that you're talking badly about has passed on. You should be ashamed of yourselves to be talking this way about the dead. But that is not why we're here. We need to talk about the future.

3rd uncle: What you're not going to do is talk to us like we're a bunch of kids. Know your place, and don't ever overstep.

Nikiwe: I apologise to all of you, but I'm trying to show you that the kingdom is without a king. We need to do something.

2nd uncle: We know that, and that is why we're here.

Nikiwe: What I'm getting at is that all of us know that my husband does not have a male child. I have a solution for that.

1st uncle: We're listening.

Nikiwe: I don't know how you are going to receive what I'm about to say, but please keep an open mind. I want the Mkhizes to give me a chance to rule. I want to be the first Queen to occupy the throne. I think you'll agree with me that it's the best solution and it's time for change.

2 of the uncles laughed, and the other one remained passive.

2nd uncle: I think we've mentioned that this kingdom is not a playground. Stick to what you know. Your rightful place is in the kitchen.

3rd uncle: Over our dead bodies will we be ruled by a woman.

Nikiwe: Times have changed, and it's up to us to move with them. Women are equal to men.

1st uncle: Not in this valley will we answer to a woman. You're below us, woman and that will not

change. Haven't you ever asked yourself why your fingers are not the same length? That is because we're not the same, and definitely not equal. Men are naturally leaders, and women belong in the nurturing role.

Their words were upsetting me, and anger brewed within me.

Nikiwe: You don't really believe that, do you? You people think that women are objects that you can use, and toss aside. I'm sorry, but that is not how it works. I'm asking you to respect me the same way you respected Mvelo.

3rd uncle: Our family never approved of you, and the way you are addressing us shows that we were right not to like you.

2nd uncle: Now here is what is going to happen. We've discussed it, and decided that I'll sit on the throne until Mandlakhe returns in the next month, and he'll be inaugurated as the next King. I'll be the

regent in the meantime.

1st uncle: We've said all we wanted to say. Now be a good daughter-in-law and bring us some alcohol.

The anger within me at their disrespect was intensifying.

We called it a night, and the servants prepared rooms for those three sexist. When I had safely tucked myself into bed and switched off the lights, I called my sister.

Zenani: You better have a good reason for calling so late.

Nikiwe: It didn't go well with the uncles. I still can't believe how sexist they are.

Zenani: You should've known that it was going to go this way. You can't introduce a change, Nikiwe and expect everyone to go along with it. You need to understand that men have always been rulers of that

kingdom. You need to be cautious to how you address it with them.

I heaved a sigh.

Nikiwe: Quite frankly, I think I should let it go. It's quite evident that they are never going to change their minds.

Zenani: Nikiwe, the person who created the light bulb failed 9000 times. Success only comes from consistency. Most revolutionaries succeeded because they were consistent and determined. They persevered, and you need to do the same. You can't give up on the first trial. That kingdom will be ours. Just be patient.

Nikiwe: Where would I be without you?

Zenani: I don't even want to know. Don't stress too much though. You're pregnant.

Nikiwe: I know.

Zenani: So what do you want me to do about Buhlenkosi?

Nikiwe: Since we know where she is, that's better. I'll think of something. She needs to be taught a lesson. My daughter is not with me tonight because of her.

Zenani: Maybe I should pay her a visit.

Nikiwe: Perhaps you should.

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3

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I retrieved a small box from my backpack which stored my important things. I started by looking at my mother's photos, reminiscing the memories I had with her. Tears even pricked my eyes. I moved on to the letter that disclosed my father, and read it again.

'My child, if you're reading this; that means that I am no longer with you. I want you to know that I will always love you, and I hope you'll forever carry the memory of me in your heart.

I know that you've always wanted to know the identity of your father, and I've never enlightened you with the truth. My intention was not to keep you from him, but to protect you.

Your father is King Mvelo Mkhize, and I know that this probably comes as a shock to you.

Mvelo and I had an affair, and that was how you were conceived. The truth is that we were in love but because he was already married, we decided to end things. A month after the break up, I found out that I was pregnant, and I took the decision not to let him know. I went to live with my cousin for the duration of my pregnancy. I resided with him until you were 3 years old and I returned to the valley. He had

suspicious about you being his child but I convinced him otherwise.

Life went on as usual, and I met Kwanele and you know the rest.

It's completely up to you what you want to do with this information.

I love you, my child and I hope you fight to live your dreams.'

The emotions that travelled through were nearly as rare as the first time I had read the letter. I folded it and returned it to the box. I retrieved another note, but this time, it was from my father. Tears streaked my cheeks. I missed them dearly.

He had given it to me at one of our 'get to know each

other' sessions.

-Flashback-

His hand engulfed my own, and an indecipherable emotion decorated his face. We were in my bedroom.

Mvelo: My child, I know that I was not present throughout your life and I'd like to apologise for that.

Me: Baba, it was not your fault. I understand that my mother kept the truth away from you.

Mvelo: I should've tried harder. Something in me told me that you're my daughter. The resemblance was there, but I chose to believe your mother.

Me: It doesn't matter anymore. We can't change the past.

Mvelo: You're right. I have something for you.

I looked at him questioningly.

Me: What is it?

Mvelo: Nothing fancy. I wrote this for you.

He unpocketed a note.

Mvelo: Whenever you're overridden by anger. Whenever you're plagued by regrets. Whatever emotion that you may feel, I want you to read this message written by Foloti Siyabulela. Read it and understand it well.

I took the note from him, and embraced him. Our relationship was becoming strong and I was happy about that.

The flashback ended, and my eyes skimmed through the page.

'If the contents of our minds were made public, people would be shocked by how much emotional junk and mental clutter we carry around. The Devil is in the business of turning people into walking emotional garbage collectors. Aren't you tired of carrying the heavy load of negative emotions? Aren't you tired of holding grudges? Aren't you tired of harboring the hot coals of toxic anger and resentment? Aren't you tired of carrying the old pains and old hurts? Aren't you tired of being tired? Physical rest won't relieve you from emotional and spiritual fatigue. Jesus says, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) Therefore daily take inventory of your mind and discard the heavy load of broken dreams, missed opportunities, failed attempts, false promises, past disappointments and past regrets at the foot of the cross and walk away free. Don't let the Devil turn you into a human garbage refuse of emotional junk. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Clean up every corner of

your mind, and trash out all the old negative emotional junk that you carry around. You cannot have peace in your life until there is peace on your mind. Release the old pain, discard the resentment, and let go of the stored up anger that fill the recesses of your mind. "Whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy - meditate on these things."

(Philippians 4:8) Today and right now, forgive yourself and others, bring your emotional garbage to God in prayer, and receive God's mercies that are new every morning. - Mr Foloti Siyabulela'

Someone knocked at door, pulling me away from my reverie. I vigorously wiped away my tears and returned everything to my backpack. A knock came again, and after composing myself, I went to open the door. Shock was evident on my face at the familiar face.

Zenani: That took you long enough.

Me: What are you doing here?

Zenani: You thought you could hide forever. You were clearly mistaken.

Me: I didn't have any intention to hide from you or your sister. And I'm not going to ask again. What are you doing here?

Zenani: Aren't you going to let me in? We have a lot to talk about.

Me: You better say what you came to say, or I'll close this door.

Zenani: You messed up. Why didn't you let Simnikiwe know that you were not happy about the arranged marriage? Now Kamva had to marry Senzokuhle to take your place.

Me: Oh, that's too bad but I don't see how this concerns me. You've gotten what you wanted nonetheless. I'm out of your lives.

Zenani: You should go back home. We care about you, Buhle.

Me: Who are you fooling here, Zenani? You're only

here because your plan with your sister backfired. Dont make me go back home, and make it my new mission to find out who killed my father, because I will and when I do, those people that murdered him will pay.

Zenani: I'm not here to fight.

Me: Please leave. You have no business here.

Anger flashed through her eyes, but she quickly composed it. She turned to walk away. I called out to her. She stopped, her back still towards me.

Me: Oh, and Zenani, thank you for the lift here. I must say though that your boot was very uncomfortable for me.

She didn't say anything, and kept walking. I smiled to myself and closed the door, flinging myself onto my bed.

Moments later, Thabile made her way inside.

Thabi: Let me show you around the city.

Me: Thank you.

Thabi: You can also buy some clothes, because I don't understand why you came without them.

Me: They were not important.

Thabi: The more I talk to you, the more I'm convinced you're a secret agent. Perhaps even a criminal.

She rummaged in her suitcase, and hauled out a black leather jacket. I rose up from my bed.

Me: Unfortunately, I'm none of those.

Thabi: It's hard to believe that with the mystery that you are.

I chuckled, as I took out a stack of money from my

backpack. Thabile looked at me, bewildered.

Thabi: You keep that much money in your possession?

Me: I don't see a problem with that.

Thabi: Yet I'm crazy for thinking that you're not telling me everything.

Me: I'd have to kill you before I let you in on my secrets.

I chortled.

Me: You should've seen your face. Relax, I'm just playing with you.

Thabi: I hope so.

Me: Let's hope that my money is not going to go missing now that you've seen it.

I was now serious.

Thabi: You think I'm a thief? You don't even know me.

Me: Exactly. I don't know you. You can't blame me.

Thabi: Fair enough. Let's go fix that. By the end of the day, you'll know me better than most people.

She smiled, and we walked out of the room. I liked her.

Kamvalihle Ngubane

My mother in law, Ntombizodwa was guiding me as to how they did things in their home. I liked her and she was very warm towards me. She was helping me prepare lunch.

Ntombizodwa: Usually our servants prepare food for us, but it's custom to us that when someone marries into our family, they prepare food for us for a whole day.

I nodded, and she came to inspect my chicken curry.

Ntombizodwa: It's not too bad, but it needs some work. I'll take over.

Kamva: Am I that bad of a cooker?

She laughed as she sprinkled spices into the curry.

Ntombizodwa: I would not say too bad, but my family has high standards. You'll get used to them.

Kamva: I hope so. My family wasn't as huge as yours. I can't help but feel nervous.

Ntombizodwa: Don't worry. You have me by your side.

Kamva: Thank you.

Ntombizodwa: Okay, peel the potatoes and boil them for me. That won't be too hard for you, right?

I smiled, and started peeling the potatoes. We worked together to prepare a mouthwatering meal, but I couldn't take the credit for the aroma that weaved through the palace as my mother-in-law did most of the work. The servants prepared the table with all the individual dishes we prepared. The rest of the family started to come down, and gathered at the dining table. I stood with my mother in law, as she pointed to each person that made their presence known in the dining hall.

Ntombizodwa: Some members you might have seen them yesterday at the wedding, but I'll properly introduce you to them. That's Nobanda. MaNdlovu, she's the King's second wife and she has two sons. Don't be intimidated by her. She takes time to open up to people.

I nodded, as she sat down at the table.

Ntombizodwa: That's Happy.

A girl walked in. She was beautiful, rocking a weave with stilettos.

Ntombizodwa: She's the youngest of the family.

Kamva: She's beautiful, and seems so modern.

Ntombizodwa: That she is. Following behind her is her mother, Samkelisiwe. MaSibiya, the last wife. She's very friendly.

She seemed young to be having a child probably around my age.

Kamva: I'm not sure I can keep up anymore. This

family is big. How do you do it?

Ntombizodwa: You better get used to it, because they are still more to come.

Kamva: That's Somikazi, my first born. She's married, but her husband is not here. You'll meet him some other time.

I nodded.

Two men walked in.

Ntombizodwa: That's Nhlakanipho and Mpilo. MaNdlovu's sons.

I didn't want to lie. The Ngubane sons were very handsome.

Moments later, my husband, Senzokuhle was

wheeled in by another man.

Ntombizodwa: You know Sensokuhle. The man with him is my youngest child, Nqaba.

I licked my lips. Out of all the men in the family, I had to get married to one who couldn't walk.

The King was the last to walk in, and they all settled down at the table. Me and my mother in law served them food, and also sat down.

Somikazi: Kamva, you've outdone yourself. Your food is very delicious.

I just merely smiled.

Kamva: As much as I'd like to take credit for the food,

your mother helped me a great deal.

Nqaba: She really does know her way around the kitchen.

MaSibiya: So how did you sleep, Kamvalihle? I hope you're settling in here.

Kamva: Ma, I can't really complain. You've welcomed me with open hands.

MaSibiya: I'm glad to hear that.

MaNdlovu: Maybe I'm missing something here. This girl was not the girl we paid lobola for. What's going on here?

I cleared my throat.

Nkosiyabo: Plans change all the time, Nobanda.

MaNdlovu: It's such a pity. I liked the first girl more.

An uncomfortable silence engulfed all of us. This

MaNdlovu, I didn't like her already.

Happy: It's such a good thing then that she doesn't need your approval.

Shots fired.

MaNdlovu: I don't remember talking to you.

Mpilo: For once, can we please eat our meals in peace? There is no need for all this bickering amongst ourselves. We've just had a new addition to the family.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I was in my bedroom, planted on a sofa with a glass of wine in my hand. My other hand sported my

cellphone as I talked to my sister.

Zenani: So I went to see Buhlenkosi.

Nikiwe: Let me guess. It didn't go well.

Zenani: You know how that girl is. We should just be happy that she's finally out of our lives.

Nikiwe: I know that, but she still needs to pay.

Zenani: She's the least of our problems, Nikiwe. As old as we are, we can't keep playing games with a 19 year old girl. We have bigger things to worry about.

Nikiwe: Bigger things, Zenani? My daughter is married to some paralysed man.

Zenani: I know, but look on the bright side. That paralysed man is from a powerful royal family. There will come a time whereby we'll need them.

Nikiwe: So you're saying I should leave my daughter with them? I promised her that I'll get her out of this.

Zenani: Nikiwe, what's done is done. She's married now. I don't think there's much we can do. Your only

worry should be those sexist pigs.

Nikiwe: So what will I say to her? She wants out of the marriage.

Zenani: Nikiwe, we can't do anything about that. Make her see the bright side of everything. She'll understand.

I deeply sighed.

Zenani: I hope that your uncles aren't giving you problems.

Nikiwe: Every time I see them, my hands ache to strangle them. The way they don't see me, and view me as their equal makes me mad. I'm losing my mind here.

Zenani: Don't worry. Everything will work out perfectly.

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Kamvalihle Ngubane

I was removing my clothing from my suitcase to the wardrobe. I had plugged in my earphones, my cell in my jean pockets as my mother spoke on the line.

Nikiwe: I'm still working out a plan, Kamva. You need to be patient.

Kamva: Ma, please hurry up. I don't know how long I can survive here.

Nikiwe: Hasn't the family welcomed you?

Kamva: They have, but it's not the same. Sensokuhle is not even trying. He is not acting like a husband.

Nikiwe: Are you acting like a wife, Kamva? You need to play along.

Kamva: I know, ma. I just wonder how Sensokuhle has sex. Is it even possible for a paralysed person to

have it?

Nikiwe: You're asking irrelevant questions.

Kamva: Ma, I need to know. I hope that he doesn't ask that of me.

Nikiwe: He's very handsome though.

Kamva: It runs in the family.

Nikiwe: Eyes on your husband, Kamvalihle. I don't want any problems.

Kamva: Ma, what do you take me for?

I chuckled, and my steps halted as I noticed Senzokuhle in the doorway. We were assigned a room downstairs as he uses a wheelchair. My heart rate picked up speed. I hope he didn't hear a word I said.

Kamva: Ma, I need to go. We'll talk later.

Nikiwe: I need to go take a bath myself. I love you.

I ended the call, and unplugged my earphones tossing them onto the bed.

Kamva: How long have you been standing there?

Senzokuhle: Long enough.

He didn't say anything more.

Kamva: Do you need something?

Senzokuhle: You can stop unpacking your bags. There is no need. We're leaving tomorrow.

Kamva: Where are we going?

Senzokuhle: Joburg. I live there. I have business I need to attend to.

Kamva: Okay.

Senzokuhle: We have to introduce you to the ancestors. Prepare yourself. I'll come back to get

you.

He pivoted his wheelchair around.

Senzokuhle: And wear something appropriate.

He wheeled himself out. I released the breath that I was holding. This man didn't know the concept of smiling. He was intimidating, and I didn't know how I'd stay married to him. My mother better come up with a plan or else I'll soon lose it. Worse, I'm forced to move to Joburg.

I hauled out a headwrap from my bag, and took off my jeans, setting for something more 'appropriate'; a maxi dress.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I walked out from my adjoining bathroom with a towel wrapped around my naked body, only to find one of the Mkhize uncles sitting on my bed.

Nikiwe: What are you doing in my room?

Mlungisi: I think there's a lot we need to talk about.

He rose from the bed, and glided towards me.

Nikiwe: As you can see, this is a bad time.

Mlungisi: That's where you're mistaken. This is the perfect time.

Nikiwe: I'd like to get dressed. Please leave.

His hand trailed on my arm, and my stomach churned in disgust.

Mlungisi: You have soft skin.

I moved back.

Mlungisi: Don't you want to drop the towel? I want to see all of you.

I mockingly laughed.

Nikiwe: So is this what it is? You're hitting on me? Get out.

Mlungisi: I thought you're a very smart woman.

Nikiwe: I thought you had some decency in your rotten bones. How dare you hit on me? Your nephew's wife? Mvelo must be turning in his grave.

Mlungisi: You scratch my back, I scratch yours.

Nikiwe: I'll not repeat myself. I said leave!

Mlungisi: You give me what I want, and I'll give you

what you want. I'll help you become Queen.

Disgust and anger travelled through my whole body. He must be smoking something if he thinks I'm going to sleep with him.

Nikiwe: I don't need your help if it comes with such ridiculous conditions. You must be out of your mind. You think I'm that desperate that I'd sleep with you?

Mlungisi: I'm doing you a favour.

Nikiwe: I'll scream rape so loud if you do not leave my bedroom right now.

He circled me, and stood behind me, trailing his hands down my arms from my shoulders. I quickly pivoted, and raised my hand to slap him but he anticipated my reaction and held my wrist before the impact could reach his face.

Mlungisi: You wouldn't dare.

He let my hand go.

Nikiwe: If you so as much as glance in my direction again, let alone touch me again, I'll rip your balls off and feed them to the dogs. Don't try me.

He winked at me.

Mlungisi: Think about it.

With those three words, he was out of my bedroom. My stomach churned, and I rushed back to the toilet, vomiting all its contents out.

Thabile Mampane

I was lying on my bed, my body and mind in relaxation. I was listening to music, and singing along to Jhenè Aiko's song: Promises. Buhle was out at mall, buying a few things.

Thabi: Swear that I can still feel you here

I just can't believe you're not here

I've been needing you

All I dream is you

I don't think I can make it

I don't think I can make it

But then I hear you say that

I bet not do nothing crazy

'Cause Nami really needs you

And I would never leave you

'Cause I am in the stars

And everywhere you are

And every single little moment
And every single bit of sunshine

I stopped the song on my cellphone the minute I
heard a knock. It came again. I was not imagining it.

Thabi: Come in.

I sat upright, and faced the door. A frown crept up
on my face when a familiar person I hated walked
through the door and closed the door. He gazed at
me with a smile.

Ofentse: Hi, Thabi.

Thabi: Enlighten me, Ofentse because I don't
understand what you're doing here.

A whole range of sad memories and feelings

plagued me.

Ofentse: I was hoping to talk to you.

Thabi: I thought I made it clear that you and your friends should never ever come near me.

Ofentse: I know we've hurt you, and I apologise-

Tears pricked my eyes.

Thabi: So that's supposed to make it okay? You took everything away from me, Ofentse. You and your friends. Single handedly. It's hard enough seeing you guys on campus, and now you're in my room. And I'm supposed to be okay with that? How do I know that you're not here to rape me again?

The tears fell down my cheeks. The memories were flooding on me tenfold. The tearing of my vaginal walls. The endless bleeding. The penetration of my

womanhood by three rods. The screams for help. Everything was coming back.

Ofentse: I'm sorry.

Ofentse didn't rape me that night. His friends did, but he was as guilty as them as he did nothing to stop them. My heart felt heavy.

Thabi: I'm at a point where if you do me wrong, I don't even put the effort to hate you. I just leave you alone and move on. Haven't I done that, Ofentse?

Yet you come into my space, only to bring back what I've tried to bury. You hurt me. You broke my heart into pieces. You crushed my womanhood. Do you think your apology is going to make everything okay?

Ofentse: I think I should go. I'm sorry.

I inhaled slowly, and exhaled.

Thabi: Ofentse, say what you've come to say.

Ofentse: I just wanted to tell you that Bandile has set his eyes on your new friend. Buhle, I think. I just thought I should let you know.

Thabi: You tell your friends to stay away from her, because I'll be damned if you do what you've done to me to another girl. What did you call it again?

Correction rape.

I paused. He looked uncomfortable, and almost sympathetic.

Thabi: I'm warning you or else I'll come for you with everything I have. Tell Bandile to behave himself or this time I'll make sure he goes straight to jail. I don't make empty threats.

He nodded, leaving me with my streaked cheeks.

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Kamvalihle Ngubane

At dawn, Sensokuhle had woken me up. I didn't understand why he didn't wait for the sun to rise. I had taken a bath, and sported warm clothes as it seemed to be cold outside. A guard came for our bags and loaded them in the trunk. The rest of the family was still asleep. I had walked out to the car. Something piqued my curiosity. I saw Sensokuhle giving the family seer something. I walked closely, where a shed of light made it possible for me to see. It was a stack of money. I wondered why. It could be for anything, but something within me said that there was more to it. It didn't help that my husband was secretive. I didn't even know anything other than his names and that he couldn't walk. Flip, I didn't even know why he couldn't walk. I walked over to the car

we were going to travel in. I climbed into the car, the driver had opened the door for me. Sensokuhle came, and the driver helped him out of the wheelchair and settled him beside me. The wheelchair was folded and positioned in the passenger seat. The driver's seat became occupied and soon we were hitting the road.

Kamva: I saw you giving money to the seer.

Senzokuhle: What is your point?

Kamva: Why were you giving him money?

Senzokuhle: He may be the family seer, but he needs to eat like the rest of us. He has a family to take care of.

Kamva: It just seemed weird to me. I'm sorry.

Senzokuhle: You know why I don't like you? Because you seem to enjoy sticking your nose in matters that don't concern you.

Kamva: Everything you do is my business. You're my husband or have you forgotten?

Senzokuhle: Only on paper. But for me, I don't love you and I don't think I will.

I laughed. I didn't mean to, but in an odd way, I found his words funny.

Kamva: And you think I do? The feeling is mutual, Mr Ngubane.

Senzokuhle: It's hard to believe that you were raised in a royal family. You lack respect and class.

Kamva: Coming from a man who can only use half his body.

He looked at me, something close to hatred lurking in his eyes. I immediately regretted my words.

Kamva: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to.

He didn't say anything, and we rode the journey in silence.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I had just eaten breakfast, and I was taking a walk around the valley. I avoided Mlungisi like the plague. Every time I saw him, he'd wink at me. It was getting uncomfortable. One guard followed closely behind me. I called Zenani, and she answered on the third ring.

Zenani: Simnikiwe.

Nikiwe: Zenani, I can't anymore.

Zenani: What are you talking about, Nikiwe?

Nikiwe: You won't believe what one of the uncles did to me.

Zenani: I'm listening.

Nikiwe: He came into my room yesterday, and said that I should sleep with him.

Zenani: They're really proving to be difficult.

Nikiwe: Too much. It's so uncomfortable when I'm in the same room as him.

Zenani: But that could work in our favour.

Nikiwe: I hope you're not suggesting that I sleep with him.

Zenani: That's not what I'm saying. You need to use his lust to your advantage.

Nikiwe: I'll never sleep with someone I don't love to get what I want, Zenani.

Zenani: I know. All I'm saying is that you need to slowly bring the Mkhizes onto your side. One by one, lure them in.

Nikiwe: And how do you suggest I do that, because I will not sleep with any of them?

Zenani: You're a smart woman. You'll figure it out.

Nikiwe: This just gets harder by the day.

Zenani: Eyes on the prize, Nikiwe. You can't afford to lose direction now.

Nikiwe: I hear you, but we still have to deal with Mandlakhe. He'll be coming back next month to take the throne.

Zenani: We can't let our hard work be in vain. We need to find a way to deal with him. When exactly did they say he's coming back?

Nikiwe: I don't know.

Zenani: You need to find out. The sooner we get him out of the way, the better it will be for us.

Nikiwe: I'll hear you. I'll do my best.

I released a sigh. We were in too deep to give up now. I need to push.

Zenani: Do that.

Nikiwe: Kamva called yesterday to tell me that she's moving to Joburg with her husband.

Zenani: Is it? Atleast I'll be able to see my niece more often.

Nikiwe: She still thinks I'm coming up with a plan to get her out of the marriage.

Zenani: I'll talk to her.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I had settled at a coffee shop, my order had been served by a waitress: coffee and a slice of chocolate cake. I was finished setting up my new cellphone- a Samsung Galaxy A10. I didn't do a sim swap, I settled for a new one. The past three days, I had been going back and forth to the mall to buy everything I needed; ranging from clothing, snacks and decorations for the room. I was glad that I got Thabile as a roommate; she was honestly a breath of fresh air. Though I could see that something has been bothering her since yesterday but I didn't push

her to tell.

I typed in my mother's best friend's number in the keypad. She was like a second mother to me. It went through, and a smile creeped up onto my face at the voice.

Noxolo: Hello?

I didn't say anything.

Noxolo: If you were not going to say anything, why did you call?

Me: Ma, it's me. Buhle.

Noxolo: Oh, my child. How are you doing?

Me: I'm good, ma. How have you been doing?

Noxolo: Forget that. I heard what happened. Why didn't you come to see before you eloped?

Me: I know I should have, but there was a lot on my mind.

Noxolo: Where are you?

Me: I'm here in Johannesburg to study.

Noxolo: That's good. Your mother would be so proud of you.

Me: I miss her so much.

Noxolo: That makes the two of us. I still can't believe that she is no longer here with us.

My smile faded.

Me: Kwanele killed her. It still hurts. She died at his hands.

Noxolo: As it should, my child. Nomthandazo needs justice.

Me: I know, ma but I don't think I can do this anymore. I've decided that karma will do with him.

Noxolo: And when will that happen, Buhle? You think I like it when I see that murderer roam the streets freely as if he didn't kill my friend.

Me: It doesn't help holding onto hatred. It slowly consumes you, and you start to lose yourself. I don't want that to happen to either of us. Ma, I've become a firm believer that the more you walk away from the things that poison your soul the healthier and happier you will be.

Noxolo: I understand, Buhlenkosi. You've been through a lot and you deserve a break. I hope you find the happiness you seek within yourself.

Me: It won't be easy to forgive Kwanele, but I'm willing to try.

Noxolo: As for me, I'll not forgive someone who's not even sorry. Kwanele doesn't care, and I'm going to work day and night to make sure that he goes to prison for killing Nomthandazo.

Me: Ma, are you sure you want to walk down that path?

Noxolo: I'm going to do whatever it takes. Kwanele

hit on me a few days back, I'm going to make him think that I'm interested and slowly work to destroy him.

Me: Ma, please let this go. Do you know what Kwanele will do to you when he finds out you're with him to settle a score? He'll kill you. I can't lose you too.

Noxolo: You will not lose me. I can't sit around and wait for karma to do its job. We've been waiting for 11 months already. That's enough.

Me: Ma, it's dangerous. You could get killed.

Noxolo: And necessary. I'm willing to take the risk. I considered Nomthandazo my sister, and you don't mess with my loved ones, and get to live freely.

Me: Ma, honestly. You're saying that there's nothing I can do to change your mind?

I heaved a sigh. It was better to let go of everything, and focus on the future.

Noxolo: Nothing, and please send everything you've discovered about the case. I need to see if you missed anything. Remember we need to build a strong case against Kwanele.

Me: What we need is his confession, and he'll never do that.

Someone cleared their throat near my table. It was a good looking guy, in simple jeans and T-shirt.

Me: Ma, we'll talk some other time.

Noxolo: Don't be scarce, my child.

Me: I won't. Be safe.

I ended the call, and looked up at the guy.

Me: Can I help you?

Him: May I sit down?

Me: Let's start with what you want from me.

Him: I want to get to know you.

Me: Okay, you may sit down.

He pulled out the chair across from me, and plopped down on it.

Him: Is it too early for me to tell you how beautiful you are?

I slightly blushed.

Me: Let's start with your name. Wait a bit with the compliments.

He outstretched his hand.

Him: Bandile Dube.

We intertwined our hands for a handshake.

Me: Buhlenkosi Malinga.

Something moved in me when his lips lingered on my hand. He kissed it while making eye contact. He had beautiful eyes.

Bandile: A beautiful name suited for its gorgeous owner.

I blushed profusely. He let go of my hand.

Me: Do you do this to all girls you meet?

Bandile: Only the ones I like.

2 weeks later

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Buhlenkosi Malinga

I cradled the flowers- roses Bandile got for me in my hand.

Me: I love them. Thank you.

My nose lingered on the petals, and I gave my boyfriend a hug. Bandile and I made our relationship official a week ago. I know that I met him 2 weeks ago, but I liked him and he made me happy. All aspects of my life were moving too fast. Classes had started: all the books I needed, I made sure that I purchased them.

Bandile: It's my pleasure, baby. I'll see you tomorrow night, right?

Me: I'll be there. I wouldn't miss our date for the world.

He pecked me on the lips, and walked away down the corridor. I smiled, my eyes still on his retreating figure. Once he disappeared, I went inside my room only to find Thabile lying on her bed, busy with her cellphone.

Thabi: Buhle.

She acknowledged my presence. Things were not very good between us at the moment. She didn't like Bandile, but failed to provide me with reasons as to why.

Me: Thabi.

Thabi: Those are very beautiful flowers.

Me: Thank you. Bandile got them for me.

Thabi: What a gentleman.

I could sense the sarcasm in her voice. I sighed, as I placed the flowers on the pedestal. I turned towards her.

Me: We're too old to be bickering like this, Thabile.

Thabi: I'm not in the mood for this.

Me: Thabile, what is your problem exactly?

She sat upright on her bed. I was getting frustrated.

Thabi: You're letting a guy come between us, Buhle.

Me: So what? This is an ultimatum? You want me to choose between you and Bandile?

Thabi: No, I want you to get it through your thick skull that I'll never like Bandile. I don't have to.

Me: I know. All I'm asking from you is to at least be civil with him. Every time he's here, you never miss a chance to insult him.

She rolled her eyes.

Thabi: That guy is not who you think he is. There is a whole different side to him.

Me: And how many times have I asked you to tell me about this side of his? You must be mad if you think I'm just going to take your word for it. Bandile suspects that you have feelings for him, and I'm starting to think that it is true.

She looked at me like I had grown a second head. She even laughed.

Thabi: Oh, the fact that I'm into girls has totally slipped from your mind? Don't come here, and talk nonsense.

Me: You're starting to bore me now. You don't like the guy, and you're not even telling me why. You attack him every time he's here.

Thabi: And I have my reasons.

Me: You know what. I'm not doing this with you.

Thabi: I'm warning you about this guy. Bandile is not who you think he is.

I didn't say anything. To be honest, my feelings for Bandile overpowered Thabile's opinions. There was no point having this conversation anymore. I sat down on my own bed, and hauled out my cellphone. I swiped through the apps, the tension thickened around us.

After a few minutes, I felt movement around my bed. Thabile was sitting next to me.

Thabi: I'm sorry.

Me: You can never live your life according to what people say. You know this as much as I do. If you listened to everything people say, chances are you might have never dated most of the people in your life. Or am I wrong?

She sighed beside me.

Thabi: No, you're not.

Me: Am I supposed to completely disregard how Bandile treats me, or how he makes me feel contra to what you say? Everyone has a past, and their flaws and Bandile is not an exception.

Thabi: I hear you. Chances are the way I know him, you know him differently. And I can see that, it's true when they say that you can never treat everyone the same. Perhaps I was exposed to Bandile's bad side, and he's showing you his loving side.

Me: It doesn't mean that he's pretending, Thabi.

Everyone has a good and a bad side.

Thabi: All I'm going to say is that you should date a person that allows you to be yourself, someone that doesn't wanna change you, someone that makes you feel alive and someone that makes you happy. And if you found that person in Bandile, who am I to stand in your way? Just be careful.

Me: All I want is to be happy, Thabi. My past has never allowed me to be. Bandile is that drug that makes me happy. He's that drug that makes me feel loved.

Thabi: Do you love him?

Me: Not yet, but it's only a matter of time.

Thabi: All I can say is that you should not base your happiness on someone else. Seek that happiness and love from yourself first.

The tears fell, as my emotions surfaced. Thabi pulled me in for an embrace.

Thabi: Your problem is that you think your healing lies in other people, and that is how you'll get hurt.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I was in my bedroom with Mlungisi massaging my feet on my comfy bed. I rolled my eyes. I didn't like doing this especially on the martial bed I shared with my husband.

Mlungisi: Why do I get the feeling that you're playing with me, Nikiwe?

Nikiwe: That's not the case, Mlu. I'm only doing what the doctor said.

Mlungisi: I hope so, because things will not end well for you.

I rolled my eyes once again, and prepared to sing the

tune I've been singing for the past 2 weeks.

Nikiwe: Mlu, you know that I can't have sex while I'm still pregnant. It poses a risk to my child.

He sighed. I was very good at lying, and he believed me each time.

Mlungisi: I understand.

Nikiwe: It's not that I don't want you, Mlu because I do. A lot.

I almost vomited at my words.

Nikiwe: But we need to think about this child that I'm carrying. He's Mvelo's heir, and we need to keep him safe. He'll be the future King, and if he dies, it will be over for the kingdom.

He nodded. I was not lying about carrying Mvelo's child and his gender, but the sex part was crafted according to my script. In fact, healthy mothers are recommended to have sex.

Mlungisi: I heard you.

Silence enveloped us. He kept massaging me. I didn't want to lie but his hands were gifted. The tension in my lower limbs was eased. I'd need him when I'm heavily pregnant. A knock reverberated around.

Mlungisi: Someone's knocking.

Nikiwe: Don't worry, I locked the door.

I saw the door knob turn, but the person couldn't gain access.

Khulekani: Simnikiwe, why is the door locked?

The regent yelled on the other side.

Nikiwe: What do you want?

Khulekani: Have you seen Mlungisi? I've been looking for him.

Nikiwe: So what makes you think that he's in my room?

Khulekani: I didn't say that he's in your room. I asked whether you have seen him.

Nikiwe: No, I haven't.

Khulekani: What are you hiding in there? Open this door.

Nikiwe: You have your own bedroom. Leave me in peace. I'm trying to rest.

I heard footsteps fading away.

Mlungisi: He's gone.

Nikiwe: We need to be careful or one of these days, we'll be caught and things won't end well.

Thabile Mampane

I tried to bury the feelings and memories that threatened to overpower me. My legs felt heavy as I walked across the canteen to where Bandile and his friends were seated. Luckily, Buhle was at the library. It took me all my willpower not to let the tears fall. I got to their table. Feelings of hatred and anger seeped into me once again. All four of them looked at me, each sporting a different emotion at my presence.

Ofentse: Thabile, what are you doing here?

I ignored him, and looked at Bandile.

Thabi: Haven't I told you to stay away from Buhle?

Bandile: I don't take orders from you.

Thabi: Why her?

Bandile: Because I love her.

Thabi: You must be sick in the head. What do you know about love?

Bandile: This is not the time and place, sweetheart.

I wished I could wipe the smirk from his face.

Thabi: I'll not let you do what you've done to me to another girl.

Bandile: I'll not do what I've done to you to Buhle. She's my girl.

Shawn: Moreover she doesn't have demons that need to be exorcised from her.

Xolani: We were simply fixing you. Don't take it personal.

Bandile: I mean no one in their right mind would choose fingers over a cock.

Shawn: But it seems that we didn't do the mechanics right.

A tear escaped, as I heard the words these disgusting pigs threw at me. Ofentse didn't say anything.

Thabi: Go to hell.

Xolani: Right after you, baby. This time I was thinking we hit it from the back. What do you guys think?

They laughed. My hands rolled into fists. I looked at Bandile.

Thabi: We'll see if you'll still have the last laugh when I tell Buhle everything you've done to me.

He stopped laughing.

Bandile: Let's talk, sweetheart.

Thabi: And she'll finally know you for the monster that you are.

Bandile: Please give me a chance to tell her myself. I was planning to tell her everything myself tomorrow night. Don't deny me the chance to fix my mistakes. Firstly to you.

What do you say to that?

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7

Kamvelihle Ngubane

It hasn't even been a month since I got married to Sensokuhle but I was already exhausted. Moving to Joburg has only made me more lonely. We didn't even share a bed, not that I cared. We hardly ate meals together. It was safe to say that my marriage was cold. My father-in-law, the King descended the stairs as I was setting the dining table. I looked up, and saw a guard holding a small suitcase in his hand. The King approached me.

Me: My King, you're already leaving?

Nkosiyabo: My business is done here.

I nodded.

Me: I was hoping that you'd stay for lunch.

He shook his head.

Nkosiyabo: I need to go back home. It was lovely seeing you and Senzokuhle. I hope that he's treating you well.

I nodded with a smile.

Me: Have a safe journey, my King.

What came next surprised me, he started coughing heavily; and he gripped his chest.

Me: Are you okay?

I pushed out a chair, and his guard helped me plop him down on the seat. His sudden coughing worried

me.

Me: Have some water.

I poured him water in a glass from a jar, and he gulped down its contents. After a few moments, he seemed better.

Me: Are you sure you're okay? Maybe we need to take you to see a doctor.

Nkosiyabo: No, I'm okay, my child. Don't worry yourself so much.

I nodded, and didn't give it much thought.

Nkosiyabo: We'll be on our way. Tell Senzokuhle to call me.

I nodded with a slight bow. The King left with his guard.

My spoon kept clinking on the plate as I played with my food. Frustration and loneliness hit me hard. Here I was, most of the time alone, in this huge mansion and Senzokuhle didn't even give two fucks.

My cellphone rang on the table, and the caller ID displayed my aunt's name. I answered it with a sigh.

Zenani: You sound depressed.

Kamva: That's because I am. Why did you call, auntie?

Zenani: Can't I check up on my favourite niece?

I rolled my eyes.

Kamva: We both know that's not why you called.

Zenani: How are things?

Kamva: There is no change, and yet you and mom want me to stay in this marriage.

Zenani: Give it time. Sensokuhle will come around.

Kamva: I'm not going to wait for him to come around. I want out of this marriage and if you and mom are not going to help me, I'll do it myself.

Zenani: I know that it is frustrating, Kamva but you can't just give up on your marriage. It's only been three weeks.

Kamva: I want to be loved, auntie. I want to be cherished. And it's quite evident that me and Sensokuhle are not meant to be. This marriage was forced on us.

Zenani: Love is not going to pay your bills. I just wish you'd see the bigger picture, Kamva. Sensokuhle is the next in line. You're his wife. You'll be the next Queen.

Typical of my aunt. Always thinking about power and

money.

Kamva: They can keep their throne for all I care. And it's not like we were in need of money before I married into the Ngubanes. I need to know that if I go through with this, you'll have my back.

She heaved a sigh.

Zenani: You'll always be welcome, but Kamva, work on your marriage. It might turn out to be the best thing you could have ever done for yourself.

Thabile Mampane

After the lecturer dismissed us, I walked out with a very good friend of mine, Dimpho. That was our last class.

Dimpho: I still don't understand why you haven't told Buhle the truth.

Thabi: I know that I need to tell her, but I can't bring myself to tell her.

Dimpho: Where is she? I haven't seen her today.

Thabi: She's spending the day with Bandile.

Dimpho: And you let her, Thabi? Why would you do that?

Thabi: Relax, Bandile won't rape her.

Dimpho: How can you be so sure?

Dimpho was the only person who knew about my rape. She was the only person I trusted. We spoke in whispers. We couldn't afford to let people hear our conversation.

Thabi: The only reason Bandile and his friends raped me was because I'm into girls. They did what we call,

correctional rape. Buhle is not lesbian, so she's safe. For now.

Dimpho: You can't seriously be thinking that. Thabi, you have disappointed me. If Buhle gets raped, it will be on you.

Thabi: Are you seriously blaming me? You of all people should know how I've felt for the longest.

Dimpho: You could've warned her, but you didn't.

Thabi: I know, but I have a plan. Bandile said that he's going to confess to Buhle about the rape tonight. So I bugged her bag. I'll soon have his confession.

Dimpho shook her head.

Dimpho: Beats me why you never reported the rape, Thabi.

Thabi: Because Bandile's father is a very powerful man. He was going to swipe my case under the carpet. I need to slowly collect so much evidence

that they have no choice but to convict them in the end.

I always record my conversations with them. Yesterday they played well into my trap like the rats that they are. They ridiculed me not knowing that they were digging up their own graves.

Dimpho: I hear you, but I need you to get Buhle on the phone right now. There is something I need to tell her.

Thabi: What is going on?

Dimpho: There are rumors going around campus that Bandile and his friends made a bet on Buhle. It was initially on who will sleep with Buhlenkosi first, and it seems that Bandile has beat them to it.

I was not really shocked, because this is how Bandile and his crew operates. But I was starting to fear for Buhle. I attempted her number twice, but it was not

going through.

Thabi: She's not answering.

Dimpho: You know what this means, right?

Thabi: If Buhle sleeps with Bandile tonight, it will be public knowledge tomorrow morning.

Dimpho: We need to find her.

Thabi: You think Bandile is going to release a sextape?

Dimpho: It wouldn't be the first time.

Fear and worry dogged my mind.

Buhlenkosi Malinga (16+)

I walked into the hotel hand in hand with Bandile. He booked a room for us. I enjoyed spending the day

with him, from the cinema, to the park to have a picnic and we sat getting to know each other better. Our last stop was the hotel room, and it was already nightfall. We walked in, and he closed the door. I looked around the room; the interior design was breathtaking. I went to position my clutch on the pedestal, while Bandile went to the other side of the room. He returned to me, two flutes of alcohol.

Bandile: Champagne?

I nodded, and he handed one flute to me. I sat on the king sized bed.

Me: Thank you.

I tentatively took sips of the champagne, until Bandile took them away. He came back, and sat beside me on the bed. My eyes kept roaming around the room, my body kind of restless. He started

kissing me, and I responded with as much passion until his hand went to my shoulder. He slid off the straps of my dress. I slightly moved back from him. His eyes harboured hunger and lust, and I didn't know how to react.

Me: I don't think I can do this. I've never done this before.

It came out as a whisper.

Bandile: You're a virgin?

His voice was husky, and I nodded.

Bandile: Do you trust me?

Did I? That was the ultimate question. I swallowed

hard and nodded.

Bandile: I promise I'll be gentle with you.

Me: Don't treat me so special, don't make me fall if you're not planning to keep me, Bandile.

My voice cracked slightly.

Bandile: You have my word.

Soon enough, we were both naked on the bed. I was honestly scared. He showered kisses all over my body. One hand of his kneaded my breast, and the other traveled slowly to my private part. He rubbed my clitoris, using different techniques as moisture pooled inside my groin. I involuntarily started moaning, my fear forsaken as he increased his speed.

He attacked my lower body with wet kisses. His body towered over mine, as he slowly moved up my lower limbs with his tongue to my coochie. His tongue lingered on my clit, teasingly. He placed one more kiss, before he inserted his dick inside after ripping a condom foil apart and clothing his member. It was long erected, and he inserted it inside me. It was painful as it was my first time. He pushed himself further in as I screamed at the excruciating pain. He thrust deeper, and he took my nipple into his mouth again. He pounded me until his release came. The pain outweighed the pleasure, and a tear escaped from my closed eyelid.

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8

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I walked inside, after a fresh intake of air. I enjoyed

most of my day with Bandile yesterday, but I was not sure how to feel about having sex with him. A lot of emotions raced through me. Thabile attacked me with a hug the minute I made it inside.

Thabi: Are you okay?

She looked concerned.

Me: Why wouldn't I?

Thabi: I was worried about you. You didn't come back last night.

Me: I'm okay.

She pulled away from me, and shook her head. I tossed my clutch to my bed.

Thabi: So you didn't think that it was important to let

me know that you would not be sleeping here?

Me: You knew that I was going to spend the night with Bandile.

Thabi: You've only known this guy for two weeks, but you're already spending the night with him.

Me: I don't see a problem with that.

Thabi: You want to tell me that you don't see a problem with missing classes for a boy? You're so naive, Buhle. Someone throws a little affection your way and you think that it is love?

Me: Are you done?

Thabi: I thought you were smarter than this, but the joke is on me, right?

Me: What do you want me to say, Thabile?

Thabi: Did you sleep with him?

Me: I don't see how that's any of your business.

She sighed, and picked up her bag.

Thabi: You did, didn't you? All I can say is that you're going to regret it. You might want to keep your phone on standby. We might start calling you a celebrity after today.

I didn't understand a word she said and I was not going to ponder on them. She walked out. I took off my jacket, and slid out of my dress, settling for a tracksuit. I switched on my cellphone, and immediately numerous notifications came on the screen. There was 6 missed calls from Thabile; I guess she was worried about and one from my aunt, Noxolo - my mother's best friend. I decided to call her, and I laid back on the bed, waiting for her to answer.

Noxolo: You finally remembered that you have an aunt?

Me: Ma, I'm sorry. Varsity has been very hectic.

Noxolo: I understand. You should not lose focus.

Me: I won't, ma. I promise you.

Noxolo: I hope so, because I don't want to hear any stories. Stay away from boys.

I swallowed a lump that formed in my throat.

Me: Ma?

Noxolo: I'm serious, my child. You're still young. The time for boys will come.

Me: I hear you, ma.

Noxolo: Anyways, I wanted to tell you that I'm in.

Me: What are you talking about, ma?

Noxolo: Kwanele. He's head over heels.

Me: Ma, you know that I don't like this one bit. Walk away while you still can.

Noxolo: I'm not changing my mind, Buhlenkosi.

Me: I'm worried about you, ma.

Noxolo: You don't have to be. I'll be fine. I'll only have peace when Kwanele is behind bars.

I sighed.

Me: I still don't like this. It's too dangerous.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I descended the stairs with my suitcase in tow. I had packed my clothes, and I had taken the decision to go stay with my aunt for the time being. I walked around the mansion looking for Sensokuhle.

Kamva: Senzo? Sensokuhle!

There was no reply. I walked to an ajar door near the

garage. It was always locked, hence I never knew what was in the room. I walked inside, and my breath was taken away momentarily. There were canvases around, absolutely beautiful. Paint and brushes littered the room. There was still an unfinished painting in the centre of the room - still wet with paint. I abandoned my suitcase at the door, and walked to it. I was in awe. It was a painting of a woman with a baby in her arms - her eyes looking at the horizon, and her shadow surrounded by greenery. It was perfectly crafted with detail. Subtitles were inked at the bottom of the canva.

Kamva: Keep your face always toward the sunshine and shadows will fall behind you - Walt Whitman.

Senzokuhle: What are you doing here?

I didn't hear him come in. He was sporting an apron tainted with different hues of paint and he wheeled himself towards me.

Kamva: I didn't know that you paint?

Senzokuhle: That was not my question.

Kamva: I came looking for you. I wanted to tell you that I'm going to stay with my aunt.

Senzokuhle: Okay.

I was surprised.

Kamva: That's all you're going to say?

Senzokuhle: Was I supposed to say something else?

Kamva: You're supposed to care. I'm your wife, and you don't care that I'm leaving?

Senzokuhle: You're not my prisoner. You can do whatever you want.

I paced to the door.

Kamva: You can expect divorce papers soon. I'm not

going stand for this anymore.

Senzokuhle: Close the door on your way out.

Kamva: You must be the most selfish person I've ever met. You keep acting like this sham of a marriage only affected you. Worst part, you bring me here, far away from my home and you don't even accommodate me. I don't know how long you're going to keep pretending that I don't exist.

Senzokuhle: I don't have time for this.

Kamva: Let me leave. You're not worth my energy.

I sighed in defeat, and rolled out my suitcase. I hauled out my cellphone, dialing my aunt. She answered on the second ring.

Kamva: I'm coming to your place.

Zenani: You're coming to visit? That's great.

Kamva: I'm coming to stay.

Zenani: Kamva, I thought we talked about this.

Kamva: Not another word about this, aunt.

I hung up the call, and surfed for a cab.

Thabile Mampane

I kept fidgeting with my phone, surfing through all my social media platforms for a sextape. But there was nothing. I was at a coffee shop Buhle liked very much. Bandile asked to meet and said that it was in mine and Buhle's great interest. So I agreed with great hesitation. I was waiting for him, and I was glad he picked a public place. He finally arrived.

Thabi: You kept me waiting. What do you want, Bandile?

Bandile: I haven't even sat down but you're already attacking me with questions. Relax, sweetheart.

Thabi: Don't call me that.

He pulled out a chair, and sat down.

Bandile: You and Buhle seem to be regulars at this place. Maybe you might recommend something for me to nibble on.

Thabi: I'll leave if you're not going to tell me why you called me here.

Bandile: I wouldn't do that if I were you.

Thabi: What do you want?

He smirked, and slid his cellphone across the table.

Bandile: Press play.

I played, and immediately moans filled my ears.
Buhle's face and her naked body filled the screen.

They were having sex. I stopped the recording.

Bandile: Don't bother yourself deleting it. I have copies.

Anger wormed into me.

Thabi: You sick bastard! I thought you said that you love Buhle and you're going to tell her the truth?

Bandile: Did you really think that I'd confess to my sins so easily, Thabile? Clearly, you still don't know me.

Thabi: You're right, because I'll never get used to the monster that you are.

I pointed to his cellphone.

Thabi: What is the meaning of this? Why did you

show me the video?

Bandile: Because I want us to make a deal.

Thabi: I hate you, Bandile.

Bandile: And I don't care. I hear that you've been asking about me and my past. I don't know what you're hoping to find, but I want you to stop. If I ever hear that you're asking about me or plotting against me, even if my name comes out from your mouth, you're not going to like what I'll do.

Thabi: What's the worst that you could do? You've already raped me. Are you going to kill me?

Bandile: I'll release this video, and your friend will be trending number 1.

I looked at him with as much hatred as I could muster.

Thabi: How many more girls will you torment, Bandile? Have you forgotten Dineo? Do I need to remind you?

Bandile: Do as I say, and your girl will be fine. You make me angry, and I'll release this. You'll have to explain to Buhle why her pussy is all over the media.

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Please let's work together to grow the page. Please like, comment and share. I hope you enjoyed

9

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I heard sniffles the moment I awakened from my slumber. I checked the time on my cellphone, and it was past 4 in the morning. It seemed that Thabile was crying.

Me: Thabile, are you crying?

Thabi: I'm fine, Buhle. Go back to sleep.

I went to switch on the light, and glided over to her bed. She scooted over, making space for me and I sat down.

Me: Talk to me. No matter how many people care about you.. if you can't be open with them about your problems, you're still alone.

Thabi: You want to know what's been on my mind, right?

She pulled out her cellphone from underneath her pillow, and unlocked it. She scrolled through her apps and gave it to me.

Thabi: Listen to all those recordings, and you'll know what's been on my mind.

I took the phone from her, and played one recorded yesterday. Immediately I recognized Bandile's voice, but my eyes popped, my heart picked up speed and shock swam through me. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Tears pooled in my eyes at the betrayal. I played another one dated two days ago - and what I picked up from the conversations was that Thabile was raped by my boyfriend and the same boyfriend had recorded our intimacy. I couldn't contain the tears anymore. I couldn't listen to the recordings anymore. Different emotions pulsed through me.

Me: This is all your fault. Why didn't you tell me sooner?

Thabi: Are you honestly going to put the blame on me?

Me: You kept acting like a jealous ex, Thabile. You were never straight with me about Bandile's intentions.

Thabi: I kept warning you, but you didn't listen.

She sat upright on her bed. My emotions were all over the place, and somewhere in the back of my head, I knew that I was blaming the wrong person. The tears kept falling however.

Me: You didn't say anything.

Thabi: I tried, okay? But it was not easy for me to tell someone I barely know about my rape. Hell, my parents don't even know about it.

Me: So you let me date a rapist, Thabile?

Thabi: Fuck you, and your boyfriend. You hear me?

Me: You're going to have to do what Bandile asked. I can't afford to have that video leaked. I'm royalty. What are people going to say?

Thabi: You know I was going to drop my investigation for your sake, but I see that I'd be making a big mistake. You're on your own... Eh, wannyela, mosetsana ke wena. Kgante, o selfish byana. O ska tlo nyela wena. O bua masepa fela. Eh, de baby.

I didn't understand her last words, but I saw my mistake nonetheless.

Me: I'm sorry for making this about me.

Thabi: The sooner you learn that the world does not revolve around you, the better. I don't care whether you're a princess or not. You'll soon learn that your royalty has no value in this place. Bandile is still going to show you flames.

Me: I'm sorry, Thabi. I was wrong and I realise my mistake. Instead of your revelation, I was consumed by my anger. I'm so sorry about your rape. I mean no one deserves to go through what you've went through. I don't even have words to express how I'm feeling. I'm feeling anger on your behalf. Sadness. I'm so sorry.

And that was the honest truth. Thabile broke down, and we ended up crying in each other's arms. When

our sobs had ceased, I pulled away from Thabile and her eyes were bloodshot. My heart felt like someone pierced through it with a knife.

Me: Do you want to talk about it?

She shook her head.

Me: Okay, I understand.

Thabi: We should go back to sleep. It's still early.

Me: Wait. What exactly are we dealing with here?

Thabi: Bandile?

I nodded.

Thabi: I don't know if it's safe to say that Bandile is a serial rapist, because I don't know myself. What I do know is that, him and his friends are evil. His family's

money really ruined him, because they've always cleaned up his mess.

Me: Are you his first victim?

I tentatively asked. I needed to know the details about the guy I shared a bed with. A newfound hatred developed for him.

Thabi: Of rape, I think I'm the first but we can never be too sure. You're the third girl I know of. Dineo was the first. And I was his second victim.

Me: Did they also rape Dineo?

She shook her head.

Thabi: No, Bandile made a sextape of them and leaked it. She couldn't take it. She was my roommate last year.

Me: Where is she now? Did she leave town?

She shook her head.

Thabi: She committed suicide. She was not strong enough. She couldn't hold on anymore. She couldn't take the humiliation.

I gasped at the news.

Me: So history is going to repeat itself with me?

Thabi: We're going to overcome this. I never thought I could hold on after the gang rape, but I'm still here. You want to know what happened?

I nodded.

Me: But only if you're sure.

Thabi: I was dating Ofentse. You've met him. He's

part of Bandile's crew. At that time, I was bisexual. I played for both teams, but I was exclusively in a relationship with Ofentse. There came a point where I was no longer happy, and I couldn't pretend anymore. I know I should've have left him, and I was not fair on him but I cheated on him with a girl. He was pissed especially at the fact that I cheated on him with a girl, rather than a boy. His friends, Bandile, Xolani and Shawn kept reminding me that I humiliated their boy. Until one night, I was coming from the library, and they grabbed me; and I was overpowered. The three of them took turns with me, and when Ofenste was told to take his turn - he said that he's already tasted me. I know I did him wrong, but did that mean I deserved to be raped? I don't think so. It all happened last September. After that night, I vowed never to deal with a man again. I'd strictly only date girls.

Tears streamed down her cheeks, and my heart shattered at hearing her story.

Me: Why didn't you report them? Surely the police would've done something.

Thabi: After they raped me and abandoned me, I called Dimpho and she came to take me to the hospital. They did a rape kit, and I told them that I had no idea who the guys were after Bandile's dad, a powerful man threatened to kill my family. I was scared, and scarred. I didn't know where to go from there. However I had asked them to keep the DNA and semen they had extracted safely until I was ready for my rapists to be captured.

I embraced her.

Me: I'm so sorry.

I stroked her back as she sobbed hysterically. What a cruel world we lived in.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I descended the stairs, my cellphone pressed to my ear.

Nikiwe: Kamva, what is this I hear that you've left your husband's house?

Kamva: I don't want to talk about that.

Nikiwe: What do you mean? You can't just up and leave, Kamva. Go back to your husband.

Kamva: Please, I'm not going to do that. I'm tired of that man. Living with him is like living in hell.

Nikiwe: Is he abusing you?

Kamva: No, but I'm so done with him.

Nikiwe: My child, no one said that marriage is going to be easy. You can't expect things to be rosy all the time.

Kamva: It's easy for you to say. You were never in a marriage where your husband doesn't acknowledge

you.

Nikiwe: Everyone of us has individual problems we face in our marriages. I may not have been ignored, but your father's family didn't like me and they never missed an opportunity to let me know. I'm still facing their hatred today, but that didn't mean I'd give up on my marriage with Mvelo.

Kamva: I'll think about it, but it will be a complete waste of time. Senzokuhle made it clear that he'll never love me, and I'm okay with that because I don't think I will either. All I wanted is for us to form a friendship at least to make our marriage bearable, but even that, he's failing to give me.

She sighed on the line.

Nikiwe: I know it's hard, but you're a strong girl. Everything will be fine.

I heard voices echo around the palace. Seemed like

something was going on in the throne room.

Kamva: I'll do my best.

Nikiwe: We'll talk later, Kamva. Remember what I said. Don't give up on your marriage.

Kamva: I love you, ma and I miss you.

Nikiwe: I love you too, my baby.

I ended the call, and walked inside the throne room. Khulekani, Mlungisi and Lungelo - the uncles were conversing with a familiar woman. I couldn't remember where I knew the lady from.

Nikiwe: I didn't know that there was a meeting.

Khulekani: If your presence was needed, we'd have summoned you.

I went to take a seat. I didn't care. They would not

exclude me.

Lungelo: As we were saying, we've called you here regarding your husband.

The woman nodded, and I remembered who exactly she was. The royal seer's wife, Phumla Mzonyane. I didn't have a good feeling about this.

Khulekani: We were informed that he relayed a message to you over a month ago that he needed to go to the mountains to connect with the ancestors.

She nodded again.

Phumla: Through a letter.

Khulekani: We're getting worried now. A month has passed now and he's still not back.

Phumla: I've learned not to worry about him a lot. His trips can take months and months.

Khulekani: I hear you, but don't you find it suspicious that he

disappeared to the mountains around the time my nephew passed away?

Phumla: I don't have much knowledge about his practice.

Khulekani: Is there a way you can perhaps help us reach him?

Phumla: No.

Lungelo: We've tried to communicate with our ancestors, but they are not showing us a clear picture. Qhawe needs to be found. The kingdom needs him.

This was definitely not good at all.

Noxolo Ndebele

I walk into the police station, and approached a male officer at the counter.

Constable: Afternoon, mam. How can I help you?

Noxolo: I'd like to be referred to detective Xulu.

Constable: Mam, if you could tell me what the problem is, I might be able to help you.

Noxolo: I'll only talk to her.

He reluctantly nodded.

Constable: Follow me.

I followed behind him as he led me to an office where the detective who once was handling Nomthandazo's case sat behind one desk. The other

desk was empty.

Constable: Detective, someone is here to see you.

Detective: I'm still busy, Constable. Can't you help her?

Constable: She only wants to talk to you.

Noxolo: I'll wait.

Detective: Okay, let's get this done. Have a seat.

The constable left, and I took a seat. The detective closed the file that she was working on, and looked at me.

Detective: So how can I help you?

Noxolo: I'm here to ask for a case to be reopened.

Detective: That can only be possible if new evidence has surfaced.

I hauled out a file from my bag, and positioned it on the table.

Detective: What case are we talking about?

Noxolo: The 'suicide' of Nomthandazo Malinga. I think it was a murder.

Detective: What do you have for me? That case was ruled out as a suicide months ago.

I opened the file, and showed her the X-ray that was done on Nomthandazo.

Noxolo: I have a question for you. I want you to look at this carefully.

Detective: I've seen this already. There's nothing new.

Noxolo: I know, but I want you to see that the impact of Nomthandazo's fall started from the back. The cracks clearly started from the spine, working its way down, and all the way up to her skull. If I

remember well, that were the doctor's words.

Detective: And the point that you're making?

Noxolo: If Nomthandazo really killed herself, which she didn't, she would have fell on her frontal. It doesn't make sense that she fell on her backside, yet she was not pushed.

Detective: I hear you, but is that enough to have this case reopened?

Noxolo: Detective, if you had paid attention to the small details, you'd have seen that she was murdered.

Detective: It doesn't say much, but I understand your point.

She rose from her seat, and went to a cabinet pressed against one wall. She flipped through the hundreds of files until she came out with one. She came back to the table, and flipped through the docket.

Detective: It says here that there was a suicide note with her handwriting.

Noxolo: The Nomthandazo I knew wouldn't kill herself.

Detective: Who are you suspecting?

Noxolo: Kwanele.

Detective: But it says here that he wasn't at the house. His alibi checked out.

Noxolo: What if I told you that his alibi is holed?

She looked at me.

Detective: I'm listening.

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10

Noxolo Ndebele

We walked out of her office together.

Detective: I'll be back.

The constable that referred me to Xulu nodded his head, and we skipped to the detective's car. She ignited the engine, and we were on the road.

Noxolo: All you need to do is question Raymond again.

Detective: I don't see how that's going to help.

Noxolo: It might. All you'll need to do is see if his story still corresponds with the one he told us months ago.

Detective: I hear you, but I myself don't remember what I did, 2 months ago on the 3rd. How is he supposed to remember what he got up to 11 months ago?

Noxolo: Because on that particular day, someone died.

Detective: You do realise that if he changes his story, he might face criminal charges. Do you think he's going to take that risk?

Noxolo: The truth will always be revealed. That's all I know, and all I want is justice for my friend.

Detective: I believe that's more to this case than what we concluded. But with my job, we don't merely go with intuition, we work with evidence. And there was simply no evidence pointing Kwanele to the crime.

Noxolo: I hear you, but have you never questioned why Nomthandazo spent days in the hospital? It's obvious that he was abusing her.

Detective: I know, but nothing could be done if Nomthandazo didn't tell us what caused her injuries. We can't open cases on behalf of someone.

Noxolo: It was always I tripped on the stairs. I bumped into my wardrobe. Whenever Nomthandazo said those things to me, covering up for her abusive

husband, I always questioned myself that is it worth it? I guess it never was, because she's 6 feet under now.

Detective: I'm sorry. I'm sure you must have tried your best.

Noxolo: I hate this system honestly.

Detective: But it is important. We can't arrest people without tangible evidence. That is to avoid people getting convicted of crimes they didn't commit.

I nodded.

Noxolo: I understand.

We parked a few yards away from Kwanele's house. We looked at it through the open window on the driver's side.

Noxolo: As you can see, the balcony is enclosed by a

sliding door, and not a railing which could've possibly changed Nomthandazo's positioning when she fell to the ground. So I still say, that she was pushed.

She nodded.

Detective: I'll see what I can do. I'm not sure if my superiors will allow me to reopen the case as there are already a number of cases that need my attention. What I can tell you though, is that the only way Kwanele can be convicted is if you discredit his alibi. With his alibi discredited, we'll be forced to question why he lied, and what exactly is he hiding.

Noxolo: Thank you.

Detective: Let me drop you home.

Noxolo: I stay here.

Detective: You mean to say that you stay with Kwanele. Am I missing something here?

Noxolo: No, he believes that we're an item, but I'm

undercover. Maybe I might be able to find something that may help with the case.

She nodded and I clambered down from the car.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I tossed my phone to the bed.

Thabi: Answer it. The last thing we need is for Bandile to be on your case.

I groaned, frowned. All those things, but Thabile was right. I reached for my phone and answered it.

Me: Hello.

Bandile: No endearments for me today?

I rolled my eyes. Hatred seeped into every fibre of my being. Thabile stared at me intently, and I put him on loudspeaker.

Me: Baby.

Bandile: I want us to meet today.

Me: I can't, Bandile. I'll be busy the whole day. I still need to catch up with my work. Perhaps tomorrow?

Bandile: Okay, baby. I love you.

Me: Me too.

I hung up.

Thabi: You don't want to know how stupid that sounded. The part that killed me the most was where he said that he loves you, and you said me too. Of course, you love yourself.

I shook my head with a laugh.

Me: Fuck you. It never was love. I was playing myself.

Thabi: But I hope you know that you can't avoid him forever. At some point, you're going to have to face him.

Me: I know, but after everything you told me this morning, I can't face him. I'll end up killing him, I swear. I need time to calm down.

Thabi: What is your next move? Because as long as Bandile has that video saved somewhere, you can't break up with him.

Me: I don't know, but all I know is that Bandile will regret ever messing with me. And I don't want you to stop your investigation because of me.

Thabi: I can't do that to you. We need to come up with a plan together.

I took her hand in mine.

Me: I want to understand me very well, Thabile. I might have never pushed you in front of your crush, hid your phone until you cried or ate your food more than you did-

A smile creeped up onto her face.

Me: What I'm trying to say is that I might have not known you for that long, but I consider you my sister. A real friend, and I'm going to do everything in my power to fix this.

Thabi: We'll fight him together.

I nodded.

Me: But I can't believe I've been so stupid.

Thabi: We all make mistakes, Buhle. Don't beat yourself up about it.

Me: Bandile might be a dog, a real one at that, but I have to acknowledge the role I played in this mess I find myself in. How could I sleep with someone I've only known for two weeks? I gave him my virginity so easily. Yes, Bandile played me, but I played myself the most. I must be the biggest fool ever. Even with my stepmother and stepfather having proven to me that you can never trust anyone, I still went and trusted a dog I don't even know. Ooo, I really played myself.

Thabi: Don't think about it so much. So stepmother and stepfather? Royalty? You must have been from a pretty messed up family dynamic.

I laughed.

Me: You don't want to know. That's a story for another day.

Noxolo Ndebele

I lifted my hand, and banged on the door. I was by Raymond's house. I knocked impatiently. Raymond was Kwanele's friend. His alibi.

Noxolo: Open the fucking door.

I murmured to myself. The door was opened by Raymond's wife whose name I didn't even remember.

Her: You're knocking like you bought this door. Please respect people's houses.

Noxolo: And who are you again?

Her: Linda, what can I help you with?

Noxolo: I'm here to see your husband.

Linda: Come in.

She made way for me to enter. Her husband was seated on the couch, watching TV when I walked in.

Linda: Ray, this woman asked for you.

He looked at us.

Linda: Have a seat. I'll bring you something to drink.
Water, juice?

Noxolo: I'm fine.

I went to take a seat.

Raymond: What brings you here?

Noxolo: The truth.

Raymond: What truth?

Noxolo: Your friend killed Nomthandazo. I want you to be real honest with me. Kwanele was never with you that day.

Raymond: You seem drunk, and I don't appreciate your words.

I might have taken one shot. Definitely more, but I was still aware of my surroundings and my words.

Noxolo: Someone was killed, and you're going to defend that pig of a friend?

Linda: Aren't you dating Kwanele? Does he know that you're here accusing him of murder?

Raymond: Good question. I wonder what brings her here with her absurd accusations. I think you should leave.

I rose from the couch.

Noxolo: Maybe I should.

Raymond: The only sensible thing you've said since arriving here.

Something clicked into my mind. I couldn't give up so easily. I hauled out my pocket knife, and held Linda in my grip, the knife on her neck in a threatening manner with seconds.

Noxolo: Are you going to tell me the truth?

Raymond: Is the truth what you want to hear? I've said it before, and I'll say it again, Kwanele didn't kill your friend. Now let my wife go.

Noxolo: I'm losing my patience. I'm going to count to 3, and if you're not going to tell me the truth, I'll slit her throat.

He stood up.

Noxolo: Don't come closer.

I applied more pressure. His hands were lifted in the air in a surrendering manner.

Raymond: Fine, Kwanele was not with me that day.

Noxolo: So why did you lie to the police?

Raymond: I had to protect my friend.

Noxolo: He's a killer. He deserved to go to jail for murder.

Raymond: Maybe, but I've given you what you want. Let my wife go.

Noxolo: You'll go to the police and tell them the truth.

Raymond: I can-

Noxolo: Do I make myself clear?

Raymond: Crystal.

Noxolo: Or I'll come and finish her off.

I let her go, and pushed her to her husband. I saw a red liquid on the knife. It was blood, oh well. Her hand was on her neck.

Noxolo: That, bitch, is for confirming your husband's lies. Knock some sense into your husband or next time, you won't be so lucky.

I walked out.

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11

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I was going through my screenshots whilst waiting for Bandile at the cafe. I was not looking forward to

meeting him. I read some quotes in murmurs as I was waiting for my order.

Me: Albert Einstein - A person who never made a mistake, never tried anything new.

Steve Jobs - Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life.

Bill Gates - It's fine to celebrate success, but it is more important to heed the lessons of failure.

Warren Buffett - Honesty is a very expensive gift, don't expect it from cheap people.

Bruce Lee - Mistakes are always forgivable, if one has courage to admit them.

Albert Hubbard - One machine can do the work of fifty ordinary men. No machine can do the work of one extraordinary man.

Robert Kiyosaki - Failure defeats losers, but inspire winners.

Abraham Lincoln - The best way to predict your future is to create it.

Audrey Hepburn - Nothing is impossible, the word itself says I'm possible.

Maya Angelou - I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them happy.

Mike Ditka - You're never a loser until you quit trying.

Muhammad Ali - Don't count the days, make the days count.

I loved downloading inspirational quotes and videos. They pushed me to do better. My favourite chocolate cake was served along with a strawberry flavored milkshake. I munched on my cake, putting my cellphone away.

Minutes later, while reeling in the tasteful cake; I felt a peck on my cheek. I looked up to see Bandile. He went to sit down.

Bandile: I thought you said that you'd be busy the whole day.

Me: I know what I said, but I thought I should take a break and spend it with my baby.

Bandile: I feel loved.

The lies coming out of our mouths. I faked a smile.

Me: As you should.

Bandile: Why didn't you order me something?

Me: I didn't know what to get you. I know you don't like pastries that much.

Bandile: I'm craving some pizza. Let's go to Debonairs.

Me: Let me finish this up first, but I don't think I can stomach any more food.

I hated being here with him. For sitting with him like he didn't betray me. For laughing with him like he didn't violate Thabile. The sick bastard.

Bandile: You'll eat it for dinner.

I nodded.

Me: So I hope that you're free tomorrow night. I want you all to myself.

Bandile: I like the sound of that. For you, I'd do anything.

I internally rolled my eyes.

Me: It has something to do with you inside of me.

I had a plan, and I had to make sure that I succeeded. My hands kept aching to kill him even now.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I walked down the stairs with Mlungisi.

Nikiwe: When is Mandlakhe coming back?

Mlu: I don't see how that's any of your business.

Nikiwe: It's my business because you promised to help me become Queen. How will that happen if he's here?

Mlu: You haven't fulfilled your side of the deal.

Nikiwe: And you know why.

Mlu: You can relax, because Mandlakhe wants nothing to do with the throne.

I was surprised.

Nikiwe: What do you mean?

Mlu: Exactly what I said. He doesn't want to come back.

Nikiwe: That's good for us.

Mlu: Not for long. Khulekani is attempting to convince him and it won't be long before Mandlakhe

agrees. And that's where I come in.

Nikiwe: The more I talk to you, the more useless you prove to be.

I shook my head, and saw a number of guards filing out of the main door. I looked at Mlungisi.

Nikiwe: What's going on?

Mlu: Khulekani might have an idea.

I turned around to see Khulekani enter the lounge.

Mlu: What's going on?

Khulekani: I've sent out guards to go look for Qhawe.

Nikiwe: I thought he was not missing. He's at the mountains.

Khulekani: I know, but we need him. There's just a lot of things that don't make sense.

I nodded, swallowing a lump in my throat.

Khulekani: Mlungisi, I need to have a word with you.

They walked out of the palace, and I was not feeling good. Things were escalating, but I needed to calm down for my baby's sake. I dialled Zenani's number.

Zenani: My phone is always on standby waiting for your call. Is there progress?

Nikiwe: We might have a problem. A big one at that.

I snaked to my bedroom.

Noxolo Ndebele

I splashed my face with water, which rolled down the opening. I looked at myself in the mirror. To say the most, I didn't recognise myself anymore. The mask was slowly coming off. My hands tightly held onto the basin.

I heard my voice, but I swear it wasn't me.

Voice: Can't you see that you're slowly starting to be like Kwanele?

I shook my head.

Noxolo: That's not true.

Voice: If Raymond didn't give you what you want, would you have killed his wife?

Noxolo: Justice must be served.

I remembered Buhle's words : 'It doesn't help holding onto hatred. It slowly consumes you, and you start to lose yourself. I don't want that to happen to either of us. Ma, I've become a firm believer that the more you walk away from the things that poison your soul the healthier and happier you will be.'

Voice: You're not a killer.

Noxolo: That I am not.

Voice: And soon you'll be one. Is that what you want?

Noxolo: If you're going to talk about all the things I'm not supposed to do, why don't you come up with a plan? I'm doing the best I can. I'd never kill someone.

Voice: Look into the mirror, and tell me that's the reflection you want to look at for the rest of your life.

I looked into the mirror again and cussed under my breath.

Voice: Revenge is not the answer.

Noxolo: You've got your wires mixed up. I was never for vengeance. I'm gunning for justice.

The voice disappeared, and I screamed. What the hell was happening with me? A booming voice reverberated around the house. That must be Kwanele.

Kwanele: Noxolo!

Doors were flung to the walls. I wondered why he was so angry. Finally he came into the bathroom.

Noxolo: Are you alright, baby?

He was flaring, and I won't lie, I became scared.

Kwanele: What is this I hear that you almost killed Linda?

He came closer to me, as I moved back, fear swarming within me. He was intimidatingly livid. If that even made sense. My lips quivered.

Kwanele: You moved into my house, only to plot against me. I should've known something was wrong when you returned my advances. After all, you're your dead friend's advocate. You were the first one to preach 11 months ago that I killed your friend alongside her troublesome daughter.

My back was against the wall, and I feared for my life as he neared me.

Kwanele: Got me thinking what exactly are you doing here.

His hands wrapped around my neck, and he started squeezing, my airways blocked. My eyes widened. Would I really allow myself to die at the hands of Nomthandazo's killer?

Kwanele: You're lucky I convinced Raymond and Linda not to lay charges of attempted murder against you. You must be thankful.

I should've known that they would run to him. Maybe going to Raymond wasn't my best move. He kept squeezing, and my hands attempted to remove his from my neck.

Kwanele: I'm going out for a drink, and when I come back, I don't want to find you or anything of yours in my house.

He let go of my neck, and immediately a gush of oxygen found its way to my lungs. I released a string

of coughs. That definitely didn't go well. Kwanele was out of my sight as quick as he appeared.

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12

Kamvelihle Ngubane

The minute I walked into the manor, Somikazi attacked with a hug. I didn't know that she was here. I returned her hug with one hand, the other holding my suitcase.

Kamva: I'm glad to see I was missed.

Somikazi: Of course, you were. Come in.

We went to sit in the lounge, and the helper, Dora

came to take my bag to my room.

Kamva: I didn't know that you were here.

Somikazi: I came here yesterday.

Kamva: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to leave Sensokuhle alone. I needed to spend some time with my family. I'm guessing that's why you're here, right?

She shook her head.

Somikazi: No, I didn't know you left when I decided to come here. I just missed my brother, and you.

I sensed a bit of sadness behind her words.

Kamva: Are you sure that's all?

Dora came to serve us, each a glass of juice.

Kamva: Thank you, Dora.

She nodded, and walked away.

Somikazi: Mzi is cheating on me.

I looked at her, tears pooling in her eyes. I was not that shocked, because the first time I met the guy, he flirted with me. He had a wandering eye. So this news about her husband was not very surprising. I took the glass from her hands, and positioned on the coffee table with my own.

Kamva: Are you sure?

Somikazi: Everything was on his phone.

I pulled her in for an embrace, luckily she didn't cry

because I was not a very good comforter, and I believed that you should never waste your tears on a man.

Kamva: I'm sorry, Somikazi.

Somikazi: I've done everything for him, and he goes and does this to me?

Kamva: I'm sorry. Did you confront him?

Somikazi: I didn't bother to. Every time he does this, he doesn't want to tell me the truth.

Kamva: So it isn't the first time?

She shook her head.

Somikazi: He always does this, and to say I'm tired would be an understatement.

Senzokuhle: Oh, the prodigal wife has decided to

return home.

We turned to see Sensokuhle wheeling himself inside.

Kamva: It's okay to admit that you missed me.

Senzokuhle: Keep dreaming. I see Somikazi has let you in on her marital problems. At least, she has found someone else to vent to. I'm done with her and her marriage problems. Somi, you're welcome to come to me with other problems, other than those of your household.

Kamva: Senzo, are you serious right now? You're basically saying that you don't care about your sister's pain.

Senzokuhle: You'd not be saying that if you knew how many times she came to me to complain about her unfaithful husband. Like the good brother I am, I attempted to advise her so many times but it fell on deaf ears, and she kept running back to Mzi. From

here on, she should deal with her choices.

He walked away. I looked at Somikazi questioningly.

Kamva: What is wrong with your brother? One would swear that he has no heart.

Somikazi: You'll get used to him.

Thabile Mampane

I sat at the bar, my hand nursing my glass of champagne. It had been a while since my presence graced clubs, and tonight I decided to come.

Moreover, Buhle was out. I was here with Dimpho, but she had quickly hit the dancefloor, the minute we made it inside. I asked for shots, and the bartender served me.

The liquid burned my throat, and I enjoyed my own company. It felt good.

Until someone decided to sit beside me. He sported a suit, and you could see that he eluded wealth. He turned to the bartender, after his gaze practically devoured me.

Him: Whisky. Neat.

The bartender poured him one, and handed it over.

Him: So why is a pretty girl like you sitting all alone?

Thabi: None of your business.

Him: I see you're playing hard to get, but don't worry, I have all night.

I rolled my eyes.

Thabi: Unfortunately for you, I don't do men.

Him: I don't bite, unless you want me to.

Thabi: I said I'm not interested.

The music blared about, so it was not easy for me to engage in a conversation without asking for repetition. Afro house music played, and I found myself jamming to the set.

Him: Not everyone will hurt you like your ex, baby girl. Some just want to love you. Let Mzi take care of you.

I rose to my feet, taking out some notes from my purse to pay for my drinks and handed it to the bartender. I went to whisper in his ear.

Thabi: Listen here. I don't want to talk about how old you are compared to me. Stick to your age group.

You even have the nerve to hit on me whilst you're wearing a wedding ring. Go home to your wife and stop stressing her.

Mzi: Oh, I like them feisty.

He smirked.

Thabi: Thank God, I don't have to deal with men.

I walked away, and went to join Dimpho on the dancefloor. Buhle came to mind while I was dancing, and I couldn't help but worry as I didn't know what her plan was. I silently prayed for her safety.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

We walked into the suite, and soon enough our

clothing were discarded. Bandile ripped a condom foil, and thereafter we had sex on the bed. After two rounds, he had drifted off to sleep. I was revolted the whole session, but I did what I had to do. I tiptoed to the adjoined bathroom when I was certain that Bandile was asleep, heavily snoring. Okay, I might have been exaggerating but that was how much I hated the guy - associating every bad trait with him.

I fished for the used condoms in the bin, and placed them in a small plastic bag, and returned it to my purse, after making sure it's sealed. I washed my hands, and called Thabile.

Thabi: I'm worried about you, Buhle. You need to come home.

Me: Don't worry, the plan was a success.

Thabi: You still haven't told me what your plan was.

I stopped talking in case Bandile was eavesdropping.

You'll never know. He seemed to still be asleep.

Me: I have Bandile's condoms with me. Hopefully we'll be able to have them tested along with the semen that was extracted from your rape kit. That way, we can nail him.

Thabi: I know it's a bad thing to say, but I'm glad that they didn't use condoms.

Me: You're so drunk. A sober Thabi wouldn't have said anything like that.

Thabi: But did you really have to sleep with him again?

Me: It was the only way.

Thabi: Thank you, Buhle.

Me: He messed with the wrong girl. It's time we put an end to his nonsense.

Bandile: Whose nonsense?

My heart pounded in my chest. I hoped he didn't hear a word. Sneaky bastard!

Me: I'll call you back.

Thabi: Is it Bandile?

I hung up, and turned to Bandile.

Me: You're up?

Bandile: You haven't answered my question.

Me: My stepfather tried to kill my aunt. So I was telling her that he needs to be taught a lesson.

I was glad that I could think on my feet, and it's all thanks to my auntie Nox for letting me know that Kwanele almost killed her. I had warned her. Bandile nodded, seemingly satisfied with my answer.

Bandile: Let's go to bed.

I followed him to the bed, and we settled in the duvets. I waited for him to go back to sleep, before I collected all my belongings and planned to leave. I went to take his cellphone on the pedestal and tossed it into my purse. I whispered into his ear.

Me: Mama raised no weak girl. You should ask Simnikiwe about me, and she'll tell you.

I pecked him on the forehead, and called a cab. He was sound asleep.

Early morning, I briefed Thabile about my plan and went to meet an acquaintance of mine. He was a final year student of IT. I slid Bandile's phone across the table.

Me: I want you to wipe off everything in that phone. Backup files. Cloud. Google accounts and everything connected to that phone. And I mean everything.

Can you do that for me?

Him: I'll try.

I hoped that he managed. But everyone praised his hacking skills, so it shouldn't be too hard for him. Hopefully the sextape would be history, unless of circumstances unbeknownst to me.

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I hope you're enjoying the story. Let me know in the comments section

13

Kamvelihle Ngubane

Mzi spoke on the intercom. He was also shown on the camera monitors.

Kamva: Are you sure you want me to let him in?

Somikazi: Kamva, as much as I don't want to talk to him, he's still my husband.

I nodded, and used the remote to open the gate.

We went back to the lounge, and I plopped down on the couch as Somikazi kept pacing around. Mzi walked in.

Mzi: If you're here, Somikazi, who do you think is taking care of your husband?

Kamva: I don't know how you've been taught, but you don't walk into someone's house, and not greet.

Mzi: I've been in this family longer than you have, and I'm here to talk to my wife.

Kamva: Well, this is my husband's house, and you're not going to talk to me in that manner.

We glared at each other.

Somikazi: Mzi, what are you doing here?

Mzi: I'm here to take you home. You're married, and you have a husband to take care of.

Somikazi: I thought Pearl got you sorted. You don't need me.

I assumed that Pearl was the woman Mzi was cheating with.

Kamva: Let me give you space.

Somikazi: No, stay.

Mzi: I didn't know that there was 3 people involved in this marriage.

Somikazi: Please don't start with me. You failed to respect our marriage. I'm sick and tired of you.

Mzi: Somikazi, you need to give me a chance to talk

to you alone.

Kamva: So you can play her? I don't think so.

Somikazi: So you're not even going to deny it?

Mzi: Somikazi, I don't get what the big deal is. I may sleep with all these women, but at the end of the day I know where home is.

I didn't even know what to say. It's true that the more you forgave a cheating partner, the more they lost respect for you because that's the only explanation I could come up with for such disrespect.

Somikazi: Please leave, Mzi.

Mzi: Are you sure that's what you want? Your father is already dealing with a lot. You don't want to be the reason he suffers an early death.

Somikazi's expression totally changed.

I didn't get the memo, so I was perplexed.

Kamva: Would anyone tell me what's going on here?
Somikazi?

They didn't say anything. The secrets of this family would be the death of me. I was in the dark about almost everything.

Somikazi: Fine, I'll be back home tomorrow morning.

I looked at her, my brows furrowed. He didn't even have to beg.

I thought about the King. Was it that he was sick? I remembered his coughing incident.

Somikazi: But please leave for now.

Mzi: That wasn't so hard.

I was utterly defeated, and didn't contribute my two cents opinion even after Mzi left.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I waited for Ofentse with Thabile until I got a call from Chris, the IT guy. I answered it.

Me: Is the job done?

Chris: Yes, I've managed to do what you've asked.

Me: Thank you. You don't know what it means to me. I'll pass by your place later. Hopefully, you have your price ready.

I ended the call, and turned to Thabile.

Me: That was Chris. He has managed to wipe everything from Bandile's phone.

She smiled, and I mirrored her expression.

Thabi: I told you that the guy never disappoints.

Me: I should definitely make sure I never lose his contact.

Thabi: So do you think Ofentse is going to agree?

Me: We'll never know unless we try.

Minutes later, Ofentse pulled out a chair and sat down.

Ofentse: Why am I here?

Thabi: We have a proposition for you.

Ofentse: Why do I have a feeling that I'm not going to like this?

Thabi: Well, that's completely up to you, but it's in your best interest to work with us.

Me: We want you to testify against Bandile, Shawn and Xolani in court.

Thabi: Since you were there that night they raped me, we figured your testimony would go a long way.

Ofentse: So you're saying to me that you've opened a case?

Thabi: And it's up to you whether you're going down with them, or you're going to help us.

I couldn't read his expression, but he definitely didn't look pleased.

Me: I'm pretty sure you don't want to spend years in jail.

Thabi: Remember, Ofentse, you came to me a few days saying that you wanted to make it up to me; this is your opportunity.

He looked conflicted.

Me: If you could look at how quickly we forget about passed on people, you'd stop trying to impress your friends for a living. I believe that you're a good guy. You just made the mistake of choosing the wrong friends. It's time for you to fix things.

Ofentse: It's not as simple as that.

Me: From where I'm standing, it's very simple. It's either you spend a minimum of 5 years in jail or you discard your rotten loyalty to your sick friends.

Thabi: Don't even bother going to Bandile about this, because it's over for him.

Me: We'll give you time to think about it, but don't take too long.

Thabile and I left him in the cafe with his thoughts. Once we were outside, she engulfed me with a hug.

Me: What was that for?

Thabi: Thank you for everything. You did what I couldn't do in 5 months in a day.

Me: Don't give me so much credit, because I only stepped in where you couldn't. You already had evidence against them.

Thabi: I don't want to lie, but I underestimated you. I thought you were just a naive, village girl, but you proved to have guts.

Me: You should meet my aunt. She takes the cup, and I can say that her character has rubbed off on me.

Thabi: I can't help but feel like something is going to go wrong though.

I shared the same sentiments. I hoped that everything goes well. I was also glad that Auntie Nox decided to move out of the lion's den, but she was still going to pursue the case. I merely hoped that

she didn't get herself killed.

Me: It will be fine. Let's go to the police station to open a case.

Thabi: Not yet.

Me: What do you mean?

Thabi: I don't trust the police. Chances are that Bandile's dad has officers on his payroll. The evidence might even disappear before we make it to court.

Me: I get your point. What do you suggest we do?

Thabi: We'll release everything online. That way they can't make the case vanish.

Me: Are you sure that's wise? Won't it jeopardize the case?

Thabi: We'll cross that bridge when we get there. All I know is that we don't know who we can trust in the justice system. This is South Africa. You can even get away with murder. We should not take any chances.

I nodded. I understood her concern.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I kept digging. The spade drilled into the soil. Sweat laced my entire body in the nightfall. After Khulekani had consulted with another seer, I knew I had to do something and this was it.

[Seer: It seems that evilness lurks in this very house. Someone in this house knows where Qhawe is, and they need to speak up.

I felt like he was eyeing me the whole time.

Khulekani: Makhosi, what do you mean?

Seer: The truth can never stay hidden forever.

My heart drummed in my chest.

Seer: Qhawe is of nature. He is one with the soil. Whenever he is, he's restless and until he is found, things will continue to fall apart. The land will continue to be infertile, and no crops will grow.

The ground shook, and all of us looked at each other with shock. I felt my body quiver, my teeth clattering.]

I kept digging. Luckily I was close to the fourth month of my pregnancy, so I was not heavily pregnant and bound to collapse at this manual labour. I was exhausted, and close to giving up, but Qhawe's arms started to appear. I couldn't see very clearly in the dark, but I could make out Qhawe's body. I kept digging, and I think we've already

established that he was dead.

I felt the ground shake vigorously, and it stopped like I had imagined it, but I knew it was real as it had happened earlier on. Fear awakened in me.

I struggled greatly to get Qhawe out of the grave dug by me and Zenani, but I managed. At the same time, I was worried someone might see me here, and perhaps accuse me of witchcraft.

Everyone knew that this was the devil's time, but I was not that worried as I was a dark force myself. I dragged his body to my car, and with great difficulty loaded him in the trunk.

Nikiwe: Damn, you're still so heavy. One would think that since you've been dead for weeks, you might have lost some weight.

I closed the boot, and went back to fill up the hole with sand. It took hours, and I was really exhausted from all the work I did. I was finally done, and drove Qhawe to a place where he'd be found. However I had to put measures in place so that people thought that nature had taken its course, and unfortunately he died. This search for Qhawe needed to be stopped or else they'd stumble upon things that should never be revealed.

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14

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I hugged Somikazi, as we were planted on our feet in the driveway. Her car was a few metres away from us, and she was going back to her house.

Kamva: Are you sure you want to do this, Somikazi?

Somikazi: Do what?

Kamva: Go back to Mzi?

Somikazi: You've not been in this family for long, but you think you can advise me about my marriage? What about your non-existent one?

Kamva: Does he have anything against you?

She clicked her tongue, and turned to walk away, but I gripped her wrist.

Somikazi: Kamva, I don't want to talk about this anymore.

Kamva: You know I was talking to Senzokuhle last night, and he said something that stuck to me. He said that the reason why people cheat more than once, it's because there was never consequences the first time. Mzi didn't even have to do much for your forgiveness, but you are ready to run back to him. In fact, he didn't even apologise. What is going on here, Somikazi?

Somikazi: What do you want me to say, Kamva? You think I never threatened to leave? I've done all I could for my marriage.

Kamva: The problem is that you never stuck to your promises. You never followed through with your threats. Your husband has gotten comfortable with the fact you're not going anywhere no matter what he does. I've seen it with my own eyes. He has lost all respect for you.

Tears escaped her eyes which were surrounded by dark circles.

Kamva: I'm not going to tell you what you should do in your own marriage, you're old enough. You only need to think about your happiness.

Somikazi: What do you want me to do?

I gripped her shoulders, holding her at arm's length.

Kamva: Take back your power, Somikazi.

Somikazi: Our marriage was arranged, Kamva. I can't tell my parents that I failed my marriage. I knew what I was getting myself into when I married Mzi. I just didn't think that I wasn't strong enough to take the pain.

Kamva: It doesn't change the fact that you're married, and Mzi should honour that. If Sensokuhle even dares to bring another woman into our marriage, whether it was an arranged or love marriage is baseless, he should be prepared for me to do the same.

Somikazi: So you're saying I should fight fire with fire?

Kamva: No, you're married to Mzi. Not your parents or anyone else.

She hugged me.

Somikazi: I need to leave now.

Kamva: But it's your marriage after all. I don't know

the standing of it, but when you need someone to talk to, you know where to find me.

Somikazi: Thank you.

We pulled away from the hug, and she slithered to her car. As for me, I needed to think hard and carefully about my own marriage.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I descended the stairs, my heels clinking on the floor. I felt relieved more than anything. My problems were solved for now. I needed to find a way to make me queen, and I was going to stop at nothing until I made sure that happened. I remembered that Kamva was on the line.

Nikiwe: I'm sorry. What were you saying?

Kamva: You were saying something until you suddenly paused.

Nikiwe: Oh, what did I want to say again? Oh, I was saying that I'm glad that you returned back to your husband's house.

Kamva: Ma, I don't want to discuss my marriage with you or anyone else. Whatever decision I take from here on should be based on my happiness, and my happiness alone.

Nikiwe: So how are things?

Kamva: Let's talk about how things are back there. I hope the uncles are treating you well.

Nikiwe: Well, I'm coping fine.

I heard a voice in the background, calling out Kamva's name.

Kamva: Ma, I need to go. We'll talk soon.

Nikiwe: Okay, my child.

She hung up, and I glided to the throne room. I heard that a few villagers were complaining, and I walked in to find two women - one elderly and another one perhaps approaching her forties. I didn't go to sit, instead I remained rooted at the entrance, and Khulekani's eyes swept over me, but he didn't seem to disapprove of my presence.

Khulekani: I've heard all your complaints, and I'll do everything in my power to solve it.

The younger woman spoke. "Please, regent. Our families are starving. We've attempted everything but our crops refuse to grow. Our vegetation is dying. Our children are dying from hunger. It's been weeks now. We thought things might improve, but everything seems to be getting worse."

The older one added. "We're trying not to lose hope,

but it's hard."

Khulekani: I'll see to it that I have food parcels delivered to every house in the village. That will sustain you and your families for the next few days. Hopefully by then, we'll have all the answers we need.

The women nodded, and rose to their feet, bowing before Khulekani and passing by me, and they did the same until they were escorted outside. I approached Khulekani.

Khulekani: Do you think Qhawe is dead?

My heart leaped out of my chest.

Nikiwe: What makes you ask that? You need to have hope.

Khulekani: I don't know what to think anymore. You

saw what happened yesterday.

Nikiwe: I know, but he didn't say Qhawe was dead.

Khulekani: The responsibilities that come with this throne are too much. I can't wait for Mandlakhe to come back. I'll be able to go back to my life. It's clear that not all of us are cut out for this.

Did that mean he managed to convince Mandlakhe to come back? I was not happy about that. I sat down.

Mlu: Did I hear right? You're saying that Mandlakhe finally agreed to come back?

We turned to see Mlungisi and Lungelo walk in.

Khulekani: With great difficulty, but I reasoned with him.

Mlu: That's good news.

Mlu added, eyeing me. They went to occupy chairs too.

Khulekani: He'll be coming back to South Africa next week.

Lungelo: That's great news indeed.

Khulekani: I want the preparations for his inauguration to be started with.

I was fuming at the news, but I managed to hide it well. I couldn't let Mandlakhe come back and ruin my plans.

Phumla came inside and greeted all of us.

Phumla: The police asked for my presence. Should I be worried?

Lungelo: We're also in the dark about why they requested this meeting.

Phumla: Do you think it's about my husband?

Nikiwe: We think so, but I'm sure it's not bad news.

It didn't take long for the police to arrive. You could sense the worry in the atmosphere. Funnily enough I didn't feel anything. There was a male, and female detective. The female one did most of the talking.

Detective: I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but Qhawe Mzonyane is dead.

Phumla: No, not my husband... You must be mistaken.

Detective: I'm sorry, mam.

Khulekani: What happened to him, detective?

Sadness lingered in the atmosphere now. Tears started falling down Phumla's cheeks.

Detective: It seems to us that he hit his head on a rock, and fell to his death from a hill.

More like, he hit his head on the corner of a table, but that's a story for another day.

Phumla: There must be a mistake... What am I going to tell my children?

She cried hysterical, and I might have felt sorry for her if I cared.

Detective: According to the autopsy report, he's been dead for weeks now. We're sorry about his death, but we have to take a leave now. You're welcome to come and identify his body.

Khulekani: Thank you, detectives.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I was sitting huddled at a table with Dimpho in the canteen, and two other girls who were Thabile's friends. Thabile had not wanted to show her face in public yet after we released all the evidence we had against Bandile and his friends on all social media platforms. The lab had prioritized our tests due to the rape. We even tweeted hashtags that highlighted Bandile, Shawn and Xolani as rapists. We still didn't get an answer from Ofentse, but we knew it was only a matter of time. The rupture and chaos this news caused was big, most especially because the Dube surname was a household name, and they were very popular. Media outlets wanted to cover this story. Journalists, and all.

Dimpho: I can't tell you how happy I am that finally, they'll pay for hurting my friend.

Me: They deserve to go to hell. Bafe fi.

A hand tapped me on my shoulder. I looked at Dimpho and the others, and their expressions had completely changed.

Bandile: Where is Thabile?

The eyes of the entire school population was on us. I rose to my feet, and pivoted to look the bastard straight in his eyes.

Me: You have no business with her.

Bandile: You'll pay for this, bitch.

Me: It's over for you, buddy. Have a nice time in jail.

At that moment, I saw police men make their way into the canteen. Shawn and Xolani were cuffed, and led to us.

I rummaged for Bandile's phone in my purse and handed it to him. His face was streaked with frown lines, his chest heaving at an uncontrollable speed - his temper flaring. The guy looked ready to kill.

Me: I don't need it anymore. I must say that it has been of great help to me.

Bandile: This is not over. I'm coming for you, and when I'm done with you, you won't even know what to do with yourself. I'll be out soon.

A police officer came, and cuffed him with difficulty. This dumb head was stubborn.

Officer: Bandile Dube, you're under arrest for the rape and violation of Thabile Mampane. Anything you say or do can and will be used against you in the court of law.

Bandile: Do you know who my father is? I'll make

sure that all of you lose your jobs! Incompetent imbeciles!

Officer: You have the right to an attorney, and if you're unable to afford one; the state will provide one for you.

They dragged them away, and Bandile kept fighting them. The students had looked at the scene before them - some had even recorded the entire thing. I felt relieved and happy that the dogs will finally be where they belong.

A week later

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I'm going to start working with targets. 180+ likes and 10 comments for the next insert. Hope you enjoyed.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

It had been a week since the arrests. They were denied bail at the hearing, and Thabile and I were over the moon. Ofentse had even decided to testify against his friends. We walked through campus, but today was the same as the past week. However today, as we walked past students; they laughed at us whilst glued to their phones. I did not think about it too much. On the other hand, Thabile has been fidgety around me.

Me: I still don't understand how my name ends up in the mouths of people I've never talked to a day in my life.

The story hadn't died down. There were a lot of notifications, but I didn't bother to follow up on them.

My phone vibrated in my pocket, and I reached for it. The caller ID displayed my aunt, and I answered it with a smile.

Me: Hello, auntie.

Noxolo: How are you, my child?

Me: I'm good. I'm glad to see that you're still alive.

I chuckled briefly.

Noxolo: That's not a laughing matter, Buhle.

Me: I hope that you're not going to do anything that's going to get you killed. I still need you in my life.

Noxolo: You're going to hear about this anyway, so I might as well tell you.

Me: It sounds serious. What's going on?

Noxolo: I've moved back in with Kwanele.

Me: Auntie, you did what? Do you want to get

yourself killed?

Noxolo: Kwanele didn't give me a choice.

Me: That's bull, and you know it. Auntie, move out or I'll be forced to come down there.

Noxolo: Buhle, I'll be fine. Don't worry.

Me: How can I not worry about you? Have you forgotten that that man killed my mother?! Please don't tell me that he's using that 'you can only leave me through death.'

Noxolo: I need to go. He's back. I'll talk to you later.

The line went dead. I was seething with anger. My mood was totally dampened. I had even forgotten that I was walking with Thabile.

Thabi: Are you okay? I didn't mean to eavesdrop.

Me: I'm fine. Nothing I can't handle.

We walked past a group of girls. They pointed at us.

One girl said. "That's her." Another one replied. "It doesn't seem like she cares that she's all over social media."

I looked at Thabile, clicking my tongue.

Me: Don't people have better things to do other than talking about you?

Thabi: They're not talking about me. There is something I need to tell you.

Me: You're scaring me, Thabile. What's happening?

She pulled me away from the scrutiny of the students. She looked... I couldn't even describe her expression.

Thabi: It seems as if Bandile leaked your sextape.

Me: What? I thought... that I had gotten rid of it.

My voice cracked, and tears threatened to fall.

Thabi: It seems that he had copies, not merely on his cellphone. I'm so sorry.

This couldn't be happening.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

We drove into the palace, and the car I was in finally came to a halt. The driver came and opened the door for me. I was traveling with Phumla. Another black car parked behind us, and it had transported Khulekani, Mlungisi and Lungelo. We were from

Qhawe's burial.

I clambered down from the car, and Phumla did the same. The uncles came to meet us.

Phumla: I can't believe that he's really gone.

Lungelo: It will get better with time.

Phumla: Thank you for giving my husband a dignified funeral.

Lungelo: Qhawe was like family to us. It's not a big deal.

Phumla: I should get going. Stay well.

She slightly bowed.

Khulekani: The driver will take you home.

Phumla: Thank you.

Khulekani: And if there's anything you need, you and

your children; don't hesitate to let us know.

She nodded, and the driver led her to the car. They ascended the car and soon enough they had drove away. The guard was meant to close the gate, but hooting could be heard from a distance.

Lungelo: That can only be Mandlakhe.

I didn't want to believe that. He was supposed to be dead.

The car drove in, but it was a different car from the one Lungelo had sent off to pick up Mandlakhe. A smile crept up on my face, but my smile was quickly wiped off when my husband's brother trod to us. I typed in a message to Zenani. 'I thought you sent out someone to tamper with the brakes. Mandlakhe is supposed to be dead, but he's here alive and breathing.'

Mandlakhe: Simnikiwe, you don't look happy to see me.

I quickly recovered, and plastered a fake smile.

Simnikiwe: That's not it. I am happy, but it has been a long morning. I'm not sure if you heard that Qhawe is no longer with us.

Mandlakhe: I've heard the sad news. I just feel bad that I couldn't make it in time for his funeral. My flight got delayed.

He resembled his older brother so much. His presence at the palace would make things for me hard. A ringtone echoed around us. Lungelo hauled his cellphone from his trousers, and answered it.

Lungelo: What? Are you sure... Thank you for letting

me know.

Mlungisi: What's going on, Lungelo?

He dropped the call.

Lungelo: I've just received news that the driver who was meant to pick up Mandlakhe from the airport was involved in a car accident.

They all looked shocked. I just wished Mandlakhe came with that car. A message came through, but I didn't bother to read it.

Mandlakhe: It seems that the devil is working overtime to kill me.

He said that with his orbs boring into me. And that is why I didn't like this man.

Khulekani: I for one am glad that you didn't come in that car. You escaped death.

Thabile Mampane

The library was closing in an hour, and while I was halfway into starting my assignment, my cellphone rang. My mother's photo came on screen, and I sighed.

Thabi: Hello, ma.

Her voice cracked. You could hear that she was crying.

Mom: My child.

Thabi: I take it that you heard about my rape.

Mom: My child, tell me why I'm hearing about this from the media.

Thabi: I'm sorry, ma.

Mom: Thabile, tell me. Have I ever come across as a mother who doesn't care about her children?

Thabi: No, ma.

My tears were falling. The memories flooded my mind. My mother's words gradually triggered my emotions, buried deep within my heart. They were slowly unveiled.

Mom: Why wasn't I the first person you told about this? A whole 5 months, my child lived with this pain.

Thabi: I'm sorry, ma.

Mom: I saw the smile on your face the past holidays, but I knew it hid a lot of pain. You remember how I

kept pestering you to talk to me, but you tried so hard to assure me that it was nothing I should worry myself about. I ended up giving you the space you needed, because I thought you trusted me enough to come to me with all your burdens.

Thabi: Ma, I didn't want you to worry about me.

Mom: I don't know what cruelty our own men are imposing on us. The same men we birth, they turn against us and torture us. I'm so sorry that you had to suffer such an inhumane attack. I'm sorry that I was not there for you when you needed me the most.

I tried so hard not to make a noise. I packed all my belongings and files into my bag, and left the library.

Mom: I'm... so sorry, my child.

Thabi: Mama, it's not your fault.

Our emotions intertwined, and hers spanned over to mine. Different thoughts raced through my mind. I

walked back to my room, with fear making each step I took heavier than the previous. I passed the hallway that the rape had occurred - my tears endlessly flowing. I had always made sure that I took another route.

I opened the door to my room, and went to collapse on my bed. Buhle seemed to be sleeping. I inhaled and exhaled - curbing my pain.

Thabi: Buhle, are you awake?

Buhle: The nightmares I get while sleeping are better than the ones I live.

I snaked to her bed. She sat upright, making space for me to sit.

Thabi: Everything will be fine.

Buhle: Don't tell me that you believe that.

I embraced her, as our sobs rhythmically left our lips. Something in me changed as we tuned into the moment. I felt like something connected us on a deeper level.

Thabi: It gets better.

Buhle: Not the reality we live.

She pulled away from the hug, but something drew me in towards her. Our brokenness emerging into one - the damage broadening.

I don't know what happened next, but I moved in for a kiss. Our lips touched, the passion surging through my veins.

Buhle pushed me away, her hand came unto my cheek - the sting immediately felt. Her eyes had

widened.

Buhle: What are you doing?

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16

Thabile Mampane

I was munching on snacks with Dimpho on my bed. I needed someone to talk to and I was glad that she was here.

Thabi: You should've heard my mother yesterday. Her words literally brought tears to my eyes.

Dimpho: You know that she cares about you.

Thabi: You know I'm just glad that Bandile, Shawn and Xolani are finally where they belong.

Dimpho: And you need to make sure that they stay there. We can't have those bastards hurting other people again.

Thabi: Let's hope that they sentence them to life.

Dimpho: Where is the death penalty when you need it?

Thabi: Death would be too easy on them.

Dimpho: As is prison. You'll never know with our country. You have a strong case against them, but you know where there is money and influence, anything can happen.

Thabi: Hence why I wanted everything to be released online. Now everyone knows the monsters we lived amongst.

Dimpho: Let's hope that the trial will go well. Have they informed you of the date?

Thabi: No, hopefully they will soon. I want to close this chapter once and for all.

Dimpho: So tell me, how is Buhle holding up? I mean everyone is talking about her, and that tape.

Thabi: I don't know how to help her. She's not taking

it well.

Dimpho: But Bandile is a dog. A filthy one at that. Couldn't he just accept defeat? You should keep an eye on her though. We don't want a repeat of what Dineo did.

Thabi: You think that she'd attempt suicide?

Dimpho: You'll never know, Thabile. Yes, she may come off as a strong person but even strong people do break down. I must commend her bravery though.

Thabi: That is why I like her so much. She's strong, brave and beautiful. She helped me a lot.

Dimpho: You haven't even known her for that long or am I missing something here? You sound like you're in love.

She chortled.

Thabi: I kissed her yesterday, but she pushed me away and slapped me. I can still feel the pain.

Dimpho: Why am I not surprised? You went about it the wrong way. Your timing was off. I don't blame her.

Thabi: I was caught up in the moment, and for the first time, I realized that I may have feelings for her.

Dimpho: She's going through a lot, Thabile. The last thing she expected was her friend to kiss her.

Thabi: I know. I've tried apologising this morning, but she didn't want to hear it.

Dimpho: Well, the last time I checked she was straight.

Thabi: But I like her.

Dimpho: You can't change that she's straight unless she wants to make you an exception and I don't see that happening.

Thabi: More than anything, from the conversations I had with her, I realized that she wasn't raised on love, but survival. And it becomes a problem when you seek that love from the wrong person.

Dimpho: She really does strike me as someone who

is damaged inside from her past perhaps. Her eyes says it all.

Thabi: And you don't realize how damaged you are until someone tries to love you. I don't think I can ever love someone properly. The psychological trauma of my rape runs deep. I've been trying to run from it, but its claws will always catch up with me.

Dimpho: I think perhaps you need to see a professional. Someone you can talk to.

I didn't know how our conversation turned into a serious one with reality on how I felt about everything. Perhaps she was right, I needed someone to help me through the ordeal.

Dimpho: You can focus on your healing now that your rapists have been arrested.

Buhle walked in.

Buhle: Hello, Dimpho.

She went to place her backpack on the bed. She didn't acknowledge my presence. Dimpho looked at me.

Dimpho: Hey.

Thabi: Is this how it's going to be?

Buhle: I don't know what you're talking about.

Thabi: I apologised, Buhlenkosi. How long are you going to be angry at me?

Buhle: This is not about you, Thabile. I'm already dealing with a lot.

I didn't say anything more.

Buhle: You had no right to do what you did yesterday.

Thabi: Buhle, it's not that deep. It was just a kiss. No

need to get worked up.

Dimpho: What Thabile means is that we're here for you.

Buhle: The only way you can help me is if you get that tape removed from the internet.

Thabi: We tried our best, Buhle. You thought that you had the video destroyed, but it seems that Bandile beat us to it.

Buhle: You and Bandile. Same WhatsApp group. Hypocrites.

Her words hurt me.

Thabi: You're taking it too far, Buhle.

Buhle: Taking it too far? You fall under those homosexual hypocrites. You knew that I was straight, but still you kissed me. Had it been a straight person, making a move on the LGBT community, they'd have been crucified and preaching about how you're trying to change them. But some of you think that you have

the right to change straight people.

Thabi: I didn't know that you're homophobic. It's disgusting actually.

Buhle: Take it how you want to take it, but you know I'm right. I have nothing against the LGBT, and just like they are the way that they are, I am straight and I'm not going to allow you to change me.

I had no more words for her. Whenever she is angry, she tends to say hurtful things. Like the last time whereby she blamed me for not telling about Bandile's true colours whereas I had warned her several times. Dimpho whispered in my ear.

Dimpho: Don't mind her. She's taking out her frustrations on you.

I clicked my tongue.

Thabi: There is a saying that says don't bleed on people that didn't cut you. She's taking it too far.

Noxolo Ndebele

Linda passed me a pack of potatoes.

Noxolo: Thank you.

I started peeling them.

Linda: I wonder what you're still doing here. I mean it's obvious that you don't love Kwanele. Unless you're still planning on getting him arrested.

I was cooking dinner with Linda while Raymond and

Kwanele outside, setting the braai stand. Linda was marinating the meat.

Noxolo: I don't see how my relationship with Kwanele is any of your business.

My purpose hadn't changed, but Kwanele forced me to move in with him again.

Linda: You nearly killed me because you thought that Kwanele killed your friend. I want to know what changed.

Noxolo: Perhaps I should've killed you that day. You like running your mouth.

Linda: It doesn't change that you're going to get yourself killed. Who knows? You might even be driven to commit suicide.

Noxolo: I think it's better that you stop talking or else you'll not like what I'll do to you.

People could rile you up the wrong way.

Linda: Let me take this to the men, before you kill me for real.

Noxolo: I'll take it.

I took the bowl of raw meat sprinkled with spices and sauces from her, and strolled outside where the braai stand was engulfed with flames. Kwanele and Raymond were each holding a glass of whisky in their hands, and talking; seated on camp chairs. Their conversation caught my attention, and I decided to eavesdrop.

Raymond: I still don't understand why you brought Noxolo back here. She wants to see you in jail.

Kwanele: I know that. Hence why I need her around.

Raymond: Keep your friends close, but your enemies

closer.

Kwanele: Precisely. And she gives it to me good.

They laughed, and my anger reappeared. I inhaled and exhaled deeply, before I stalked towards them. I positioned the bowl on the ground.

Noxolo: You'll let us know when you need something.

They nodded, and I paced back to the kitchen. Linda was now busy on her phone.

Noxolo: I hope you know that dinner won't cook itself.

Linda: Forget that. You won't believe what I've just come across.

Noxolo: I don't think I want to know.

Linda: Oh, you definitely have to see this. It seems that Nomthandazo's daughter has been up to

mischief in Joburg. I never expected this.

Noxolo: What are you talking about, Linda?

Linda came to show me a video of Buhle having sex with a boy. Her face was clearly visible, and her moans very audible. Shock couldn't even describe how I felt. I trod to my bedroom where I had left my phone charging. I typed in Buhle's number on the keypad.

Buhle: Hello, auntie.

Noxolo: Hello, auntie my foot. What is this nonsense I see of you on social media?

Buhle: Auntie, please give me a chance to explain.

Noxolo: Explain what, Buhlenkosi? Is this how your mother raised you? She must be turning in her grave. It's only been a month since you've been in Joburg, but you're already involved in scandals.

Buhle: Auntie, I know that you're disappointed in me, but-

Noxolo: Disappointment doesn't even come close to it. I didn't expect this from you.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I pushed Sensokuhle's wheelchair.

Sensokuhle: Where are you taking me?

Kamva: We're married. You need to learn to trust me.

I opened the sliding door to the swimming pool area.

Kamva: I think that this is something that needs to be done.

Sensokuhle: What are you talking about?

He sighed impatiently. I wheeled him closer to the edge of the pool.

Kamva: What caused your paralysis?

Senzokuhle: I don't want to talk about it, Kamva.

Kamva: Wrong answer.

Senzokuhle: What is this, Kamva? You seem to be losing your mind.

Kamva: You haven't seen the worst of it. I'll teach you not to take me for a ride. You've been lying to me.

Senzokuhle: What exactly have I been lying about? Please take me back to the house.

I tipped his wheelchair slightly.

Senzokuhle: What the hell are you doing, Kamva? Are

you trying to kill me?

I tipped the wheelchair in an angle that he fell into the pool.

Kamva: If you want our marriage to work, you'll come out of that pool. Or you will simply die, and either way, I win.

I was already walking back to the house. I went to pour myself a glass of wine, and flipped through the channels on the TV.

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Target: 190+ likes.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

Senzokuhle: I've been with crazy women before, but you take the cup.

For the first time, his voice had a hint of humor behind it, and undoubtedly I liked that.

Kamva: Oh, you didn't die? I was looking forward to your funeral. I had even picked out a dress for it.

I feigned disappointment.

Senzokuhle: I'm not the dying type.

He came to stand in front of the TV. He was shirtless, his caramel skin glimmering with droplets of water. His abs were on full display, and I started

seeing him in a different light.

Senzokuhle: Like what you see?

I closed my mouth while staring at him in awe.

Senzokuhle: There was no need for you to do what you did back there.

Kamva: I gave you a chance to come clean to me, but you didn't take it.

Senzokuhle: What if I was really paralysed? You do realise that you'd have killed me?

Kamva: Oh please, I'm not that heartless. I knew that you can walk. I saw you with my own two eyes. You could imagine the shock on my face.

Senzokuhle: Okay, but what if I couldn't swim? I'd have drowned.

Kamva: Then why would you bother yourself with a house that has a pool if you can't swim?

Senzokuhle: What you did shows me how crazy you are.

Kamva: That's irrelevant right now. I need you to answer my questions. Why would you lie to everyone about this?

He sighed, and sat down on the glassy table in front of me.

Senzokuhle: I can't tell you that, Kamva.

Kamva: Don't push me, Senzokuhle. I have your mother's numbers on standby. I'll not hesitate to call her and let her know what her son has been up to.

Senzokuhle: Fine. I'll tell you everything.

Kamva: I'm listening.

Senzokuhle: As you know, I'm next in line for the throne and it seemed that it was going to be happening soon than I anticipated since my father was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer a few months ago. His health has been deteriorating since

then.

Kamva: I'm so sorry to hear that.

Sadness crossed his features.

Senzokuhle: But since I didn't want to be King, I had to come up with a plan. I attempted so many times to talk to my parents, but they were not having it. So I decided to fake my paralysis and told them that I was involved in a car accident. I did this so that I was deemed unfit to take over the throne.

Shock swam in my orbs.

Kamva: Wow! All this because you don't want to become King?

Senzokuhle: My life is not in the valley. It's not like the throne lacks successors.

Kamva: And how is your plan coming along?

Senzokuhle: They bought it, but they don't see it as a good enough reason for me not to become King.

Kamva: There is something I don't quite get here. If the ancestors have chosen you for the job, it is nearly impossible to go against them.

Senzokuhle: The family seer saw through my facade, and confronted me. I've been paying him money to appease the ancestors and not reveal the truth to my family.

Kamva: I can't believe this.

Senzokuhle: Can I trust you not to tell my family?

Kamva: It's not my place anyway, but I'd really like to see how all of this is going to play out.

I was out of words. The shock that transfixed me to the sofa refused to evaporate.

Senzokuhle: You said something about when I make it out of the pool, we're going work on our marriage. Does the offer still stand?

He smirked, something which he never did in my presence. I looked at him, unblinking.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I groaned as my phone rang under my pillow. I answered it without looking at the caller ID.

Me: Hello.

My voice was sleepy.

Noxolo: Don't tell me that you're still sleeping. Don't you have classes to attend?

Me: Auntie, now is not a good time.

Noxolo: I learnt that waking up everyday is proof that you're born to make it. You can't keep feeling sorry for yourself.

Me: Aunty, please.

Noxolo: Buhle, wake up and go tackle your problems. Don't let setbacks prevent you from making your dreams come true.

Me: But it's hard, Aunty. Everywhere I go, people look at me. They make snide remarks. The truth is that this video will always follow me.

I resorted to sitting upright on the bed.

Noxolo: Take it one day at a time. You need to know that video will be old news in the next week. Soon enough, people will be talking about something else. So go live your life on your terms.

Me: You see why I still need you in my life. Please don't allow Kwanele to take you away from me.

Noxolo: That won't happen.

Me: Aunty, we can't be going back and forth about this. Kwanele is dangerous. I don't know how many times I have to tell you this.

Noxolo: I know what exactly I'm dealing with here. I have a plan, and this time nothing is going to hinder it.

Me: I wash my hands off you. Seems like the only time you'll listen to me, is when you find yourself buried next to my mother. Dead at his hands and by then, it would have already been too late. More than anything, I think you're obsessed with this man.

Noxolo: You may have forgiven Kwanele, but I never will. This man killed your mother. My friend. She was my sister. I will stop at nothing to ensure that her death was not in vain. I thought that's what you initially wanted? You wanted Kwanele to be prosecuted for his crimes? What changed, Buhle?

Me: I realised that in life you choose which battles to fight. Some battles aren't worth fighting.

Noxolo: This one is worth fighting.

Me: Okay, do what you think it's best. Let me go live

my 24 hours like it's my last.

She chuckled.

Noxolo: I didn't mean that you should go seek solace in alcohol and drugs.

Me: Who said anything about alcohol and drugs?

We laughed, and the fact that a genuine laughter escaped my mouth for the first time in the past 2 days was something. We said our goodbyes, and I hung up. I gave myself a little prep talk, and got up to tidy up my bed. Thabile walked in while I was patting the bed for any creases.

Me: Thabile, may I have a quick word with you?

Thabi: I'm not in the mood to fight.

Me: I wanted to apologise for my behaviour.

Thabi: Apology accepted.

She went to sit down on her bed.

Me: I have this tendency of saying hurtful things when I'm angry.

Thabi: I've noticed.

Me: And I'll try to work on that bad trait of mine.

She smiled. However I sensed some awkwardness between us. I think it was because of the kiss, but I didn't want to talk about that anymore.

Thabi: Okay. Now that we've gotten that out of the way. I was thinking that perhaps we could attend therapy.

Me: I don't know about that.

Thabi: I think it'll be fun and helpful. That way, I think

I'll also be strong when the trial begins.

Me: Okay.

I was doubtful. I didn't think I'd be able to talk to a stranger about my life.

Thabi: And perhaps, they'll help us move forward with our lives. We'll be introduced to better coping mechanisms.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

We gathered in the dining hall, where a swarm of servants laid the food before us, and served us in separate dishes. Everyone is assigned a seat at the table, and with that knowledge and arrangement - I had sprinkled poison on Mandlakhe's plate. I started

digging in, but subconsciously I found myself thinking about Mandlakhe. I kept chanting a mantra in my mind. 'Eat. Eat. Eat, dammit!' Others were munching on their food, but not Mandlakhe. Mlungisi struck up a conversation but I was more focused on Mandlakhe eating his meal that would send him straight to the grave.

Mlungisi: I think that perhaps Mandlakhe and Simnikiwe should tie the knot.

I choked on my juice.

Lungelo: That's a very good idea. With Simnikiwe expecting, Mandlakhe could take on the father role for the baby.

Nikiwe: Mvelo's grave hasn't even turned cold, but you want me to marry his brother?

Mandlakhe: Simnikiwe is right. I'm not going to marry Mvelo's wife.

Khulekani: This is not up for discussion.

We all looked at him. I didn't protest any further. Mandlakhe was going to meet his brother very soon, so I might as well play along. After tonight, there would be no groom for me to marry. Oh well.

Mandlakhe called for the kitchen servants to gather in the dining hall. They came, and bowed down.

Lungelo: What's going on, Mandlakhe?

Mandlakhe: I want the person who prepared my food to step forward.

One of the servants spoke up. "The chef prepared the food. Our duty is to serve you, my prince."

Mandlakhe: Okay, I want one of you to come and taste my food.

Khulekani: Mandlakhe, what are you doing?

Mandlakhe: Uncle, trust me in this.

My heart drummed in my chest. What game was Mandlakhe playing?

One of the girls rose to their full length and stepped forward. I could see that she didn't understand what was going on, but she had to do as instructed. She ate a few spoonfuls of the food, and nothing happened or so I thought.

Mandlakhe: Dismissed.

His words were swallowed as the girl started hyperventilating, and collapsed. All of us were shocked. Yes, even me I was shocked. I mean I was told that this was a slow poison, and that was not what was happening here.

Mandlakhe: COME IN!

His authoritative voice echoed around the palace.

Moments later Phumla and an unfamiliar woman walked into the hall. Mandlakhe barked orders.

Mandlakhe: Attend to her.

She pointed to the unfamiliar woman. She nodded, and from her backpack took out a few medical equipments. So she was a doctor. Seemed like my plan was backfiring greatly.

Khulekani: Mandlakhe, would you please tell me what's going on here? What is the meaning of this?

Mandlakhe: This is the second attempt on my life.

I swallowed hard as Mandlakhe's gaze traveled over me. Fear coursed through my veins.

Mlungisi: Are you saying that someone is out to kill you?

Mlu's eyes also swept over me. My fear was intensifying. This was not happening. I waited for the exposure, but it never came.

Lungelo: It makes sense. First the car accident, and now this? I see his point.

Mandlakhe: From here on, I'll only eat food prepared by Phumla.

Khulekani: So that means she'll be staying with us?

Mandlakhe nodded.

Lungelo: What about her children?

Phumla: My sister will be taking care of them in my absence. I hope that there's no problem.

Mlungisi: Not at all. You're welcome here.

The doctor spoke up. "There's only so much I can do for her. She needs to be admitted. We'll have to run tests on her.

They nodded. Mandlakhe rose from his seat, and disappeared. There was one thing for sure, Mandlakhe knew I was the one behind the attempts on his life, but why was he keeping quiet? I wanted to find out the game that he was playing, because two can definitely play the game and make it interesting.

The servant was carried outside.

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Sorry for the late insert.

18

Mandlakhe Mkhize

I watched my uncle talk to someone over the phone. We were locked inside my bedroom as he wanted clear answers for what went down yesterday.

Simnikiwe and her evilness kept creeping into my mind, anger worming into me.

He was finally off the phone, and he came to address me. He took a seat on the sofa across the one I was occupying, with a table separating them.

Khulekani: I was on the phone with the hospital. Poison was traced in Sabina's blood. You were right.

Sabina was the girl who collapsed yesterday at dinner.

Khulekani: But all of this doesn't make sense. I fail to understand how you knew that your food was poisoned. The fact that you had a doctor and Phumla seconds away doesn't make sense to me.

Mandlakhe: You know that I foresee things before they happen.

Khulekani: So you mean that you willingly put innocent lives in danger? Was there a need to have that girl eat your food if you knew that it was poisoned?

Mandlakhe: She's going to be fine, isn't she?

Khulekani: I know that you usually have visions about future occurrences. But a lot still doesn't make

sense to me. Who is after you, Mandlakhe?

Mandlakhe: I can't tell you yet.

Khulekani: You need to tell us so that we can deal with that person, and make sure that he doesn't come at you again.

Mandlakhe: I don't remember mentioning a male. It could be anyone, uncle.

Khulekani: And it's clear that you know who it is. I hate that you're now playing games with people's lives. We've already lost one of our drivers. Sabina was poisoned, and in both of these events, you knew what was going to happen.

Mandlakhe: I don't dispute that, but some enemies you need to play them at their own game. And that is what I'm doing.

Khulekani: So this enemy doesn't have a name? If there's something you know about this person, you need to tell us. How will we protect ourselves against some unknown enemy? What if next time he comes for other members of the family?

Mandlakhe: You can relax. She won't do that. All you need to know is that all will be revealed soon.

Worry was plastered on his face. You could see that he really cared about the wellbeing of others.

Khulekani: You better be speaking the truth, because time is of essence here. I can't keep providing villagers with food parcels every week. Soon enough, it will create a dent in our pockets.

Mandlakhe: It won't get to that. The inauguration will be happening soon. After the truth is revealed, hopefully we'll work to restore our land.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I was tucked near a vanity table with a mirror pinned

against the wall, as Somikazi was applying my face with makeup. I didn't want to lie, my stomach churned as I thought of the day ahead and my date with Sensokuhle. Yes, you heard right - I was going out with Sensokuhle. Hopefully everything will go well. Somikazi stopped working on me, and leaned against the table. She looked at me.

Somikazi: Are you sure you're ready to pursue a relationship with Sensokuhle? I know that you're married-

Kamva: Are you against it?

Somikazi: No, I just want to make sure that you know that love is not a smooth sailing experience.

Kamva: I hear you.

Somikazi: Every relationship feels like the best thing in the beginning. The talks. Sweet messages. Happiness. Good sex.

I couldn't help but laugh at her last words.

Somikazi: That's how it all started, for me at least. I was never ready for the insecurities. The stress. The jealousy. I was never ready to be cheated on or watching ourselves fall out of love.

Kamva: I thought your marriage to Mzi was arranged.

Somikazi: We were given time to get to know each other beforehand, and there was something between us. I couldn't pinpoint it, but we clicked well.

I faintly smiled, and let her continue.

Somikazi: We grew apart. We fought every day, and at times some painful words were said. I'm not saying that you're deemed to live my experiences, but I want you to understand that love is not all rosy as people make it seem. The truth is that the honeymoon phase always comes to an end and it's up to both of you how you're going to carry on from then. It's sad that after that phase, I carried the both

of us because Mzi seemed to have given up. Most relationships go through this and if what you feel for each other is genuine and true, you're going to have to pull through. I've heard people say that 'love shouldn't be hard' and I've never really understood that statement till today because every success sprouts from failure and tribulations.

Kamva: You've really gone through a lot.

Somikazi: All I'm trying to say is that once the honeymoon phase is gone, don't pack your bags and leave. Shit always gets real in marriage. I know that there's only so much we can do for failing relationships and perhaps sometimes it's better to let go but don't go running at the first fight, well, unless he raises his hand on you.

I chortled.

Kamva: You've a funny way of saying some things. But thank you.

Somikazi: You still haven't answered my question.

Kamva: And what was the question?

Somikazi: Are you ready for this?

Kamva: I think I am. We all deserve a shot at happiness.

Somikazi: I still don't sense some excitement and enthusiasm.

Kamva: I AM.

We laughed together.

Kamva: But there is something that's has been bothering me.

In fact it has been bothering me since yesterday.

Kamva: You know your brother better than me. I have a feeling that perhaps he's doing all this

because I know something about him that other people don't know about.

Somikazi: You think he's buying your silence?

Kamva: I mean the sudden change.

Somikazi: Senzokuhle is a good man, and soon enough you'll see that for yourself. I don't know what you're both hiding, and I don't think that it concerns me. Put all that aside, and make sure that you enjoy your time. After all he's yours.

I laughed. Somikazi was honestly a fresh breath of air. She had been that person who eased my loneliness when I started to settle in - a new city.

Somikazi: Now let's get you all dolled up.

Hours later, a car had come to pick me up. It was still daylight. I was wearing a black dress with mid-thigh high slit that accentuated my body and finished my look with pair of black stilettos. The

driver opened the door for me, and escorted me in a breathtaking restaurant. Everything was glamorous, and I liked. I walked in, with rose petals sparkled on the floor - it seemed that he had booked the whole restaurant and I followed the trail. I came face to face with a handsome Sensokuhle, adorning a suit. I approached him. He took my hand in his, and kissed my knuckles.

Senzokuhle: Thank you for coming, my lady.

I smiled, and he pulled out a chair for me. I plopped down on the seat and he went back to his own.

Senzokuhle: I must say that you look very beautiful. Stunningly gorgeous.

Kamva: Thank you, but you and your English.

We chuckled.

Senzokuhle: You get used to it.

Kamva: This is very beautiful.

I said gesturing to our surroundings.

Senzokuhle: Not as beautiful as you.

Our eyes locked - the contact intense. I looked away.

Kamva: Be careful, or you might end up falling in love with me.

He smiled.

Senzokuhle: What are you thinking of eating?

He asked as we opened our menus.

Noxolo Ndebele

I was walking to where I believed that my problems would be solved.

Along my short journey, I met two women that didn't like me nor Nomthandazo. The jealousy they had for us, they couldn't even hide it. And seemed like today was no exception. I mean the way I didn't care about those women - I didn't even remember their names.

The dark skinned one stopped me. "Now that you found a new man, you've forgotten about us." I rolled my eyes.

Noxolo: What's there to remember about you?

The light skinned woman piped in. "Zandile, remember how I always said that this woman right here killed her friend in order to be with her man. It's happening right in front of us."

The dark one. "I remember, and it makes sense. This is the works of witchcraft."

Light one. "She probably couldn't see her friend happy, and decided to kill her. Now she goes for her man."

The dark one. "You're still talking. She probably fed him love potion."

Noxolo: Funny how you're both accusing me of witchcraft, yet you're the biggest witches out there.

Light one. "All we're saying is that it's fine to be single. You don't have to kill, and take other people's men."

Noxolo: I don't have time for this.

I clicked my tongue, and walked away. We trod in opposite directions. I walked until I got to the hut I seek.

I walked into the yard, and I was shown to the hut where Gogo - that was the name given to her after she initiated - was available. She instructed me to take off my shoes and sit down.

Sangomas were not my cup of tea, but desperate times called for desperate measures.

Gogo: What you want can't be granted easily, my child.

Noxolo: Gogo, I'm willing to do anything.

Gogo: You're asking me to awaken a dead spirit. Souls never die, but the person you want to come back has crossed into another realm.

Noxolo: Gogo, all I'm asking is that you give me something that make someone see me as Nomthandazo. I don't want Nomthandazo's soul to be returned, or interrupted. I want him to see Nomthandazo in me, in everything I do, I want him to be reminded of her. I want him to be tormented and haunted to the point where he'll tell the truth. He'll have no choice but to spit the truth.

She started doing her dance with her feather like thing - if I may call it that. She was mumbling in tongues.

Gogo: I can see that your friend was killed by her

husband whom you now live with.

I nodded.

Noxolo: Will you help me?

She started rummaging through her herbs, and brought forward something wrapped in newspaper. She handed it to me.

Gogo: You'll wash with this for 3 days. And I repeat for 3 days, in the evening and make sure that you chant Nomthandazo's name 10 times each night. Nothing more, nothing less.

I nodded, and she also gave me a small container.

Gogo: You'll rub that on his eyes the final night. On

the 3rd night. The last night.

I nodded, and placed everything into my bag properly. I also ensured that I listened to her instructions attentively.

Gogo: Even a little mistake as chanting Nomthandazo's name 11 times may cause this not work. Remember to do as I've said.

I nodded, and hauled out a few hundred notes from my purse. She declined the money.

Gogo: Keep the money. My transactions do not work with money. I will tell you what I want very soon from you in exchange for my services.

I merely shrugged, I didn't care but that surely should have raised a red flag with me.

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I don't have knowledge in these things. I'm just merely writing from my imagination and what makes sense to me but I hope you enjoyed.

19

Noxolo Ndebele

Three days had passed since I had went to the sangoma. Three nights since I bathed in water containing the herb I was given - 30 times have I chanted Nomthandazo's name. And on the final night, I had ensured that Kwanele got so drunk that he passed out and I applied the muti under his eyes. And with every passing minute, I battled with my inner self. I was plopped down on a chair in the kitchen, a bottle of wine on the counter and a glass. That voice within me seek to be released.

Voice: Your obsession is going to get you killed.

Noxolo: I don't know how many times I have to say that it's not an obsession.

Voice: You went to a witchdoctor.

Noxolo: You're one of those people that believe African spirituality is wrong? But at the end of the day, we all go to them when the going gets tough.

I downed the wine straight from the bottle.

Voice: There are good and bad sangomas. Ones that use their gifts for healing and the betterment of others, and ones that misuse it and instead partake in evil.

Noxolo: I got what I want, and that's all I care about.

Voice: What's the meaning of my transactions don't work with money? That equates to something deeper, even sinister. You'll find yourself being a

sacrificial cow, I'm telling you.

Noxolo: You should stop buzzing in my ear and find something useful to do. Find a hobby or something.

Voice: Unfortunately I'm part of you, and I'm the light to the darkness you so badly are attracting into your life. I mean the daughter of the person you're doing this for doesn't seem to care about avenging her mother, but you Mother Theresa are willing to die for someone who wasn't even your blood.

Noxolo: You're nothing but a negative entity in me. You pretend to want the best for me, but everything you say projects negativity. You're a pessimist I so badly want to get rid of. You always complain about my decisions, yet you don't bring any alternatives forward.

After that, everything was dead silent. Sometimes I questioned myself that was it really me who says all these things or something else disguised with my voice.

I finished the bottle of wine, and I could feel the intoxication kicking in.

Kwanele: Noxolo?

His voice rang around me. A headache awaited me.

Noxolo: I'm in the kitchen.

My words were not slurring yet. Seconds later, he came into the kitchen with a frame in his hand.

Kwanele: Alcohol will be the death of you.

Noxolo: And I'll be your unmaking.

Kwanele: What do you mean, Noxolo?

Noxolo: I meant in the bedroom.

I attempted to be seductive, and I succeeded. I could see with the smile that crept up on his face. However deep down, I meant that I'm going to finish him.

Kwanele: Are you the one who put up Nomthandazo's pictures?

Noxolo: I'm sorry. I shouldn't have, but her death anniversary is coming up. I thought you might want to reminisce about your wife. Remember that I'm not here to replace her.

He smiled.

Kwanele: That's what I like about you.

I internally rolled my eyes.

His free hand lingered on my cheek until his eyes

widened a bit.

Kwanele: Nomthandazo?

He rubbed his eyes.

Kwanele: I don't understand...

And I knew then and there that it was working.

Noxolo: What's wrong?

Kwanele: I saw Nomthandazo. Must be a blur of vision.

Noxolo: You're probably just missing her.

Thabile Mampane

Our behinds were planted on the bench. I was with Buhle, and we were here to see a professional - waiting for her appointment to finish. I was passing time on the phone with Dimpho whilst Buhle had leaned back on the wall, her eyes closed.

Thabi: Maybe she was really hurt, Dimpho.

Dimpho: I don't care, Buhle. I'm not going to be friends with a person that defends rapists. She didn't have a problem with dragging your name through the mud online. That shows Amanda was never a friend in the first place.

Thabi: I hear you. Perhaps she's hurt.

Dimpho: Are you hearing yourself, Thabile? She equates not telling her anything for the past 5 months as you lying and that you were never raped. I don't know what goodness you possess in your heart to overlook that, and I don't want that

goodness if it's going to make me forgive snakes that have clearly shown me that they hiss. Worst part is that she went to social media to vent her anger, instead of coming to you. Entlek what's the reason for her anger?

Thabi: It's fine, Dimpho. She's not the first one to say negative things to me.

Dimpho: The difference is that we considered her a friend. I will never understand women who defend rapists. Knowing very well that you have a vagina, and you might be the next victim. I'd rather just keep my mouth shut.

Thabi: You know that I've always loved saying that fuck with people the way they fuck with you. Barely, hardly and accordingly. Amanda has shown me that she's not standing with me at this point in my life, and I can't do anything other than move forward.

Dimpho: I love your spirit.

Thabi: You love everything about me.

She chuckled, and I smiled. I could imagine her rolling her eyes.

Dimpho: The arrogance.

Thabi: Look, we'll talk.

Dimpho: Good luck with the session.

She hung up, and I turned to Buhle.

Thabi: Are you okay?

She opened her eyes.

Buhle: I don't know.

Thabi: Are you sure you want to do this?

Buhle: I'm here. Might as well go through with it.

I nodded, and a comfortable silence engulfed us, and we waited. Finally the door inked Xoliswa Madonsela opened, and two middle aged women walked out. One greeted us, and walked away. The other one smiled, and ushered us inside.

Xoliswa: Sorry for keeping you waiting. That took a little longer than expected.

We nodded, and we went to sit down on a couch. She plopped down on a chair, facing us.

Xoliswa: So my name is Xoliswa Madonsela.

We nodded, and didn't say anything. She had a friendly smile plastered on her face throughout.

Xoliswa: I think this is the part where you tell me yours.

Buhle: We thought you might have an idea of who we are. We are never short of remarks and long stares.

There was a hint of hardness and bitterness behind her tone.

Thabi: Thabile Mampane.

Xoliswa: And you, my dear?

Buhle: Buhlenkosi Malinga.

Xoliswa: For a moment, I thought you were siblings. Well, since this is our first session, I'd just like you to briefly go into your background, and what you believe has led you here. So who'd like to start?

Thabi: If it's not a problem with my friend, I'd like to go first.

Buhle didn't dispute, and the office went silent. I breathed an intake of air, and began to narrate my story with the emotions pouring through me

accordingly.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I trod to my car, and clambered into the driver's seat. My heart leaped out of my heart in fear when I heard a voice.

Mlu: You seem to be in a hurry.

I saw him in the rear mirror.

Nikiwe: What are you doing in my car?

Mlu: Have you forgotten that our family is under attack? Where are you planning to go without a guard?

Nikiwe: Mlungisi, please get out of my car.

Mlu: But wait, you're not worried because you're the attacker. I know that you're not some good samaritan, but I never thought that you're capable of murder. You must have had us fooled for years. I'm starting to think that you had a hand in Mvelo's death.

Nikiwe: Please get out.

Mlu: I'm going to give you a word of advice. Stop all of this, or you're going to get burnt and it's not going to be pleasant.

Nikiwe: Your nephew asked for a war, and that's exactly what he's going to get. And in war, there are casualties. Don't make me make you one. I'm not going to ask again. Please leave my car.

Mlu: You've been warned. Your days are numbered.

He descended my car, and I ignited the engine.

I was driving to Gogo's hut. She helped me with a lot of things before, and I was hoping that she'd today.

Mandlakhe needed to go. I parked outside her yard, and paced to her hut. She welcomed me, and I sat on the floor.

Nikiwe: Gogo Khanyisa.

Gogo: What brings you here today?

Nikiwe: I need your help. I need someone eliminated. He's standing in my way.

Gogo: You know my price. I don't have a problem helping you.

My heart pounded.

Nikiwe: Gogo, we've come a long way. I'm afraid that I can't do what you're asking of me.

Gogo: There's the door.

Nikiwe: Gogo, I can't sacrifice my child again. He's my only hope. He'll be the future King. I can't give you him.

Gogo: You know the rules. You pay in blood, girl.

Nikiwe: Gogo, I've already given you two fruits from my womb. I can't give you this one.

Gogo: Then clearly you don't want my help.

I remembered my two pregnancies that were used as payment to Gogo. I had to sacrifice my unborn sons because she loved that they were of royal blood and held more value than females. Have you never questioned why I had no sons? She took them - she believed that they made her more powerful. Luckily Kamva was a girl, so she was allowed to live. The first pregnancy was shortly after my wedding to Mvelo - I sacrificed my child because I wanted my husband to see only me, and no other woman. His father was going to make him take a second wife - from a royal bloodline but I was not having it. The other one was after I had found out Mvelo cheated on me with Nomthandazo - the spell had dried off after many years - and I was livid and wanted to make him pay. Luckily Nomthandazo was already

dead - apparently she killed herself. Mvelo betrayed me, and I wanted him dead. Worst part, he had a grown girl who would constantly remind me of his affair. So I asked Gogo to kill him, and as a result Qhawe interfered, and I pushed him and he hit his head on a corner of a table. I couldn't let her take another one of my children. Not a third son and definitely not a heir to the throne.

Nikiwe: Forget it. I'll do it myself.

Gogo: You're not going to win this time. Not without my protection.

Nikiwe: I'm not going to let you kill another one of my babies. I'll find a way.

I rose to my feet.

Gogo: Your sins will catch up with you.

I clicked my tongue, and walked away.

Gogo: You'll never know peace in your life. From this day. Mark my words.

I went to my car, and drove away. Our conversation kept playing in my mind, until my cellphone rang.

Nikiwe: Hello, my child.

Kamva: Ma, have you seen a video of Buhle online?

Nikiwe: Zenani told me about it.

Kamva: I can't believe this. I feel sorry for her.

Nikiwe: What did she think would happen when she ran away from her own wedding? I'm not surprised. Like mother, like daughter. Seems like she has taken her dead mother's whoring ways.

Kamva: Ma, she's still your daughter. You can't say all those things about her.

Nikiwe: I only have one daughter. I'm not going to go claiming other people's children.

Kamva: I take her as my sister. I wanted to ask if you perhaps know where she is.

Nikiwe: Don't tell me you want to go and see her.

Kamva: She needs her family.

Nikiwe: Don't involve me in that. She's not my family.

Kamva: You once mentioned something about her being in Joburg -

Her words were dimmed to nothingness when suddenly a figure appeared in front of my car - fear awakened. More closely it seemed to be Mvelo, and at the same time lightning stroke. Mvelo disappeared, but it was too late as I had already swerved my car - my foot on the brakes.

Kamva: Ma?!

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20

Simnikiwe Mkhize

In my daze, I heard the machines rhythmically beep and I slowly opened my eyes. I drunk in my surroundings, and it seemed that I was in a hospital. Everything came back to me - falling like a ton of bricks. My gaze fixated on Mandlakhe. Perhaps he came to finish me off.

Nikiwe: What is going on here?

Moments later, the doctor budged in.

Nikiwe: Doctor, please tell me what's going on.

Mandlakhe: A villager found you in your car unconscious.

I nodded, and turned to the doctor.

Nikiwe: I hope that my baby is okay.

She smiled.

Doctor: There was no harm done to you and the baby. You're free to go home.

Nikiwe: How long have I been here?

Doctor: A few hours.

She turned to Mandlakhe.

Doctor: Please pass by my office before you leave.

Mandlakhe nodded, and the doctor departed.

Nikiwe: Water, please.

He gave me a sealed water bottle, and I opened it - quenching my thirst.

Nikiwe: Thank you.

There was an invisible serpent of tension threatening to suffocate both of us. The hatred we felt for each other was felt in the ward.

Nikiwe: Thank you.

Mandlakhe: Don't get it twisted. I was only doing this for my brother's child. Otherwise I'd have killed you myself.

Nikiwe: Okay, I get it. There's no need to get worked up.

Mandlakhe: You're out here pretending that you don't know the damage you've caused. You killed my brother. You killed Qhawe. Now you want to come for me?

Nikiwe: I don't know what you're talking about.

Mandlakhe: You'll finally pay for your sins. And this time, nothing will save you.

Nikiwe: You seem so sure of yourself. Please, don't start with me. Your brother died in his sleep. Qhawe fell from a hill onto a rock, and you're still alive. Please don't accuse me of things I know nothing about.

Mandlakhe skated to the entrance.

Mandlakhe: I'll go sign your discharge papers. Let's hope that by the time I come back, you wouldn't have found another way to kill me.

Nikiwe: I'll go in my car.

Mandlakhe: Your car is at the palace.

Nikiwe: So I have to travel with you?

Mandlakhe: You're welcome to stay behind.

I shook my head, and he exited. I thought of the accident - Mvelo, the lightning and the swerving of my car. I rubbed my stomach.

Nikiwe: Everything is going to be okay.

More than anything, I attempted to convince myself but something was not right. A lot of things actually.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

When I awakened from my slumber, I searched the whole house for Sensokuhle. The room he painted in was locked, so I knew that he was not in. It seemed that he didn't sleep home. I went back to my bedroom for my cellphone, and called Somikazi.

Kamva: Please tell me that Sensokuhle is with you.

You could hear the worry in my voice.

Somikazi: So early in the morning, Kamva? And why would Sensokuhle be with me?

Kamva: He didn't come home last night. I thought he might be with you. I'm worried about him.

Somikazi: That is unlike him. Moreover he can't walk, where would he be? Perhaps he's still at the office. You know how much he loves his work.

Kamva: I called the office, and they said he left around 6. I hope that he's not with some woman.

Somikazi laughed.

Somikazi: You're already in love with him? That didn't take much. It only took one date. You disappoint me, Kamva.

She laughed again.

Somikazi: But don't fall in yet. My brother still needs to do some more chasing. You can't show him that you're easy. Don't show him you love him yet.

Kamva: Well, hard luck, because some of us can't half love people. We go all the way, and if they take advantage of that, then that's on them.

My voice was laced with irritation.

Somikazi: Woo babes, I'm not the one who decided not to come home. Don't bite my head off.

Kamva: I'm sorry. We should talk about something else.

Somikazi: Okay, but don't be too hard on Senzokuhle. I'm sure he has a good reason.

Kamva: I've been meaning to ask. Is your father's cancer the hold Mzi has on you?

Somikazi: He's right. My father wouldn't take the divorce well. He's already weak, and we've been asked not to stress him.

Kamva: I hear you, but weak isn't the word I'd use to describe your father. I remember him coming down on my mother when Buhle didn't show up at the wedding. I had to sweep in, and take her place.

Somikazi: Do you regret it?

Kamva: No. I used to, but it's not all that bad. I mean I met you.

Somikazi: Flattery will take your places.

I heard footsteps.

Kamva: Seems like Sensokuhle is back. We'll talk later.

Somikazi: Okay. Twist his ear for me. I mean he's the reason why you woke me up so early.

I chuckled, and hung up. Sensokuhle came into our bedroom - we opted to shared one now - his jacket in his arm and his tie loosened. His whole appearance was disheveled. I sat upright on the bed.

Sensokuhle: Morning, Kamva.

Kamva: You didn't come home last night.

Sensokuhle: I'm aware.

Kamva: A explanation would do.

Sensokuhle: I had to take care of something.

Kamva: A call or text would've surfaced. Learn to

communicate, man Senzo. You had me worried.

Senzokuhle: I'm sorry.

He dropped his jacket, and came to peck me on my forehead.

Kamva: You need a serious shower. I'll make you breakfast in the meanwhile.

Senzokuhle: Thank you. Oh, and before I forget, we're going down to your hometown tonight.

Kamva: Is there a problem?

Senzokuhle: Well, your uncle is getting inaugurated tomorrow and they've extended an invitation to my father. I'm going in his place.

Kamva: You're starting to be careless, Senzo. Your cover will be blown. But I didn't know that my uncle was back in the country.

Senzokuhle: Don't worry about me, I'll be fine.

Nhlakanipho will also be there.

I nodded.

Senzokuhle: I thought I should accept the invitation because it's your family. You might be missing your home and your family. Tomorrow you have the chance to see them.

Kamva: Thank you. I'll start packing in the afternoon.

He hugged me.

Senzokuhle: Let me go shower, and bring out my wheelchair.

Kamva: I'll be in the kitchen.

I was happy that I'd finally see my mother again and my uncle.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Xoliswa: Take your time, my dear.

Thabile's hand stroked my back. Every emotion pulsed through my veins - my past had already been written in stone and I couldn't change a thing about it - I had to accept it. I wanted healing.

Me: I grew up without a father. My mother did everything for me and I thank her for that. For years it had only been the two of us, but she fell for someone new. I had to understand that my mother deserved happiness and I thought that my stepfather would bring that happiness to her, but he turned out to be our worst nightmares. He'd hit my mother, and what hurt the most was that there was nothing I could do.

Tears were streaming down my cheeks, the pain and hurt raw and feeling just as new.

Me: It came to a point where he finally killed her. She stayed, and every minute more she stayed, it brought her closer to her death. Until one day, she was no more. Her death hurt me. It still feels raw.

I paused.

Me: I found out the identity of my father through a letter. So many years yearning for a father's love, I was happy that I found my father. It didn't matter that my life was going to change. That I was suddenly royalty. I moved in with him, and his family. His wife didn't like me, and she didn't hide it. My new sister was neutral. It was clear that my stepmother would make sure that I felt her anger for the affair that pro-created me. But that didn't matter because I

finally had my father's love. Two months ago, he passed away. Soon it will be a full year since my mother died.

I paused again. I felt relieved of all those feelings that were buried within my heart.

Me: Two weeks didn't even pass after my father's death before my stepmother arranged a marriage. The night before the wedding, I eloped and came to start a new life.

Ms Madonsela was jotting down in a notepad.

Xoliswa: What do you think attracted you to Bandile?

Me: I don't know. He was not my past. He seemed different. Charming.

Xoliswa: Did you perhaps see love in him? Seek love from him? Did he strike you as someone stable?

Me: Where are you going with your questions?

Xoliswa: I'm trying to identify the problem, or rather the root cause of everything. I think that perhaps pertaining to your past, you so badly wanted a stable environment. From what you've told me, it's clear that you were not raised in a stable environment. It could even be a lack of your father's love for so many years. The trauma of your mother's abuse, you still haven't healed from it. It seems that you haven't even properly grieved your parents' death. You had to grow up quickly. And you come here, not wanting to be associated with anything from your past.

Everything she said made perfect sense.

Xoliswa: You wanted to be loved. Perhaps even forget. And there's nothing wrong with that. Everyone wants to be loved. Today I'm going to task both of you with something. I want you to go home and when you get there, take out your journal. If you don't have one, I want you to invest in one. I want

you to jot down your feelings, what you've discovered about yourself, what you are passionate - remember healing is also about finding what you love and pouring your heart into it. Write down what you're most grateful for. Think about your values. And finish for the day with what three life lessons you've learned throughout your existence.

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I walked out from my last class for the day. It was 4pm, and I was going back to my room. During the lecture, my attention was on how the session I had earlier had turned out. I felt better. Thabile and I were covering the costs of the therapy 50/50.

I walked in the room to find Thabile on her bed on her cellphone. She was talking to someone and the phone was on loudspeaker.

Thabi: Ma, please tell me that you're kidding.

Her mom: No, I'm not, my child.

Thabi: Ma, Mpilo can't be Bandile's lawyer. That man is a shark in the courtroom.

Her mom: I know, but he's not the only good lawyer in South Africa. There are lot that have been in the game longer than him and better than him.

Thabi: I know, but they won't come cheap.

Her mom: Money is not a problem.

Thabi: Okay, ma. We'll talk later. I love you.

Her mom: I love you too, my child.

I went to take out a bottle of water from my bar fridge.

Me: I see you're having lawyer talks.

I swallowed a mouthful and closed the bottle.

Thabi: It's not looking good. Bandile has one of the best lawyers in South Africa. That man is going to shred us to pieces in court. I'm telling you.

Me: He can't do much. We have all the evidence we need for this trial to go smoothly.

Thabi: Hello? Have you met Mpilo Ngubane? He'll eat us alive.

Me: I don't care. He can't do anything. Bandile and his friends are going to jail, and there's nothing anyone can do.

Thabi: He's one of the top paid lawyers in South Africa. He can do about anything.

Me: Well, let's hope that he's ready to lose his first case. The way you praise him, you might end up thinking that he's a god.

My cellphone vibrated in my pocket. I hauled it out, and it was a unknown number.

Me: Hello?

A familiar voice spoke into the line. "Missed me?"

Me: Bandile?

My heartbeat started picking up speed. Thabile looked at me.

Me: What do you want?

Bandile: I wanted to tell you that I'm not done with you. Not even in the slightest. That video was the beginning. I'm going to ruin your life so much that you're going to beg me to end it.

Me: You-

My heart couldn't take it anymore. I ended the call, as the strings in my heart were pulled out. I felt like my heart was compressed and I couldn't breathe anymore. I felt hands around me as my vision

blurred.

Thabi: Follow my lead, Buhle. I want you to take a deep breath.

I listened - my heart still drumming.

Thabi: 1. 2. 3. In. 1.2.3. Out.

We did that, until my heart rate was normalized.

Me: Thank you.

Thabi: I think it was a panic attack.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Mvelo kept appearing wherever I went. I even accepted. I was not as scared I was when he appeared in front of my car.

My eyes were pinned to the ceiling, unmoving.

Two foetus were on the ceiling, swirling. I was being haunted by my husband, and children. That much I could make out. A knock came. Another one came, and I slipped from my reverie. I went to open the door, and to my disappointment, it was Mandlakhe.

Nikiwe: What are you doing here?

Mandlakhe: I've came to warn you.

Nikiwe: What is it, Mandla? I want to sleep. You disturbed me.

Mandlakhe: Tomorrow, I want no funny business from you.

Nikiwe: I'm not in the mood for this.

I attempted to close the door, but his foot blocked me.

Mandlakhe: The truth always has a way to unveil itself.

Nikiwe: Good luck with your inauguration tomorrow. You're going to need it.

This time I managed to close the door. For now, I was stepping back and see how everything will play out. I went back to bed.

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21

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I awakened from my slumber and sun rays snuck into my bedroom through the drapes. I stretched my hands and clambered down from my bed, only for my eyes to be met with something shocking. My orbs widened at three bold words inked in red, perhaps even blood on the opposite wall in my room. The three words were 'CONFESS YOUR SINS.'

I halted my steps, my heart drumming. I had no idea what was going on here. I rummaged for my cellphone in my dishevelled bed, and dialled Zenani's number in panic. She answered on the 5th ring - my heart still beating fast.

Nikiwe: Zenani, I don't know anymore. Things are falling apart.

Zenani: Nikiwe, slow down and start over. What is going on?

Nikiwe: I'm being haunted. Gogo was right, my sins

are finally catching up to me. I woke up to blood streaked on my wall.

Zenani: Okay. I think you need to take the first flight out of that place.

Nikiwe: What? I can't do that.

Zenani: What do you mean, Nikiwe?

I started pacing around, sweat lacing my forehead.

Nikiwe: I mean that I can't let them win. I'm not a coward, Zenani and I'm not going to run.

Zenani: You want to tell me that you enjoy seeing dead people? Come here, and we'll think of something.

Nikiwe: I killed them, Zenani. They couldn't do anything to me when they were still alive. What are their ghosts going to do different? I'm not a coward, and Mandlakhe better be ready to finish what he started.

Zenani: You're starting to scare me now, Nikiwe. You have a baby to think of.

Nikiwe: I should go get ready. I still have a long day ahead.

I hung up, and immediately Zenani attempted to call me again but I didn't answer.

And I took my decision. Today I was going to finish Mandlakhe. After all my problems started with him.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

The driver drove into the yard, and parked the vehicle inside. It was good to be in the place that I was born and raised in. The driver got out, and I turned to Senzo.

Kamva: I don't know how to thank you. I was really missing my family, and friends.

Senzokuhle: We can think of ways you can thank me.

He winked, and I blushed.

Kamva: You'll find me inside.

I descended the car, and turned my attention to the driver.

Kamva: Please load my husband on his wheelchair, and bring him inside.

He nodded, and got to work. The yard was buzzing with movement and it seemed that the inauguration will be taking place in the garden. I walked inside the

palace, and servants bowed before me and got back to work. I went to my uncle who was barking orders. He'd never change.

Kamva: I see you're still the earliest bird after so many years.

Mandlakhe: Kamva, how are you doing, my child?

He embraced me.

Kamva: I'm hurt that you didn't tell me that you're back in town. I didn't even know about your inauguration. I had to hear about it from my husband.

Mandlakhe: A lot of things were happening, and I had to deal with them. And I didn't forget about you, I was merely caught up in a lot of drama.

Kamva: I'm glad you're back.

He smiled at me.

Mandlakhe: It seems that I missed a lot. You're married. It was not long ago when I was wiping your snot off. On the other hand, I heard about your new sister. I'd really like to meet her. I honestly don't understand what's going on here.

I laughed.

Kamva: That's a story for another day. You need to go get ready.

Senzokuhle was wheeled in by the driver, and they approached us.

Kamva: Well, uncle, this is my husband and Senzo, this is my uncle.

They nodded, and both outstretched their arms for a

handshake. I could see the shock on my uncle's face.

Kamva: Well, I'll leave you guys to get to know each other.

I said already walking away.

Mandlakhe: Kamva, attend to your husband. I've a lot of work.

Kamva: Well, take care of him. He's your guest after all.

I clicked my tongue playfully, and I heard them laugh seconds later. I had no doubt they were talking about me. I ascended the stairs, and glided to my mother's bedroom. I attempted to turn the doorknob but it didn't budge.

Kamva: Ma?

Nikiwe: Kamva, is that you, my child?

Kamva: Yes, it's me. Why is your door locked?

She opened the door, and pulled me in for a hug.

Nikiwe: I missed you.

Kamva: Are you okay, ma? You seem different.

Nikiwe: I'm okay.

I didn't push, but I could see that something was off about her. I wanted to go inside her room, but she stopped me.

Kamva: Are you hiding a dead body in there?

Nikiwe: Funny, but I want us to go catch up over a cup of tea.

She locked the door, and I raised my brow

questioningly.

Nikiwe: You know that I don't like people walking into my room uninvited.

Thabile Mampane

We walked to Amanda in the cafeteria. Eyes were on us. She was sitting with a friend.

Amanda: Can we help you?

Her gaze traveled from head to toe, and returned to her food.

Dimpho: You can start by telling us when you're

changing to your real form. I mean you're a snake in a human body.

Thabi: Dimpho, I'll handle this.

Amanda looked at me.

Amanda: Is there a problem, sis?

Thabi: What do you call that little stunt you pulled on Twitter, Amanda? You're supposed to be my friend.

Amanda: I was stating the truth. I don't think that you were raped.

Dimpho: Well, it's a good thing that opinions are not classified as truths.

Thabi: And what makes you say that? Everything I've said is backed up by evidence. You heard those dogs confessing to the crime a number of times on the tapes. And the DNA.

Amanda: Stop trying so hard, Thabile. I don't know why you're doing this, but you're ruining people's

lives.

Thabi: You're nothing but a coward, Amanda. Instead of hiding behind your phone, you should've come straight to me.

Dimpho: Thabile, she's not worth it. Blood is thicker than water.

Thabi: Oh, I had forgotten that you're Shawn's sister. Well, I see now where he gets his rottenness.

Amanda: Don't you dare. I'm not doing this to spite you, Thabile. My older brother was falsely accused of rape. I'm not letting the same happen to Shawn.

Thabi: I'm not going to do this with you. When you're ready to accept the truth, listen to those recordings. I hope your love for your brother doesn't deafen and blind you from the truth. Deep down, you know that you're fighting a losing battle.

Dimpho: God puts people in our lives for a reason and removes them from for a better reason. Amanda, perhaps you just need to find that reason.

I clicked my tongue, and walked away. Dimpho followed behind me.

Dimpho: Such family members are the reason we have criminals roaming around the country freely.

Thabi: I mean it's not difficult to understand. You're a woman before you're a sister or mother.

My phone rang somewhere in my side bag. I fished for it, and it was an unknown number.

Thabi: Hello?

A male voice spoke into my ear. "Am I speaking to Thabile Felicity Mampane?"

Thabi: Yes, you are.

"This is Mpilo Ngubane. I'd like to meet up with you if it's possible."

Thabi: Aren't you Bandile's lawyer? Why would you request a meeting with me?

Mpilo: You'll find out tomorrow. I'll send you the location and time. Do not not show up.

The line went dead.

Dimpho: Did I hear right? You were talking to Bandile's lawyer?

Thabi: He asked to meet.

Dimpho: Will you go?

Thabi: I don't know. It could be a trap.

Dimpho: As long as you meet in a public place, you'll be fine. I mean you have nothing to lose.

She shrugged.

Dimpho: I'll go with you.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I sported an old tracksuit that I could later discard. I opened the bucket of paint. Luckily it was the same tint as my room. I reached for a brush, and started painting over the writing. I was not a painter, but I had to cover this for the meanwhile and I'd get a professional when things settled down.

My heart jumped out of my chest when I heard Kamva's voice on the other side.

Kamva: Ma, why do you keep locking this door?

Nikiwe: Kamva, what do you want?

Kamva: The inauguration is about to start.

Nikiwe: Okay, I'll be down in a few.

It went silent again, and I brushed the last stroke over the words and decided to go take a quick shower.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I paced around the room. I had a lot of thinking to do, and within I knew that I felt something for Thabile beyond friendship. I didn't know what it was, but there was something and I couldn't keep running away from it. All thoughts of Bandile had evacuated from my mind though his call yesterday kept

bothering me. If his intention was to get me to sleep with one eye open in fear, then he was winning. But then I couldn't let him win.

Thabile walked in, interjecting my thoughts. She placed her bag on her bed, and I walked to her, and pulled her in for a kiss. I could feel her shock in her rigid body.

Thabi: What are you doing, Buhle?

She spoke against my lips.

Me: Don't question it.

Thabi: Are you sure?

I answered her with a kiss. Her lips were soft against mine, and my hands snaked around her neck. She cupped my breast, and a moan left my mouth.

This felt different. But good different, and we didn't take it any further. We intensely looked at each other, both of us breathless.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Media outlets were present. Everything seemed to be going well to my disappointment. Mandlakhe was handed the spear and he glided to stand in front of the throne draped with animal skin, and little gold studs. He cocked the spear in the air and everyone cheered.

My eyes popped open when I felt my airways being blocked. I was choked until I was rendered breathless and different voices in sync chanted around. "Confess your sins." It was clear that I was

the only one hearing the voices.

For a moment, I thought I was caught up in a nightmare.

The strangling stopped, and I did everything I could to pretend that I was okay. I rose from my seat, and Kamva grasped my hand. She whispered in my ear.

Kamva: Where are you going, ma?

Nikiwe: I'm going to the toilet.

She nodded, and I walked into the centre as people looked at me. Suddenly, I felt a force knock me off my feet. I stumbled to the ground. I attempted to crawl away but hundreds of eyes were on me.

The strangling happened again, and the chanting persisted. "Confess your sins." People looked at me

like I was crazy. Tears were streaming down my face. People murmured amongst themselves, and in my blurred vision, I could make out people coming towards me.

I felt defeated, and I was running out of oxygen.

Me: FINE! I'll confess.

The garden became engulfed in silence. I felt everyone's attention on me.

Kamva: Mama, what is going on here?

Nikiwe: Please take me inside. I'm not feeling well.

I coughed. This time I felt excruciating pain in my lower limbs. I could literally feel thousands of needles poke my skin. I groaned in pain. The tears didn't stop. I had to do what they wanted. I couldn't

take the pain anymore.

Nikiwe: I... killed my... husband. I killed Qhawe. I sacrificed my children... Please stop this pain. I've confessed. Please.

It didn't stop.

Nikiwe: I tried to kill Mandlakhe. I'm sorry. Please make the pain stop.

I cried.

Kamva: Ma, what are you saying to me? Ma, how could you?

Mandlakhe: Please call the police, uncle.

I heard his authoritative voice echo around all of us.

"She should be stoned to death. Better yet, let's burn her alive." A voice I didn't recognize resounded.

I was utterly defeated. It would be better if death claimed me.

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22

Kamvelihle Ngubane

My heart shattered. It felt like a piercing through my flesh. I couldn't believe my own mother would do this.

I looked at her, on the floor. The cameras were clicking. Something in me broke me.

I held my mother's weave, and pulled her to me.

Kamva: How could you do this? Baba trusted you, and you went and killed him. You killed my father! In cold blood, and you moved on like nothing happened.

She was wincing in pain, but I didn't care anymore. I was clouded by anger and pain.

Senzokuhle: Kamva, please. She's still your mother.

Kamva: A murderer for a mother! Senzokuhle, I respect you, but please stay out of this.

Mandlakhe: My child, I know that you're angry but the police will be here soon.

Kamva: I've been living with a killer for all these years.

Senzokuhle: Kamva, don't use the sharpness of your tongue on the mother who raised you. I know that you're angry, and your anger is justified.

Mandlakhe: Don't say things you'll regret. Give yourself time to process everything.

I pulled my mother with her weave, and her hands leaped to her head.

Kamva: I can't believe you've taken away my father. You let me cry on your shoulder about his death, knowing very well that you killed him. How do you live with yourself? How do you sleep at night knowing that you've deprived your unborn child of a father?

Nhlakanipho came, and gripped me in his arms.

Nhla: Kamva, you need to be strong.

My brother-in-law said, and took me to Senzokuhle. I kneeled before Senzo, shedding my tears, and he

stroked my head on his lap.

Senzokuhle: It will be okay..

Kamva: Nothing will be okay, Senzo. I can't believe my mother would do this.

I heard police sirens, and lifted my head from Senzokuhle's lap. Two police officers went to Simnikiwe, still huddled on the floor.

Mandlakhe: Please be careful with her. She's pregnant.

They didn't cuff her, but helped her to her feet. Her eyes turned to look at me. Hatred and anger surged through me.

Nikiwe: My child, more than anything, know that mama will always love you.

I clicked my tongue, and looked away, seeking refuge in Sensokuhle's lap.

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I watched Sensokuhle sleep, his chest heaving rhythmically. He looked so peaceful - the complete opposite of how I felt. I glided to open the drapes, and sunlight attacked my eyes. I maneuvered back to the bed, and Senzo was already opening his eyes. He yawned and looked at me.

Senzokuhle: You're awake?

I nodded.

Senzokuhle: How are you feeling?

Kamva: My mother killed my father. I'm still going through the emotions.

Senzokuhle: Do you want to hear her side of the

story?

I narrowed my eyes - I was getting worked up.

Kamva: Is that going to change that she killed my father and our family seer? Is it going to change that she tried to kill my uncle?

Senzokuhle: She's still your mother.

Kamva: Well, I don't have one anymore. She's dead to me.

Senzokuhle: Don't take decisions in anger.

Kamva: Senzo, stop advocating for that woman. You don't know how I'm feeling. Your mother isn't the one who went and killed your father. She didn't go out there and kill innocent people.

Senzokuhle: I hear you. I'm just trying to help you.

Kamva: Well, she has a evil heart. She treated Buhle badly, and I was too blind to see that evilness runs through her veins.

Senzokuhle scooted closer to me, and embraced me in his arms - warmth plaguing me.

Senzokuhle: Everything will be fine, and if your mother is truly guilty, she'll pay for her crimes.

Kamva: I want to go back home.

Senzokuhle: You're home, Kamva.

Kamva: You know what I mean. I want to go back to Joburg. I can't stay here anymore.

Senzokuhle: Are you sure?

Kamva: I'm done with my mother, and I'm not going to stay behind and see my mother walk away freely.

Senzokuhle: You think she's going to walk?

Kamva: I know my mother. Nothing can keep her down. She'll be out, and I want to be far away when that happens.

Thabile Mampane

We walked into the restaurant, and looked around. Dimpho cocked her finger to where a man sat alone.

Dimpho: I think that's him.

I nodded, and we snaked to the table.

Thabi: Mr Ngubane?

He pivoted, and it was him. He looked more handsome in real life. His pictures did him no justice. I smiled, and we took our seats. He looked at Dimpho; I cleared my throat and introduced them.

Thabi: This is Dimpho, my friend.

He nodded.

Mpilo: Would you like to order anything? A drink perhaps.

Thabi: No, we're fine. We're not planning to stay long.

I looked around the hotel. It was definitely five star; the interior design out of this world. Mpilo reeked of money, and you could see in his expensive sense of fashion.

Mpilo: Let me get straight to the point.

Thabi: Is this allowed? I mean you're Bandile's lawyer.

Dimpho: I hope that you're not here to buy her silence.

That did cross my mind, and I thanked Dimpho for voicing it out.

Mpilo: The truth is that I was never Bandile Dube's lawyer. His father approached me and asked me to take on their case, but I couldn't. Especially not with the nature of the case. I don't condone rape at all, and I'll never defend a rapist. I mean I have sisters, a mother and aunts and I wouldn't like them to go through rape.

I nodded.

Mpilo: So I called you here because I'd like to take on your case. That's if you don't have a lawyer yet.

I couldn't contain my happiness.

Dimpho: She'll happily appreciate your services.

Thabi: Bathong, Dimpho. But Mr Ngubane, thank you so much.

Mpilo: And I'll do it free.

My smile fell, and shock danced in my eyes.

Thabi: What's in it for you?

Mpilo: What do you mean? Your case has gained much traction and every year, I avail myself and take on a case pro bono.

Dimpho: Well, I guess we must be lucky that you chose us.

Thabi: Thank you so much, but I'll have to talk to my mother.

He nodded.

Mpilo: But don't take too long. Especially since the

trial will commence in two weeks.

He stood up and I ended up salivating. His physique threatened to burst out from his suit - you could see the muscles. And I was impressed with his length - he was tall.

Thabi: Do you think the decision for the trial to commence in two weeks was influenced?

Mpilo: Probably. The Dubes were pushing for an early date seeing as those boys were denied bail. The more the trial is prolonged, the more they will stay in jail.

I nodded, and he fixed his jacket.

Mpilo: You have my number. You'll let me know.

I nodded, and he downed his glass of whisky and

took out a few hundred notes from his pocket and placed it under the empty cup, and retreated.

Thabi: We should also get going. We have a class in-

I looked at my watch strapped on my wrist. It read 12:45.

Thabi: 45 minutes.

We rose to our feet, and departed from the restaurant.

Dimpho: Don't think I didn't see you.

Thabi: What are you talking about now?

Dimpho: The looks you kept giving that poor lawyer.

Thabi: Just because I play for my team doesn't mean that I can't see hotness in front of me. I'm not blind,

you know.

Dimpho: But that man is flames.

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My last class for the day ended and I hugged Dimpho as we were headed separate ways. I navigated res until I got to my room. I walked in to find Buhle busy on the phone.

Thabi: I thought you had a test to study for. You're writing in 3 days but you're busy on your phone.

Buhle: You won't believe what I've just come across.

Thabi: I hope it's not another sextape.

She rolled her eyes.

Buhle: That's not funny, and no, it's not a sextape. My stepmother was arrested yesterday and it's trending on social media.

Thabi: What was she arrested for?

Buhle: 2 murder charges and attempted murder. I see that she confessed here. I was right to assume that she killed my father, and turns out I was right.

Thabi: Wow!

Buhle: And I'm here thinking that I could've been one of her victims. I did well by leaving that place.

She continued scrolling on her cellphone.

Thabi: You did, but you need to remember why you came here. I know the past few weeks have been hectic, and our school work has been suffering but we need to pull up our socks if we want to pass the semester.

Buhle: You're right, and with the upcoming trial, it would be a miracle if I obtain even a 50%.

Thabi: Don't sell yourself short.

I went to sit down on my bed.

Thabi: I was hoping to talk to you.

She looked at me.

Buhle: What about?

Thabi: Whatever is going on between us.

Buhle: What about it?

Thabi: I was hoping that we could remain friends and not pursue anything further.

She cracked up.

Buhle: Okay, I'm being curved.

I also laughed.

Thabi: No, it's not like that. I think that perhaps our feelings for each other are not genuine. Maybe we're mistaking friendship for chemistry. I don't know.

Buhle: I understand completely. I also think that perhaps they were influenced by the fact that we only have each other in this fight against Bandile, and we've gotten close. But I'm straight. I swear I'm the most confused human right now.

Thabi: And I don't want it to seem like I'm forcing my sexuality on you.

Buhle: And we have school to focus on and the trial. We already have a lot on our plates as it is.

Thabi: I'm glad we're on the same page.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Zenani walked in and took a seat. The guard closed the door, and waited outside.

Zenani: If you had listened to me, you wouldn't be here, Nikiwe.

Nikiwe: This is not the time, Zenani.

Zenani: How are you planning on getting out of this one?

Nikiwe: I'll walk, don't worry.

Zenani: You seem to be sure of that. They have your confession on tape, Nikiwe. You can't run from that.

Nikiwe: That doesn't mean anything where I'm involved. I could've killed all those people in front of the world, with Mzansi watching and I'd still walk free.

Zenani: Word on the street is that Mandlakhe has been talking to Gogo Khanyisa. I think he knows of her involvement in everything.

Nikiwe: Do you think he's trying to convince her to talk?

Zenani: I wouldn't put it past him, but she would be incriminating herself.

Nikiwe: She must die.

Zenani's eyes popped open.

Zenani: We can't kill her. It's dangerous, Nikiwe.

Nikiwe: Do you think I've gotten this far by playing it safe, Zenani? I didn't take myself out of poverty, only to return there. I've worked far too hard, and I'd be damned if I let anyone take that away from me.

Zenani: I hear you, but Gogo Khanyisa on her own is dangerous. If we kill her, her demons will be unleashed unto us. We just need to think about this with a clear head.

Nikiwe: I hear you, but I'm not going to spend my life in jail. I'm not going to give birth in here.

Zenani: Do the police have any evidence against you?

Nikiwe: There is no physical evidence I can think of.

I've always been careful. Mvelo's autopsy revealed no irregularities. Qhawe hit his head, and died. The driver that was sent out to pick up Mandlakhe from the airport is dead, and the guy you paid to tamper with the brakes - they won't find him. The girl that consumed the poison that was meant for Mandlakhe is alive, but she knows nothing. Nobody can prove anything.

Zenani: And the confession?

Nikiwe: I'll deny it until kingdom comes. And to be on the safe side, we need to get rid of my car. Forensics might find something there, especially in the boot.

Zenani: I'll send a towing truck. I'm sure I'll not be welcomed at the palace and it would raise suspicions if I just went and took it.

I nodded.

Nikiwe: Set it alight. I don't want any problems.

Zenani: You'll be fine.

Nikiwe: And when I walk, I'm going with you to Joburg.

Zenani: If it needed be, money will come in handy. People love money too much.

And I had no doubt that I'd walk. This is a lesson to all willing to listen that you can't keep Simnikiwe down.

Noxolo Ndebele

I was coming from a supermarket when I bumped into Gogo.

Gogo: I've come to collect.

She jumped straight to the point.

Noxolo: What do you want, Gogo?

Gogo: Remember I said that I'll come to collect. I'm here now.

Noxolo: You refused my money, so what do you want?

Gogo: I want your womb.

I swear my jaw dropped to the floor. I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

Noxolo: You're crazy. This is not what I signed up for.

I attempted to walk away but she grabbed my wrist.

Gogo: There is no walking away, girlie.

Noxolo: You have a nerve to ask that of me. Your

muthi is not even producing the results I want. It's not working.

And I was not lying about that. Kwanele didn't seem to see Nomthandazo anymore, and I was growing impatient.

Gogo: You must have done something wrong. You need to keep your end of the deal. I need your womb for protection. I'm being attacked, and just like a womb is the safest place for a baby, it will protect me.

She grew more and more desperate. I could see that she was crazy.

Noxolo: I didn't sign up to be involved in witchcraft.

I pushed her hand away, and walked away. Good

grief!

Gogo: You better be ready to face my wrath. You'll give me what I want or I'll take it myself.

I ignored her, and continued walking.

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23

Noxolo Ndebele

I stirred on the bed when the lights in the room suddenly went on. It took time for my eyes to adjust to the light, and I finally opened them, only to see Kwanele walk into the bedroom.

Kwanele: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you up.

He discarded his suit, and sported boxers and a vest when he slid into the covers after switching off the lights.

Noxolo: What time is it?

Kwanele: Just after midnight.

Noxolo: You're quite late today.

Kwanele: You won't believe what happened.

Noxolo: You're going to tell me anyways.

Kwanele: The community killed Gogo Khanyisa. I was delayed because of that.

I couldn't believe my ears. Shock twirled in my orbs.

Noxolo: Wait. I don't think I heard you properly.

Kwanele: Gogo Khanyisa is dead.

Noxolo: What? What happened to her?

Kwanele: She was burnt alive. You know that rumours of her practicing witchcraft has been circulating around the village for quite some time now. People wanted her gone.

Noxolo: I can't believe this.

Kwanele: Well, you better believe it. It was a gruesome thing to see.

Noxolo: I still can't believe it. I mean a few hours ago, I saw her and now she's no more.

I didn't know how to feel. Relief flowed through me at the fact that she wouldn't bother me again with her demand for my womb but sadness that a life had been claimed.

Kwanele: You know how our community takes these things seriously.

Noxolo: But to burn her alive? I don't wish that even on my worst enemy.

Funny how I was sharing a bed with an enemy.
Kwanele murmured and I could hear that he was
drifting off to sleep. The voice in my head rang.
"You've been given a second chance. Don't waste it."

And I couldn't agree more. Sleep dogged me -
conscious thoughts evading me.

Mandlakhe Mkhize

I showed Detective Xulu to Simnikiwe's room. She
was leading the investigation. I didn't know what to
say other than I was happy that Nikiwe was arrested.

Mandlakhe: So detective, do you think that
Simnikiwe will walk?

Detective: At this point, I can't tell. I sat her down,

and questioned her but she's sticking to her story that she never killed anyone.

I ran my hand over my face in frustration. I unlocked her room with a spare key, and a can of paint and brushes were scattered across the floor. I scanned the room, and I could make out something like 'sins' on the wall - the rest seemed to be painted over.

Mandlakhe: Surely her confession is enough.

Detective: That she is denying. She says that she doesn't remember uttering those words. And to backup her theory, she's the one who referred me to her bedroom. She says on the day of your inauguration, she woke up to writing on her wall.

Mandlakhe: I hear you, but there must be something you can do. Surely you don't think that she's innocent.

Detective: We need evidence. What I think is not important.

Mandlakhe: I've given you everything. I've told you

exactly how Mvelo and Qhawe were killed by her. I've a gift for seeing.

Detective: That's the problem. No irregularities were discovered in Mvelo and Qhawe's deaths. And on top of that, you were not in South Africa at the time of their deaths. No magistrate is going to believe a word you say. Superstitions don't mean anything in court. I'm sorry.

Things didn't look good. My hatred for Simnikiwe intensified with each passing day. The detective snapped pictures of the inked wall.

Detective: And that old woman you said could back you up was burnt to death last night.

Mandlakhe: That has Simnikiwe written all over it.

Detective: I'm afraid not. The community is behind her death.

Mandlakhe: So you're saying that there is nothing I can do?

Detective: If we take your visions into account, we need to also believe Simnikiwe's theory that she was bewitched and that a dark force within her forced her to utter the confessions.

I had to admit it. Simnikiwe was good at this game, far better than I anticipated.

Detective: You mentioned something about Simnikiwe burying Qhawe weeks ago before his real burial. Could you perhaps pinpoint where exactly he was buried?

I racked my head for an answer, and came up with nothing. I shook my head.

Detective: Okay. If you're right, that means she'd have had to use her car to transport the dead body. Perhaps if you could show me where her car is, and I'll have forensics look into it. We could find DNA,

fingerprints and even blood. That way we can nail her.

I looked at her, confusion overcoming my features.

Mandlakhe: I thought the police came for her car yesterday. Her car was taken by a towing truck under your orders.

Detective: No, I never sent a towing truck. There was not an order issued by us for the collection of Simnikiwe's car.

Mandlakhe: That means Simnikiwe was two steps ahead of us. Damn it!

Detective: I need to get going. I'll keep you updated.

We bumped into Khulekani and Lungelo as I was escorting her outside.

Lungelo: I'll walk her out.

I nodded, and Lungelo walked out of the house with the detective. Khulekani turned to me.

Khulekani: If Simnikiwe walks, we kill her.

Mandlakhe: Uncle, we can't do that.

Khulekani: If the law fails us, we'll take the law into our own hands.

Mandlakhe: She's pregnant. We can't kill her.

Khulekani: I don't care. She's been doing as she likes for far too long. She walks, and I'll ensure that she's stoned to death.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

A smirk crept up on my face.

Nikiwe: For the first time, the people of this village have come through for me.

Zenani: They really have, and now we don't have to worry about that woman.

Nikiwe: And I like that we didn't even have to lift a finger. Everything played right into our laps.

Zenani: How is the progress?

Nikiwe: I've denied everything. We'll see how things unfold.

Zenani: The world was never ready for you.

Nikiwe: You know me. Nothing keeps me down.

Zenani: So I've set your car on fire. I watched the flames lick it up as it distorted to nothing.

Nikiwe: When I get out of here, I'm taking a vacation.

Zenani: And at this rate, you'll be out before you know it.

My smile disappeared.

Nikiwe: How is my daughter, Zenani?

Zenani: I've been trying to reach her, but she's not answering my calls.

Nikiwe: Please try to convince her to come and see me.

Zenani: Give her the space she wants. You need to understand that she's still in shock. She'll come around.

Nikiwe: I hope she does. She's the only child I have.

Zenani: You're carrying another one.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I packed our clothing into the suitcase laid out on my

bed.

Senzokuhle: Your aunt has been calling me non-stop.

Kamva: Block her, Senzokuhle.

Senzokuhle: Are you serious right now, Kamva?

Kamva: Do I look like I'm joking?

Senzokuhle: How long are you going to be angry? At least, talk to your aunt. She's not the one who killed your father.

Kamva: One thing you need to know is that my mother and my aunt. Same WhatsApp group. She knows everything my mother has been doing. Trust me.

Senzokuhle: I don't want you to regret your decision. Do you really want to leave without seeing your mother?

Kamva: Senzo, please tell me if this is going to cause a problem in our marriage. I'm done with my mother and her sister.

Senzokuhle: Will you ever be able to forgive her?

Kamva: If only she can bring back my father. And I know that's not going to happen, so no, I'm never going to forgive her.

Senzokuhle: There is always an opportunity to learn something from situations that invoke feelings of anger, confusion and happiness. But that can happen if you don't allow emotions to rule you.

I sighed deeply, and his phone rang. He answered it.

Senzokuhle: Hello... What... How did that happen...
Okay, I'll be there as soon as I can.

His face was suddenly streaked with panic.

Kamva: Is everything okay?

Senzokuhle: My father collapsed. He's been taken to the hospital. I need to drive there.

Kamva: I'm coming with you.

Senzokuhle: It's going to be a long drive.

Kamva: It doesn't matter. I'm part of your family now.

He nodded, and I hurled the remainder of our clothes into the suitcase without folding them as Senzokuhle fished around the room for his car keys - the atmosphere now dampened.

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24

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I pushed Senzokuhle's wheelchair into the hospital. We had been driving for two hours, and finally we had arrived in his hometown. We went to the reception area, and asked for the ward that Senzo's father was admitted at.

Kamva: Senzo, there is no need for this anymore.

Senzokuhle: What do you mean?

Kamva: Your father is lying on his deathbed yet you still want to lie to him.

Senzokuhle: Please don't start with me.

Kamva: I think it's time you told the truth.

Senzokuhle: That's not going to happen.

Kamva: I give up on you.

I shook my head, as I pivoted around a corner and straight ahead the family was gathered together. Others were plopped down on the bench, and others leaned against the wall. You could see the worry and fear on their faces.

My mother-in-law's face brightened up when she saw us, and got up to give both of us a hug. I greeted the rest of the family.

Senzokuhle: How is he doing?

Ntombizodwa: The doctors haven't said anything.

Somikazi: It's not looking good.

Senzokuhle: What happened exactly?

Ntombizodwa: Son, you know how weak your father was. The cancer had taken a toll on him. And you know how much he loves to pretend that he's okay.

We sat in silence, everyone deep within their thoughts. My mind kept diverting to my mother.

MaNdlovu: Girlie, we've all seen what your mother is capable of. I don't think you should be here. Who knows? You might be here to finish off my husband.

Ntombizodwa: Nobanda, now is not the time.

I wished the ground would open up and swallow me.

Happy: Kamva, I'm sorry to hear about your mother.

I looked at the youngest child. Still as beautiful as ever. I nodded.

MaSibiya: I'm sure it can't be easy to find out that your mother killed your father.

Kamva: It certainly isn't.

Somikazi: I think you should all stop talking about Kamva's mother. It's making her uncomfortable. Leave her to process the news on her own.

Nhla: I agree with Somikazi. We didn't come here to gossip about other people's lives.

Nhlakanipho had left on the same day on my uncle's inauguration. I was thankful Somikazi and Nhla got their family to stop discussing my mother.

Around 30 minutes later - I was even close to drifting off to sleep, a doctor had approached us.

Senzokuhle: Doctor, how is my father doing?

Doctor: He is awake, and he's asking to see all of you.

Somikazi: Will he be okay?

Doctor: Please come through, and try not to overwhelm him.

They nodded, and we were led inside the ward. My father in law seemed to be weak, with all the machines connected to him. We gathered around his bed, and a faint smile adorned his face.

Doctor: I'm only giving you a short while to see him.

The doctor departed. His three wives hugged him softly one by one, and the rest of us were spectators. Happy and Somikazi also went for a hug, careful not

to hurt him.

Ntombizodwa: I'm glad that you're okay.

Nkosiyabo: I'm sure you're wondering why I called you here.

He let out a string of coughs, and mother in law was already by his side.

Ntombizodwa: I think we should all give you space.

He shook his head.

Nkosiyabo: This is important.

Everyone looked at each other.

Nkosiyabo: My children, I'm proud of the men and women you've become. That as a father makes me very happy. I see that Mpilo and Nqaba are not here, but they know that I love them, and you're all my pride.

With each word, it sounded like a dying person's speech. And I could see everyone shared my sentiments.

Nkosiyabo: And to you, my wives, take care of yourselves and the children. I hope that you'll all live in harmony and peace when I'm no longer around.

Ntombizodwa: Baba, quit talking like that. You're not going to die.

MaSibiya: Myeni wam, MaCele is right. You're going to be just fine.

Tears were already falling.

Nkosiyabo: I wanted to tell you all that I want Nhlakanipho to succeed me after my death. He'll be the future king.

Shock plagued the entire room. I looked at Senzokuhle.

Somikazi: Baba, I thought that Senzo will rule after you.

Nkosiyabo: That's what I thought too. Until I found out that my son is a toddler in a grown man's body. I'll not leave my kingdom to be ruled by an immature man who runs from his responsibilities.

Ntombizodwa: Baba, what are you talking about?

Nkosiyabo: Ask your son to tell you the truth.

Everyone looked at Senzokuhle, and my heart hammered in my chest. It couldn't be that he found out the truth.

Nkosiyabo: For six months, we thought that Sensokuhle had lost his ability to walk in a car accident, only to find out that it was all a lie. My son lied to me. Lied to all of us.

Ntombizodwa: Senzo, is this true?

Senzokuhle looked down in shame.

Senzokuhle: I'm sorry.

Nkosiyabo: Now tell me, have I taken the wrong decision? I'll not subject my people to a man who shies away from his duty. Some times, we don't like the purpose we're born to fulfil, but that doesn't mean that one should deceive his family. I must say that I'm greatly disappointed in you Sensokuhle.

Senzokuhle: I'm sorry, baba.

I didn't know what to do with myself. Emotions were

running high around me.

Nkosiyabo: I'm not angry with you. I just wish you used a different approach. You didn't have to lie to us. I don't doubt that you'd have done a good job ruling, but your brother is more than capable and ready.

He started coughing, and the machines beeped vigorously. I didn't know how to explain it, we were all panicking.

Somikazi: Nurse! Doctor!

Moments later, nurses filed in with the doctor we had spoken to earlier.

Doctor: Please, I'm going to need you all to leave.

We were pushed outside.

Nhla: Doctor, please do everything in your power to save my father.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I looked at Thabile momentarily and she nodded, reassuring me and my gaze returned to the therapist.

Me: I get triggered by little things these days. Even a look in my direction can trigger my anxiety. I don't know what to do anymore. This has never happened before.

Xoliswa: A lot has happened from the time you got to the city.

Me: I got my first attack when Bandile called me a few days back, and I remembered everything that he had done to me and Thabile. The other one was yesterday, where I passed a group of laughing girls, and the first thing I thought was that they were laughing at me. That automatically got me in knots. Luckily Ofentse came to my rescue. This has to possibly be the worst time for me to deal with this. We're starting with exams soon, and I can't keep losing my mind over little things.

Xoliswa: Healing is a process, Buhlenkosi. I think that you may be suffering from clinical depression.

I shook my head.

Me: That can't be true.

Xoliswa: You're showing the symptoms. I know it's hard to take in, but we'll work through this.

Me: At times like this, I miss my mother.

Tears springed to my eyes, and I blinked them away.

Xoliswa: We'll give it some time, but if you find it hard to cope, I might recommend you antidepressants.

I nodded. I didn't think my life would turn out like this when I first arrived in Joburg.

Xoliswa: And maybe, we could have one on one sessions.

I shook my head.

Me: I'm comfortable with Thabile here. After all, we're here to work through our trauma.

Xoliswa: I understand. And you, Thabile? Do you have anything to share with us today?

Thabi: No.

Xoliswa: Are you sure?

Thabi: Yes.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

MaNdlovu: Senzokuhle, you better pray that Nkosiyabo makes it or else I'll never forgive you.

She was breathing fire.

Happy: Ma, it was bound to happen. Have you forgotten that the doctors said that he had a few months to live?

MaNdlovu: He triggered him. He was doing so well.

Happy rolled her eyes.

Happy: Believe what you want to believe if that makes you sleep better at night. Cancer is not a joke.

Senzokuhle approached his mother. He was no longer in the wheelchair.

Senzokuhle: Ma, may I please talk to you?

Ntombizodwa: Senzo please, we can't do this here.

Senzokuhle: I know that you're angry-

Ntombizodwa: You don't know how I'm feeling. Like I said, we're not going to talk about this here.

Somikazi cleared her throat. The tension was already high around us. Everyone was worried.

Somikazi: Since it's the time for exposing secrets, I

thought I should let you know that me and Mzi are getting a divorce.

My head turned to Somikazi when I heard a smack. It seemed that MaNdlovu slapped her. I was surprised. Somikazi's hand was on her cheek.

MaNdlovu: Your father is dying in there, and you think it is the time to make jokes.

Somikazi: Mama, are you going to let her hit me?

Ntombizodwa: Somikazi, umdala. Don't involve me in your mess. And Nobanda is right.

Kamva: Kodwa nawe Somikazi, couldn't you wait before you announced the news? Now is not a good time.

I for one didn't understand why she thought that this was an appropriate time to announce her divorce.

Somikazi: Whether I announced it now or whenever, it was not going to change anything.

Happy: I swear that we deserve our own reality show. The drama in this family never ceases to end.

MaSibiya: What did Mzi do?

Somikazi: I'm done with Mzi and his inflated ego. If only his belly was as inflated as his ego, perhaps he'd have been loyal to me as his woman. I've been feeding that man's ego for far too long and he has gotten too big for his shoes.

MaNdlovu clapped her hands.

Mandlovu: I can't believe this.

The doctor came out from the ward, and they attacked him with questions.

Senzokuhle: Doctor, how is my father doing?

Doctor: I'm sorry. His time has come.

Those two words broke everything. The melancholy and tears returned. I even shed tears myself.

Nhla: I'll inform Mpilo and Nqaba about father's passing.

The hysterical sobs were the only sounds heard thereafter.

Noxolo Ndebele

I popped by the cemetery after I had packed everything of mine from Kwanele's house. I sat close to Nomthandazo's gravestone. I smiled, reminiscing

all the memories I had with my best friend. The void of her death was still there within my heart, but I had learned to live with it, so did Buhle.

Noxolo: I don't even know where to begin,
Nomthandazo.

I played with the sand surrounding the tombstone.

Noxolo: God knows how much I tried to bring Kwanele to his knees. I hate him for taking you away from us. I tried everything but it didn't work, and here I am, to bid you goodbye. Kwanele might have killed you, but he'll never kill the memory we have of you in our hearts. I slept with him. I did everything I could think of to get you justice, and it almost landed me in trouble. Sometimes things don't go as planned, and I guess that is part of life. God must have a plan for Kwanele, and I'm going to step aside and let him take over. Rest easy, my friend. Until we meet again.

I blinked away my tears, and looked at the horizon, and a flock of birds flew by and a smile adorned my face.

Noxolo: Till we meet again.

Detective Xulu

If any of you are planning to pursue a career in my field, back out now. I swear my job was exhausting and dangerous. And it didn't help that sometimes cases aren't solved if thought the truth is staring us right in the face. Kwanele slipped from my grasp with Nomthandazo's 'suicide', I couldn't allow Simnikiwe to walk. My intuition said that I had the right woman. The captain walked in, disrupting my thoughts. I stood up, and addressed him.

Detective: Captain.

Captain: Xulu, I've just gotten off the phone with the Commissioner. He wants the charges against Simnikiwe to be dropped, and I agree with him. This case is going nowhere.

Detective: Captain, we can't do that. Something tells me that this woman is guilty.

Captain: We don't have anything against her. We're wasting our time and the state's resources.

Detective: I hear you, but give me more time to investigate this. We have her confession. We can work with that.

Captain: It's clear that something forced her to confess. I know we don't work with superstitions, but you can clearly see that Simnikiwe was in pain. I think it was witchcraft.

I sighed.

Detective: I hear you. I'll get right on it. But the press wants answers.

Captain: We don't work for the media.

I nodded, and he retreated from my office. I called Mandlakhe.

Detective: Detective Xulu here.

Mandlakhe: Yes, detective. What can I do for you?

Detective: I wanted to tell you that the charges have been dropped against Simnikiwe Mkhize.

It was quiet for a while.

Mandlakhe: I think we can both agree that the justice system has failed my brother, and all the other people Simnikiwe might have killed. What more did you need, because she had already confessed to the crimes?

I didn't know what to say. I heard a voice in the background. "I'm not going to let that woman walk. Not on my watch."

The call was cut. My heart was not at ease. I wondered what those words meant.

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25

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Zenani came to pick me up from the police station. I glanced back at the building as I mounted Zenani's car. I can't say that I'd miss being here.

Nikiwe: I deserve a break from all of this. A week in

Zanzibar would be great.

Zenani hit the accelerator.

Zenani: It must have been very hard for you in there.

Nikiwe: I need a full body massage. It didn't help sleeping on those hard mattresses. My whole body aches.

Zenani chortled, and I rolled my eyes.

Zenani: Serves you right. If you had listened to me when I said leave this place, we wouldn't be here.

Nikiwe: I thought you knew me better than that. I'm not a coward. I wasn't going to run.

Zenani: And look where that got you. You just need to admit that I was right.

Nikiwe: Matter of fact is that I'm free. And we need

to celebrate.

Zenani: You're going to have to cut down on your wine consumption. You keep forgetting that you're pregnant.

Nikiwe: How I wish this baby would just pop out. I had some weird ass cravings inside, and knowing jail and the nonsense they feed us. I knew that I wasn't going to survive.

Zenani: We still have 5 months to go, and he'll finally be here. I'm still thinking of a name for him.

Our conversation was interrupted when there seemed to be a riot outside in full swing.

Nikiwe: What do you think is happening?

Glancing outside the windows, villagers started to surround our car - only the frontal vacant of protesters. They were carrying axes, rods and sticks, and I could make out the angry expressions on their

faces. We were taken by surprise when rocks were hurled at the car, and they collided with the metal. Fear awakened within me, and Zenani had mirrored my expression.

Nikiwe: You need to continue driving. We can't stop or they will kill us.

The rocks didn't stop being thrown at us, and the rear window shattered. We kept attempting to dodge the hits, and we were almost successful until Zenani's window was broken and a rock hit her head. She winced in pain, and when I looked at her, blood was trailing down her face. I had to swallow my fear and do something. Zenani let go of the steering wheel, as pain overwhelmed her senses. I quickly used my hands to gain control of the wheel while strapped on the passenger seat. The attacks didn't stop.

Nikiwe: Zenani, I need you to work with me. Try to

keep your foot on the accelerator, and don't let go.

I could see the strength leaving her, but she tried her level best to meet me halfway. It was hard to control the wheel, but we managed to escape the villagers - luckily it was a straight route. I looked back and around when we were metres and metres away to be certain that there were no more villagers near. I stopped the car and clambered down.

I couldn't let fear and panic win. I rounded the car, and went to the driver's side. I carefully tossed out the broken glasses from the driver's seat. Thereafter I tore my blouse, and wrapped the fabric around Zenani's wound on her head. I helped her occupy the backseat and luckily she was still conscious.

Nikiwe: Stay with me, Zenani.

I mounted the driver's seat, and ignited the engine. I

drove away, and used Zenani's cellphone for navigation. I searched for the nearest hospitals or clinics, and eased down on the route. I couldn't go to the hospital in my village. I didn't know what awaited me there, and I couldn't take any chances.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Thabile tossed a pillow at me after she ended her call. I was scrolling through the internet when I came across an article that talked about Simnikiwe's freedom. My anger appeared again.

Thabi: What's gotten you so engrossed that you don't hear me talking to you?

Me: The charges against my stepmother have been dropped.

Thabi: What? I thought she had confessed. Didn't they have a strong case against her?

Me: Apparently not. I can't believe this. So she's going to walk after ruining people's lives?

Thabi: This just makes me think about the upcoming trial. What if they walk?

Me: I don't think they're going to walk. The evidence we have against them is more than enough to bury them.

Thabi: Yet your stepmom walked.

Me: Simnikiwe is a sly woman. I'm more angry than surprised that she's out.

Thabi: Things are not going well right now. I was supposed to meet with the lawyer today, but he can't make it for the next week.

Me: Why?

Thabi: His father passed away, so he needs to be home to help with the funeral arrangements.

Me: Yoo, that's sad.

Thabi: But he said that he'll make a plan to communicate with me via Skype and prepare me for the trial.

I nodded, still engrossed in following up on the injustice my father was suffering. How could Simnikiwe walk?

Thabi: How did you write?

Me: I wrote. I didn't know half of the stuff asked in the paper.

Thabi: Hence why I said that you should pull up your socks. University is not child's play.

Me: I know. I just wish I wasn't dealing with so many things at once.

Thabi: I feel you.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

We were back at the palace. The whole atmosphere was solemn, and I sympathized with the family. I knew what it was like to lose a father - the pain wasn't pleasant at all. It was truly sad that I lost my own at the hands of my mother. I shook my head, as I embraced Somikazi.

Somikazi: I feel bad for bringing up my divorce at such a time, Kamva.

Kamva: You didn't know that your father would leave us. There is nothing to feel guilty about.

Senzokuhle: Somikazi, Kamva is right.

We looked to see Senzokuhle walking in.

Senzokuhle: If there is anyone who should feel guilty, it's me.

The bed dipped under Senzo's weight as he joined us.

Kamva: Senzo, not you too. This was bound to happen sooner or later.

Senzokuhle: I know, but I can't help but feel like I pushed him to an early death.

Somikazi: I still can't wrap my finger around the fact that you can still walk. You deserve an Oscar, Senzokuhle. I must give it to you. You had us all fooled.

Kamva: What's done is done. We can't change the past.

Senzokuhle: My father was truly a good man. He loved his family and cared for us. He always had the people's best interests at heart. He'll be missed by all... I will miss him so much.

We heard footsteps, and mother-in-law glided in.

Ntombizodwa: And he'll miss you too. He'll be a great ancestor, looking over us.

Senzokuhle rose to his feet, a regretful look crossing his face.

Senzokuhle: Ma, I'm sorry for lying to you and everyone else. I know that you raised me better than that.

Ntombizodwa: That's in the past, my child. Your father is no longer with us today, and we need to be there for each other in order to work through the pain and to keep the family together.

Senzo nodded, and they shared a long hug. It was good to see the mother and son bond that they shared.

Kamva: I'll go, and make tea for all of you.

Ntombizodwa: We would like that. Thank you, Kamva.

I nodded and descended from the bed. I wanted to give them a moment together. I walked out from the room, and I passed by Nhlakanipho's bedroom - the door was ajar. He was with his mother, and I heard snippets of their conversations as I passed by.

MaNdlovu: Have the courage to do things even though they'll be those that want you to fail. Nhlakanipho, we both know that not everyone is happy about you becoming the next king but I want you to step up. That's what your father would want you to do. I don't want you to spend your life silencing yourself and your capabilities. We're going to bury your father soon and after the mourning period, I want you to be stronger than ever before. Forget about avoiding to step over people's toes, and claim your seat. You'll not live in fear of anyone

or anything. You'll rule us. You have big shoes to fill. I know your father's passing is hard to take in, but we'll work through it.

I didn't eavesdrop anymore. I descended the stairs, and slithered to the kitchen to make the tea I promised my mother-in-law. There were people dropping by to offer their condolences. It was truly a sad time for the family.

Mandlakhe Mkhize

Khulekani: You'd be happy to know that our land is slowly getting restored.

Mandlakhe: That's good news.

Khulekani: Soon our plantations will be grow, and produce food for the village.

Mandlakhe: I'm glad that things are looking up.

He nodded, and my cellphone vibrated in my pocket and I reached for it.

Mandlakhe: Hello.

Detective: Please tell me that you have nothing to do with the attack on Simnikiwe.

Mandlakhe: I don't know what you're talking about.

Detective: Simnikiwe and her sister were attacked by angry villagers a hour ago near the police station.

Mandlakhe: I had no hand in that.

Detective: Yesterday I heard -

Mandlakhe: I don't care what you heard, because that has nothing to do with you.

Detective: Do you have an idea where she might be?

Mandlakhe: Simnikiwe is not any of my business.

Detective: We have a few villagers in our custody.

We can't allow people to engage in mob attacks anymore. We've already lost Gogo Khanyisa. This can't continue.

Mandlakhe: If the police did their jobs, there wouldn't be a need for mob violence.

I hung up, my frustration taking over.

Mandlakhe: Uncle, I told you that it wasn't a good idea to instigate the villagers against Simnikiwe. Apparently she was with her sister, and they almost killed them.

Khulekani: That's bad news. You're telling me that they survived. Where are they?

Mandlakhe: I was asked the same question. The police have a few people in their custody.

Khulekani: The police can't do anything. That would mean arresting half the population of this village.

I sighed.

Mandlakhe: They're going to try and make an example of the few they have.

My eyes darted to the entrance of the throne room.

Mandlakhe: You may come in, Phumla.

She abandoned her bag at the entrance, and came forward. She greeted us with a slight bow.

Phumla: I've nursed Sabina back to good health. You'll be happy to know that she can return to her duties.

Khulekani: We thank you for your assistance, Phumla.

Mandlakhe: It's good to hear that Sabina is well. We

don't want to send out the message that we can't take care of the people that work for us to the community. And once again, Phumla, I thank you for your help. I must say though that I'm going to miss your good cooking. You really know your way around the kitchen.

Phumla: You should just be glad that there won't be anyone who will try to poison your food now that Simnikiwe is gone. I still can't believe she killed my husband. Me and my husband have devoted our lives to serve this kingdom, and it hurts me that Qhawe died, and justice will not be served.

Khulekani: But her sins will catch up to her. She cannot run forever.

Phumla nodded.

Phumla: I should take a leave.

Mandlakhe: And Phumla, remember that I'm only a phone call away. If there's anything you and your

children need, you're welcome to come to me.

Phumla: Thank you, my King.

She bowed again, and left the room at once.

Khulekani: I should also return to my wife soon. I've been gone for too long. I'll accompany you to Nkosiyabo's funeral, but after that I should make plans to go back home.

Mandlakhe: You're not seriously thinking of leaving me here alone. I think it's better you move here. Your advice is always needed.

Khulekani: I'll speak to my wife.

Noxolo Ndebele

I knocked on the door and glanced back at the cab driver at the gate. My niece came to open the door. A smile and happiness immediately erupted on her face. I smiled at her. I was back in Alex.

Anna: Aunt, you're back!

She squealed, and I pulled her in for a hug.

Noxolo: Where is your mother?

Anna: She's inside.

I nodded.

Noxolo: Bring in my bags, and we'll catch up.

Anna: I'm packed with gossip. I can't wait to tell you what everyone has been up to in Alex.

I laughed. I was genuinely happy to see her. The cab driver was offloading my bags. I walked inside, and immediately the smell of nicotine hit my nostrils. I saw my sister relaxed on the sofa, puffing her cigarette.

Noxolo: You'll never change.

I shook my head.

Khethiwe: Well, finally somebody remembers that she has a family. You've been gone for years.

Noxolo: I always visited you, Khethiwe. My last visit was last year.

She rolled her eyes.

Noxolo: At least the house is still clean. I know you and your laziness.

Anna came in with my bags, the cab driver helping her. I paid him and he left.

Khethiwe: Those bags don't look like there are for someone visiting for a few days.

Noxolo: That's because I'm back for good.

Anna: Auntie, that's great news.

Khethiwe: Don't count on it, A. She might run back to that village she chose over us. Let's not forget her beloved friend.

I rolled my eyes.

Noxolo: I informed you months back that Nomthandazo passed away.

Khethiwe: Oh, so it took her death to remember that you have a family?

My phone rang, and I was thankful for the distraction. I didn't want to get in an argument with my sister.

Noxolo: I have to take this.

I trod outside, and sighed when I saw the caller.

Noxolo: Kwanele, what do you want?

Kwanele: You left without telling me.

Noxolo: Do yourself a favour, and delete my numbers.

Kwanele: Noxolo, what is going on?

Noxolo: You killed my friend! That's what's going on.

I hung up, and deleted his numbers. I walked back inside. People could really rile you up the wrong way.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Pain dogged my abdomen, and I couldn't take it anymore. Zenani seemed to be unconscious in the backseat. Only a few more metres, I chanted in my head as the pain didn't want to stop. I finally parked at the hospital - the pain intensifying every second. I groaned in pain.

I clambered down from the car, and I had felt the moisture pooling in my legs while I was driving. Turned out it was blood, and the fear came back tenfold. I staggered to the reception, holding my abdomen and blood trailing down my legs.

A nurse noticed me, and attended to me. A porter was called.

Nikiwe: So save my sister. She's... badly hurt. She's in a white BMW X6... Please...hurry.

Orders were barked around, while the pain persisted and I cried out. I was wheeled to the theatre.

Bandile Dube

Shawn banged the wall.

Shawn: We've been in here for too fucking long.

We were encaged together along with Xolani and I was thankful for that. My father pulled some strings for us to have a comfortable time in here, but we'd soon be out. I was willing to bet on it.

Bandile: Everyone responsible will pay. Thabile and Buhle won't know what hit them.

Xolani: And then there's Ofentse. You still think he's on our side?

Shawn: It's bad enough that we're inside, and he's out there. Only time will tell.

Bandile: I want Buhle to be driven crazy. I want her to go mad. To lose her sanity. She messed with the wrong guy.

Shawn: Everything was fine until she came along and helped Thabile.

Bandile: We'll have the last laugh. I will drive her so crazy that she'll beg for my mercy.

Xolani: I'm glad you brought that up, because I had an interesting conversation with my mother not so long ago.

I glanced at Xolani, a smirk plastered on his face. My new mission was to make Buhle and Thabile's lives

a living hell, and I'd stop at nothing. The hatred and anger I had for them pulsed through my whole being.

Bandile: I'm listening.

A week later

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26

Somikazi Nkosi

I shed tears as my father's coffin was lowered into the ground. My heart constricted at his death, but the funeral finally put everything into reality. My father was really gone, and I had to accept it, but that didn't stop a hole from forming in my heart. The burial had been intimate with family and close

friends and a memorial would be held where media outlets, associates and the villagers as a whole would be able to attend.

Lwando, my best friend squeezed my hand reassuringly as my tears flowed, and I looked at the man that occupied the seat next to me with a faint smile. After the speeches delivered by my mother, Sensokuhle and Nhlakanipho - the rest would be voiced at the memorial, we departed from the royal cemetery. As we scattered to our individual cars, Mzi pulled me from Lwando. I sighed.

Mzi: We need to talk. In private.

He looked at Lwando.

Lwando: Will you be okay?

Somi: I'll find you in the car.

He nodded tentatively, and retreated, leaving me with my husband.

Mzi: Your brother served me divorce papers yesterday. Would you care to explain what's going on?

Somi: Mpilo is fast. I didn't expect him to draft the papers so quick.

Mzi: I will not sign those papers.

Somi: Don't make this any harder for yourself.

Mzi: Is he the guy you're divorcing me for?

My brows furrowed in confusion, until who he was referring to clicked into my head.

Somi: Lwando is like a brother to me, Mzi. You know this.

Mzi: Is he the one putting you up to this?

Somi: This was long overdue. I thought you'd be happy. I'm giving you the space and freedom you need.

Mzi: I never said that I want to lose my wife.

Somi: Well, that's a pity because you can't have your bread buttered on both sides.

Mzi: I know that I haven't been the best husband, but give me a chance to fix things.

Somi: It's a little too late, Mzi. I'm so over your bullshit. I don't know what made you think that I'd stay any longer in this sham of a marriage. You proved to be nothing but a selfish man.

Mzi: Somikazi.

I raised my hand mid-air.

Somi: No, you could have picked any other day for us to have this conversation, but you decided to do this on my father's funeral. If that doesn't show how selfish you are, then I don't know what will.

I left him standing there, and snaked to Lwando's car. I attempted to calm my temper - Mzi really knew which buttons to push. I climbed into the passenger seat.

Somi: Can you believe that Mzi thinks that I'm cheating on him with you?

Lwando: Doesn't he know that you're nothing like him?

Somi: He's a nuisance. I don't know how I stayed married to him for 4 years.

Tears started to fall when I went through the emotions again.

Somi: It hurts that a marriage that I invested my all in has crumbled to the ground.

Lwando: You did good by not begging him anymore.

Somi: It doesn't feel that way.

I wiped my tears.

Lwando: You can't let him see your tears no more, because that is only going to feed his ego. I'm a man myself, and I know what I'm talking about. What you did is you stopped texting him, you stopped begging, you stopped making him feel important. You showed him that you don't need him anymore. You crushed his ego, and the only reason he's back with his tail between his legs is because he wants to redeem his ego. Ego is everything to men.

I nodded, and he started the car and soon we were on the road back to the palace for the memorial service.

Lwando: But give yourself time. Process your father's death properly, and you'll deal with Mzi later.

We passed Mpilo as we strolled to the hall.

Somi: Where are you going?

Mpilo: I'm going back to Joburg. I have a lot of cases pending. I've been here the whole week, and my work keeps piling up.

Somi: I hear you. Have a safe trip, and take care.

Mpilo: You'll let me know the latest on Mzi.

I nodded, and we hugged before he departed.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I watched Sifiso waltz into the lounge with a platter and pecked Zenani on the forehead whilst I

munched on the bar of chocolate. Zenani's head had been bandaged, and her wound was going to heal as the doctor put it. Whereas my wound was in my heart, and I wasn't sure I'd ever heal when the doctors pronounced that they couldn't save my baby and I suffered a miscarriage. My heart had been heavy ever since Sifiso had us transferred to Joburg, and for 5 days, we had been occupying his home. Zenani's car was at repairs.

Nikiwe: I still can't believe that you two are dating. Who would have thought?

Sifiso laughed as he served Zenani some fruits, and she swallowed.

Zenani: And now you know.

I rolled my eyes.

Zenani: Baby, thank you for taking us in when we needed you. I think Simnikiwe would agree with me when I say that it's time for us to return to my place.

Nikiwe: Finally. I was starting to think that you're married.

Zenani: You'd have been the first to know.

She shook her head.

Zenani: Baby, please give me a minute with my sister.

Sifiso nodded, and retreated from the lounge.
Zenani's gaze bored into me.

Zenani: Are you sure you don't need counseling? I mean with everything that has happened, I think you need someone to talk to.

Nikiwe: I agree that my miscarriage was the final nail to the coffin, and it hurts so much but I'll be fine. It

doesn't help that Kamva still doesn't want to talk to me. I thought with this baby, I had a second chance at life.

Zenani: I hear you, and I know you don't want to hear this but maybe it's for the best. You don't have anything tying you to the Mkhizes anymore.

Nikiwe: Maybe.

Zenani: I'll find you something to do, and we'll think of a way forward.

I nodded, and leaned back on the couch. My heart was still sore.

Narrated

Xolani was led into the visiting room, and a guard showed him to his mother. At his mother's presence,

a smile overtook the young lad's face. His hands were uncuffed, as he was plopped down on the bench. His mother widely grinned at his son who had been confined to the prison she frequently came to visit for one reason - his only son.

Xoliswa: My child, I hope they treating you well.

Xolani: I can't complain, ma.

Xoliswa: You'll be out soon. Don't worry.

Xolani leaned in closer - the more serious parts coming to the surface.

Xolani: Have you done what I asked you to do?

His mother nodded.

Xoliswa: I don't like what I'm doing, but you know

that I'd move mountains for you.

Xolani: I know, ma and for that, I'll always be thankful.

Xoliswa: I could lose my job and face criminal charges if this comes out.

Xolani: You can relax, ma. Buhle and Thabile don't know that you're my mother.

Xoliswa: And when the trial starts? There is no way I'm not going to be there to support you.

Xolani: We'll cross that bridge when we get there.

Xoliswa: Okay, Bandile would be happy to know that I've changed the antidepressants for pills that will drive Buhle crazy. For as long as she seeks counseling from me, I'll ensure that she takes the pills. Very soon, she'll be so crazy that she'll even roam the streets naked.

The two laughed.

Xolani: Di momzo, I knew you'd come through for us.

Xoliswa: I was surprised when those two girls were listed as my clients, I even thought of dropping them.

Xolani: I'm glad you didn't, because now we have them where we want them. Do you have anything we can use against them?

Xoliswa: I still have to do my job, Xolani. Confidentiality is key in my job.

Xolani: Not when your son is jail because of them.

She sighed.

Xoliswa: I'll keep fishing.

They continued talking until visiting hours were declared over.

Noxolo Ndebele

Noxolo: I'll come to see you soon, Buhle.

I smiled. As soon as she heard that we were in the same province, she seek my presence.

Buhle: I hope so, because I've been missing you so much.

Noxolo: And I miss you too. We talk, okay?

I went to end the call when I saw an old friend of mine.

Buhle: Okay.

I hung up, and greeted the ghetto man before me. He hadn't changed one bit, but more scars sported his

face.

Noxolo: Kaizer.

Kaizer: Nox.

We fist bumped, and he sat down and he downed my beer as our presence graced a local tavern.

Noxolo: Kaizer. Kaizer, it's been a long time. I hope you've been staying out of trouble.

He raised his brow.

Kaizer: Trouble is my middle man.

I chuckled, and when my laughter ceased, a serious look crossed my face.

Noxolo: Man, look. I need a favour.

Kaizer: I'm all ears.

Noxolo: I'm not sure if you heard the story about a girl being raped by three guys. It's been making the rounds, and one is Dube's son.

Kaizer: It's all people talk about. Apparently the girl is Ace's daughter.

My eyes popped.

Noxolo: The Ace I know? Ace Mampane?

Kaizer: The one and only.

Noxolo: So why are those boys still alive? The Ace I know would've killed them a long time ago. Or has Ace grown soft?

Kaizer: I don't know but remember that Ace and Dube play in the same circles. If Ace were to kill Dube's son, Dube would retaliate and it would be a full blown war. Two power players at war would be a

disaster and lots of bloodshed.

I nodded.

Kaizer: What is this favour you want from me?

Noxolo: I want you to find guys on the inside to teach those three boys a lesson. I want them to be taken from the back all day. I want them to be raped just like they raped that girl.

Kaizer: What is the girl to you?

Noxolo: Let's just say that Dube's boy messed with someone I consider a daughter.

Kaizer: That can be arranged.

I took a long swish of the beer.

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Somikazi Nkosi

I woke up to a message from Lwando. I stirred, sitting upright and read the message with a smile. 'Make self love your CV and work on yourself.' I typed in a quick reply. 'Will do.' I slithered to my adjoined bathroom, and brushed my teeth, and washed my face.

I walked back to my bedroom to find Kamva, and a tray of food positioned on the pedestal.

Somi: We have servants for a reason.

I took a bite of the sandwich I was served.

Kamva: I don't mind helping around.

I nodded, and sipped the juice.

Somi: Thank you.

Kamva: So tell me, how are you feeling this morning?

Somi: Taking it one day at a time.

The bed sagged due to our weight, as we sat on it.

Kamva: I hope Mzi is not giving you any problems.

Somi: He doesn't want to sign the papers. You know how he is.

Kamva: I don't even think he's in a position to contest the divorce. He'd lose.

Somi: He forgets that his cheating ways is an advantage to me. He better stop making things hard for me.

Kamva: He'll come to his senses sooner or later.

Somi: Hopefully.

I finished the first sandwich, and dabbed the corners of my mouth with a cloth.

Somi: How did you deal with the death of your father?

I eyed her.

Kamva: I'm not going to lie. It was hard for me. Yes, I've always been closer to my mother than my father but that didn't mean I didn't feel the pain. It felt like a piece of my heart had been ripped out. But death is an inevitable part of life, and you've to pick yourself up and move on. With time, it does get better.

Somi: And your mother?

Kamva: I don't even want to talk about her.

Somi: Don't you think that it's time you gave her a chance to explain herself?

Kamva: Somikazi, it's not easy. Yes, I can't erase the role she played in my life for 24 years, but I still can't wrap my head around the fact that my mother killed my father. I don't think that she deserves any one's forgiveness, let alone mine.

I nodded. A ringtone resounded around the room.

Kamva: Please pass me my phone.

She pointed to the tray, and I noticed her cellphone and handed it to her.

Kamva: Hello, uncle... I can't hear you properly.

She put the phone on loudspeaker.

Kamva: I'm glad you and uncle Khulekani had a safe

journey.

Mandlakhe: Listen, Kamva. I need you to help me get in touch with your sister.

Kamva had shared with her uncle a while back everything on Buhlenkosi. How she was conceived and how her paternity had been revealed, including the marriage but apparently she had left out her sextape. As Buhle was supposed to get married to Senzokuhle, I was aware of the details of her past.

Kamva: Unfortunately, I don't have her numbers, but last time I checked, she was enrolled at University of Johannesburg.

Mandlakhe: Okay, try to locate her and get her to call me.

Kamva: I hear you, uncle. As soon as I arrive in Joburg, I'll look for her. She won't be hard to find.

Mandlakhe: Okay, remember that she's your father's daughter and I don't like the way you and your

mother handled things.

Kamva sighed.

Kamva: Things ended badly, I agree.

Mandlakhe: And I didn't get a chance to meet her.

Kamva: I hear you.

Mandlakhe: I want her to be present at the cleansing ceremony and so should you. Death has claimed a lot of lives, and we need to rid ourselves of the dark cloud.

Kamva: I hear you, uncle. You'll let me know of the date, and I'll pop by.

Mandlakhe: Find the girl first.

With the way things were going in that girl's life, perhaps she did need to be cleansed.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

The therapist handed me the paperbag, and I took it with a smile.

Xoliswa: Remember that the antidepressants are for your betterment. Use them.

I nodded, and smiled once again.

Me: Thank you.

Thabile nudged me in the back.

Thabi: Buhle, we need to go. We're going to be late.

Xoliswa: For?

She asked out of curiosity, a smile adorning her lips.

Me: We're meeting up with a lawyer.

Xoliswa: Oh, let me not keep you any longer.

I nodded.

Xoliswa: Good luck.

She gave us a faint smile as we filed out of her office.

We travelled in an Uber to the restaurant we were meeting in. We rushed inside to find this so called lawyer. We arrived at the table.

Thabi: Good afternoon, Mr Ngubane.

Mr Ngubane: You're late.

Thabi: We're so sorry, Mr Ngubane. We were held up somewhere.

Mr Ngubane: Call me Mpilo.

Thabile nodded vigorously. Mr Ngubane rose from his seat, and whirled around, adjusting his jacket.

Thabi: I brought a friend. I hope you don't mind. She'd also like to discuss something along the lines of revenge porn. And she's willing to be a witness against Bandile.

My breath was knocked away, when the lawyer turned to look at us. He outstretched his hand for a handshake, and Thabile went first. I was tongue-tied as I looked at this yummy man before me. Thabile whispered in my ear, pulling me out of my reverie.

Thabi: I know he's hot, but try to be professional.

I shook his hand, and volts of electricity jolted through my whole body, and something fluttered in my stomach.

Mpilo: And your name, miss?

I cleared my throat, letting go of his hand abruptly. I found myself wanting to get lost in the rhythmic sound of his voice - it was the right kind of deep.

Me: Buhlenkosi Malinga.

Mpilo: Buhlenkosi. You may have a seat, and we can get started.

The way my name rolled off his tongue did things to

my lady parts. I shook my head, telling myself to behave as Thabile and I settled into the vacant chairs.

I found myself engrossing myself in the simple way his lips moved as he talked, and his hand gestures the duration of the meeting. I wanted to get lost in his brown eyes as they had this magnetic force.

But something pulled me from my fantasies, and Bandile was one of them.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

The whole table was silent as we ate our dinner - only the sound of cutlery dominating. Happy broke the silence, and I was thankful because the silence

forced me to divulge deeper into my thoughts.

Happy: You know I was talking to Mpilo earlier on, and he says that he thinks that he has found himself a bride.

There were murmurs around the table.

MaNdlovu: He better forget about bringing a city girl into our lives.

Happy: Here we go again.

Happy rolled her eyes.

MaNdlovu: Senzokuhle, you made a good choice by not marrying that younger girl from the Mkhize family. Imagine your wife trending because she decided to expose her private parts for the whole world to see. Kamva was a better choice, I realise

that now.

Happy: I regret showing you the video. Now we'll never hear the end of it.

Her words were not pleasant, but I decided to keep quiet.

MaNdlovu: Look at how Somikazi has forgotten her place. Two minutes in Joburg, she wants to end her marriage. Children of these days think that marriage is a walk in the park.

Somikazi: I think I've lost my appetite.

Her chair scraped on the floor, and she stood up.

MaNdlovu: Yes, run, girl. That's the reason why your husband had no problem opening other girls' legs. Instead of using those legs to run away, you should have opened them wider for your husband.

I choked on my food, as my eyes widened to the size of saucers. I couldn't believe this woman.

Ntombizodwa: I'm not going to allow you to insult my daughter any further, Nobanda.

MaNdlovu: You should be the last person to talk. Your first born is a divorcee and the second takes the trophy at uttering lies. Let's not even mention your last born.

Ntombizodwa: It's only been two minutes since the head of this house passed on, and you think that you can talk anyhow you want. You'll not insult my children. Do I make myself clear?

MaNdlovu: I know the truth hurts. There is no need to catch feelings.

Nhlakanipho banged the table, startling all of us.

Nhla: That's enough! My father's house will not be made a playground. You want to bicker like small kids, find another place to do so.

Afterwards, silence engulfed the whole house. I needed to talk to Senzo about returning to Joburg, because I was not cut out for this drama.

Narrated

Bandile, Shawn and Xolani were in the communal bathroom at the prison. Showers were stacked together, as the boys were doing their hygienic routine.

Unaware of the danger looming, the shower taps were turned off by the boys.

They were pulling on their trousers when a group of 4 muscular, and scary prisoners walked inside.

The leader of the group chuckled, huffing a cigarette. "So you're the three boys who had their way with a girl without her consent?"

Confusion braced the boys' faces.

Bandile: You're not supposed to be here.

Another one laughed. "It's always boys who can't get a go at real men who decide to terrorise our sisters."

They walked closer to the trio whose faces sported fear.

The bigger one of them all snarled. "My mentor always said that I should pick people my size, and it's such a pity that I'm going to make you an exception. But don't worry, I'm going to have a great time squashing you like the cockroaches you are."

The one puffing a cigarette roared. "Trousers down, boys."

The trio looked at each other, fear coursing through their veins. They were clever enough to figure out what was happening.

Shawn: GUARD!

The leader cocked his head, and the members scattered, each picking a boy.

"You want to make this hard for yourself?"

The boys tried to fight them off as their trousers with their underwears were pulled down to their ankles.

The one attacking Bandile seemed to be struggling a bit as he fought with all his might.

Punches and kicks were delivered to Xolani and Shawn, and they were soon penetrated from behind. Screams filled the area.

Bandile had his attacker backed against a wall, his hands wrapped around his neck, squeezing. He didn't seem to understand why the man laughed as he continued to squeeze.

The leader watched the scene, and decided to lend a helping hand to his fellow friend.

Soon enough, a sharpened toothbrush was drilled into Bandile's neck, and blood sprayed them as he collapsed on the ground - his eyes converting into lifeless and milky orbs.

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Somikazi Nkosi

I was leaning against the bonnet of Lwando's car, and scrolled through my phone. Minutes later, he came back baring two kotas and handed one to me.

Somi: It's like you knew how much I needed this.

I relished in the taste of the bunny chow.

Lwando: I've known you long enough.

Somi: I still can't believe that it's been 15 years of our friendship. Time does really travel fast.

Lwando: And we're getting old.

We continued eating.

Somi: You don't know how much I needed to get out of the house.

Lwando: Your family should consider a reality show. The drama never ends.

He chuckled, and I rolled my eyes playfully.

Somi: It's not funny. Last night, MaNdlovu really got on my last nerve. She thinks that she can dictate how we should live our lives. You should've heard

the things she was saying about me.

Lwando: You shouldn't even be letting her get to you.

Somi: She thinks now that her son is going to be King; she can do whatever she likes.

Lwando: Stop giving her power over your thoughts. You'll have a heart attack at a young age.

Somi: I don't know about young. You seem to forget that I'm turning 35 this year.

Lwando: And it doesn't show.

Silence enveloped us, as I ate the last particle of the kota.

Lwando: So what do you plan to do with yourself after the divorce?

Somi: I don't know. What I've been doing these past years.

Lwando: And what is that? Sitting around, and doing nothing.

Somi: I wasn't sitting around, and doing nothing.

Lwando: You could go back to school.

Somi: At my age, Lwando. There is a reason why I dropped out of varsity and I don't think I want to go back.

Lwando: I hear you, but don't be afraid to go back to school. Education is not age bound, and this time, you could do something you love.

Somi: If only I knew what I love.

Lwando: Get yourself and your qualifications in order.

I gazed at him.

Somi: You think it's a good idea?

Lwando: Only you know what your heart desires. It was a mere suggestion.

I hopped off the bonnet.

Somi: My butt is starting to hurt. We should finish this conversation in the car.

Lwando: I should get you home, before your husband accuses me of all sorts of things.

I shook my head as we got in the car.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Thabile was unplaiting my braids. It was long overdue. With everything happening, I had forgotten about some things. My heart was heavy as I thought of my past. My mother didn't get justice, neither did my father. Both their killers are roaming the streets without fear. On the other hand, the sextape would follow me forever, and I was beginning to accept

that. I mean it's not the first time people see breasts and a naked woman's body. I mean porn is a billion dollar industry. I'd be fine.

Thabi: You have rich hair, but the maintenance of natural hair is daunting.

Me: Tell me about it. Sometimes I find myself wanting to cut it.

My thoughts wandered off to a certain lawyer. I couldn't stop thinking about him.

My smile vanished as I looked at the two tablets in my hand. I didn't want to live my life on pills, but sometimes the pain got too much and the urge to end it all intensified. Perhaps the antidepressants would help.

Me: Thabile, please bring me a glass of water.

She chuckled.

Thabi: I don't understand why you want to drink those tablets now.

She went to my bar fridge, and returned with a half full water bottle, and handed it to me. As I was about to take the pills, someone barged in our room. Amanda came inside, guns blazing - her temper flaring.

Thabi: What the hell is wrong with you? This isn't your mother's house.

She approached us, and pain dogged my scalp as a portion of my braids was pulled backwards, and I ended up dropping the contents in my hands.

Me: Have you lost your mind, Amanda?

I was fuming.

Amanda: I hope you're both happy. You've finally gotten what you wanted.

Thabi: You better have a good reason for barging in our room, and attacking us.

Me: This better be the first and the last time you touch me or the next time, ngizokuhudula phansi. Ngakhula ngishaya amantombazane angenhlonipho.

I clicked my tongue, and rubbed the part of my scalp where I felt pain.

Amanda: Wasn't it enough that you sent my brother and his friends to jail? Did you have to send your father to kill Bandile?

Shock swam through me.

Me: Bandile is dead?

Amanda: You don't have to act surprised. I know you both have a hand in this.

Thabi: What do you mean Bandile is dead? What happened?

Amanda: It's all over the news. My brother better not be next, or I'll come and kill you myself.

Amanda stormed out, leaving us in a ocean of shocking news.

Me: Bandile can't be dead. That's too fucking easy for him. He needed to suffer. I needed to see him spend his whole life behind bars. He can't be dead.

Thabi was pacing up and down. My heart should be content at his death, but he needed to suffer. I

couldn't deal with it. Thabi picked up her phone from the bed.

Me: Who are you calling?

Thabi: The lawyer.

Me: Put him on loudspeaker.

I neared Thabi, and we were silent as the phone rang. He answered on the third ring. I couldn't even indulge on the attraction I may have towards him as alot was at stake.

Mpilo: I take it you've heard about Bandile's death.

Thabi: How did that happen? What does this even mean for the trial?

Mpilo: I don't have all the details, but apparently he was discovered dead and alone in the prison showers.

I shook my head.

Me: Was he killed?

Mpilo: Hundred percent. It's nothing new.

Thabi: What does this mean for the trial? It's in 2 days. Does Bandile's death change anything?

Mpilo: Possibly. It could be postponed to investigate his death.

Thabi: That dog can't die just like that. He needs to pay for his sins.

Mpilo: I have to ask. Standard procedure. You didn't have anything to do with his death?

Thabi: What are you implying?

Mpilo: I'm your lawyer, and you need to be transparent with me. If there's anything I need to know, tell me now. I don't want any surprises in court.

Thabi: We didn't kill Bandile. If anything I'm happy that the bastard is dead, but we had nothing to do with his death. What do you take us for? We're

university students. What do we know about killing?

Mpilo: I didn't mean to upset you.

Narrated

Prisoners huddled together in a line as they were served food.

Xolani and Shawn were seated together at a table, silence engulfing them. They had difficulties walking after they were brutally raped, and penetrated in the anus. It hurt like hell, and for the first time, they found themselves feeling remorseful about their actions towards Thabile. Silent cries plagued their hearts. Bandile's death haunted them as they were forced to leave their friend, blood spilling from his neck.

Their thoughts were interjected by the group of men who rained a heavy storm on them. Their fear radiated off them, and the gang was pleased.

The leader picked a slice of bread, intimidating the duo. "If you sing to anyone about yesterday, I'll do more than just kill you. I'll have your dicks cut, served on a platter and have you eat them. Do I make myself clear?"

Xolani and Shawn nodded vigorously, fear consuming them whole.

Another member. "What happens in hell stays in hell."

The leader released saliva on their plates purposely.

The prison warden, accompanied by guards stalked into the cafeteria; calling for everyone's attention.

Warden: This is the second death this month. I'll not tolerate this manslaughter any longer and you better pray we don't find you. So save us the trouble, and turn yourselves in before I find you.

No one said anything.

Warden: Xolani and Shawn, follow me.

Guards were by their sides as they followed the warden. Every movement for the boys exerted excruciating pain in their limbs. They were led to an office whereby a man they knew too well through their deceased friend occupied.

Njabulo: Leave us.

Bandile's father barked, and his wish was their command. The door closed, sealing the three inside. You could see the way that his jaw was clenched, and something close to pain lingering in his eyes that his son's death hit him hard.

Njabulo: Is there something you need to tell me?

The boys shook their heads.

Njabulo: Are you sure?

Shawn: We don't know what happened. Bandile had asked to take a shower alone, and we didn't ponder on it much.

Njabulo: Very well then. This has Ace written all over it, and he's going to regret messing with me.

His hands rolled into fists -anger simmering in his

eyes.

Noxolo Ndebele

I paced around the yard, my cellphone pressed to my ear.

Noxolo: Kaizer, your guys messed up. I don't remember telling you to kill any of the boys. Do you have any idea what's going to happen? You said it yourself that there would be bloodshed, and lots of it.

Kaizer: Relax.

Noxolo: How the fuck am I supposed to relax? No one was supposed to die. If your guys are found, they better not mention my name.

Kaizer: Nothing will happen. You'll not be exposed.

Noxolo: I hope so, because I'm not ready to be killed by Dube.

I hung up, and screamed. This was not how things were supposed to go.

Khethiwe: So you have started? You're already in trouble, and it hasn't been long since you came back to Alex.

Noxolo: Sis, I'm not in the mood to fight.

Khethiwe: No, you're back to the same shit that almost got you, me and my daughter killed and had you go into hiding! So if you're back into that shit, go and do it far away from us!

She walked away, and I ran my palm over my face in frustration.

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Kamvelihle Ngubane

My body sported a white gown, laid on a reclined chair; my feet being massaged. Somikazi had called for a spa treatment right at the luxury of our home and I was thankful for the opportunity to release the tension packed in my bones. I heard footsteps, and opened my eyes to see Somikazi jogging into the patio.

Somi: I see that you're enjoying yourself.

She did some stretches.

Kamva: It's what I needed.

Somi: Where are the others?

Kamva: Your mother is in the kitchen, making tea for herself.

Somi: Tea? She should be drinking wine.

Kamva: But you know very well that ma doesn't drink.

Somi: There's non-alcoholic, darling.

I shook my head.

Kamva: And Happy was more than happy to update her Instagram.

Somi: I know her very well. I take it MaNdlovu and MaSibiya are still out.

I nodded.

Somi: They're going to have our heads when they come back.

Kamva: I wonder what new drama is MaNdlovu

cooking up.

Laughter rumbled out of our mouths.

Kamva: Come closer.

She neared me, and sat on another chair facing me.

Somi: What's up?

Kamva: I hope that you're not doing this because you're trying to hide your pain and feelings from the rest of us.

Somi: What do you mean?

Kamva: The jogging? Spa treatments? It's okay to go through all the emotions, Somikazi. I mean your father just passed away, and you're going through a divorce. Even if you initiated the process, it doesn't make it hurt any less, right?

Somi: We can't grieve forever. At some point, you're going to have to accept that you've suffered a loss and move on. Moreover, father's death was expected. It made things a lot easier for me, because I was shattered when the doctors told us that he had a few months to live and I learned to live with the reality that he'd soon leave us.

I nodded, faintly smiling.

Somi: I've moved on from Mzi's bullshit. I just need him to let me go. I've already let go of him.

Kamva: I hear you.

Somi: The thing is that I've become so addicted to personal growth, self love and self improvement. It's always good to know that development and betterment of oneself is possible. Happiness is a choice, darling and I only have one person to thank for changing my mentality.

Kamva: Thank them for me, because I love the new,

improved version of Somikazi.

Somi: Let me go have a shower, and I'll come back to join you.

I nodded, and she trod away. Minutes later, my mother in law and Senzokuhle stepped into the patio. One with a cup of tea, and the other with a glass of whisky. My mother-in-law sat on one of the recliners, and Senzo on a normal chair.

Ntombizodwa: You know I've been thinking that you haven't been to your honeymoon.

I eyed my mother in law, as another lady went to massage her. My gaze travelled to Senzo. He didn't give anything away.

Kamva: We didn't get married under the best circumstances.

Ntombizodwa: But you've grown together. Don't think that I don't see the love blooming between you two.

Kamva: All the problems we have faced with our families has brought us closer. From strangers, to a friendship.

Ntombizodwa: And finally love.

I looked at Senzo, but he merely shrugged.

Kamva: I don't think that this is the best time for a honeymoon. Father in law just passed away.

Ntombizodwa: And he'll forever be in our hearts, but that doesn't mean that our lives should come to a halt.

Kamva: I wish I could say yes, but right now is not a good time. My uncle tasked me with finding my sister.

Senzokuhle: I knew you'd say that. So I had a friend find Buhle's details.

He outstretched his arm, with my cellphone in his hand.

Kamva: So you're in this together with your mother?

Senzokuhle: I've saved your sister's numbers so you can give her a call.

Kamva: You can take a break.

I dismissed the lady who was massaging me, and strolled to Senzo to take my phone.

Kamva: You do realise that this girl was supposed to be your wife? Should I be jealous?

I said in a whisper with a smile.

Senzokuhle: Perhaps.

I shook my head, and glided away from my husband and his mother, dialing Buhle's number. My eyes absentmindedly raked over the trees and flowers I walked past as I waited for her to answer.

Buhle: Bandile, you're back from the dead? I should have known.

My brows wrinkled in confusion.

Kamva: Hello, Buhle.

Buhle: Oh, it's a lady voice. Free advice, sis, run while you still can. Bandile will break you.

Kamva: Am I talking to Buhlenkosi?

Buhle: Oh, don't mind me. I was kidding.

Kamva: It's good to see that you still have your sense of humor.

Buhle: And who am I talking?

Kamva: It's Kamva.

Buhle: Oh, what can I do for you?

Kamva: Our uncle is back in South Africa and he'd like to meet his brother's daughter.

Buhle: I'm not interested. I thought I made it clear that I want nothing to do with you and your family.

Kamva: You've always have been hard to deal with, but this is important. He's also planning to do a cleansing ceremony, and he'd like you to be present there.

Buhle: I meant it when I said that I want nothing to do with the Mkhizes. You can all go to hell.

Kamva: Yet my father's money is what's putting you through school.

Buhle: Is that supposed to make me feel guilty? I didn't ask your father to leave me with the 1.5 million. Moreover I'm taking it as maintenance for all the years he wasn't present in my life. He was the glue connecting me to your family. Now that the glue has

dried up, you can guess.

Kamva: I can't believe you... I'm not fighting with you. I was relaying a message.

Buhle: You and your mother have always had the talent of bringing out the worst in me.

Kamva: I don't appreciate you painting me with the same brush as my mother.

Buhle: The shoe fits, right? She mistreated me, and you being your mother's daughter turned a blind eye.

Kamva: I couldn't pick a side, Buhle. You know this. I was there for you as best as I could. But this isn't about me and Simnikiwe, it's about your uncle.

Buhle: I don't care. Where was he when his brother died? When your mother arranged a marriage against my will? Where was he? He didn't even care about attending his own brother's funeral. Now that comes across to me as a man who doesn't care about anyone but himself.

It was safe to say that she hated our whole family.

Kamva: You don't even know him, but you're passing judgements on him. And if you must know, he played a big role in making sure that Simnikiwe's wrongdoings are exposed.

She sighed.

Kamva: Have you even sat down and questioned yourself why everything in your life is going south? Firstly you didn't leave home in a proper manner, and secondly, you were never introduced to our ancestors. It's possible that you don't have your forefathers' protection and guidance.

Buhle: I don't need them.

And the line suddenly went dead. I pursed my lips, and returned to the patio.

Senzokuhle: And?

Kamva: Paris would be a great start.

Senzokuhle: How did it go with your sister?

My reply was swallowed in my throat when MaNdlovu walked in.

MaNdlovu: I can't believe this. Two weeks hasn't even passed since Nkosiyabo died, but you're all here having a celebration.

MaSibiya followed behind her.

Somikazi: You're more than welcome to join us.

MaNdlovu: It's clear that you killed my husband, and now you're celebrating.

My mother in law dropped the cup she was drinking

from and it shattered, rising up to her full height.

Ntombizodwa: What did you say?

Somikazi: Ma, she's not worth it.

Ntombizodwa: No, this woman is always picking a fight with us. She seems to forget that I'm the first wife here.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I hung up, and took a deep breath. I was really annoyed with the conversation I had with Kamva. I meant it when I said that I was done with my father's family. My only family was Auntie Nox.

Thabi: Are you alright?

I nodded, and picked up my backpack.

Thabi: It seemed like you were having an intense conversation.

Me: It was no one important.

She flipped through her textbook, and I placed my cellphone in my pocket.

Me: I'm going to go to my last class for the day, and go see my aunt.

She nodded, and I whirled around preparing to walk away. Thabi stopped me.

Thabi: Before you go, I want to give you something.

She rummaged for something in her drawer, and hauled out an elongated jewelry box. She handed it to me. I opened it, and looked inside. My eyes drank in a glistening necklace.

Me: This is so beautiful.

Thabi: It's yours. I'm giving it to you.

Me: I can't accept it. It looks expensive.

Thabi: I meant to give it to Amanda at her graduation ceremony this month, but since we're no longer friends, she can't have it.

Me: I think she'd appreciate it.

Thabi: Well, we'll never find out. I've cut her out of my life. First of all, she had the liver to tweet that I was lying about my rape. And then yesterday, she attacked us. I'm good.

Me: Well, thank you but I don't think I can take it.

I went to place it on her bed.

Me: You could give it to Dimpho. She'll love it.

She nodded, and went back to her books.

Me: Do you really believe that Bandile is dead?

Thabi: I'll only believe it when I see it.

Me: Okay, I'll see you later.

I walked out.

Narrated

Bandile's mother, Nokulunga walked into her husband's office with a tray of food.

Nokulunga: I've brought you lunch.

Their home had since been plagued with sadness.

Njabulo: You can leave it on the table.

The wife placed it on the desk, and Njabulo turned around to face her. She stared at the gun her husband was polishing in his hands.

Nokulunga: What do you plan to do with that?

Njabulo: I want Ace's brain to be scattered across the province. I want him dead.

The wife inhaled deeply, and exhaled.

Nokulunga: This is not the way to handle things. It's

not going to end well.

Njabulo: What do you suggest I do? He had my son killed. He went back on his word.

Nokulunga: It could be another one of your enemies. We're not sure that Ace is behind this.

Njabulo: We agreed that none of us would influence the verdict. We agreed that we'd step aside and let the law take its course. But what did Ace do? He went back on his word, and killed Bandile. Worst part, he disfigured Bandile's face. Our son is unrecognisable. The acid corroded his face. That was a man who wanted to send a message, and I've gotten the message.

Nokulunga: We haven't even buried our son, but you want to go and get yourself killed. I can't lose my son, and then lose you too.

Tears were falling down her cheeks.

Njabulo: I can't let Ace get away with this.

Nokulunga: If he's truly behind this, he's expecting you. You could be walking into a trap.

His cellphone rang, and he answered it.

Voice: Boss, we're ready.

Njabulo: We'll be heading there in an hour. Make sure the guys are briefed about the plan. We kill everything. Cat, dog, I don't care. And save Ace for me, I'll be killing him myself. Nobody and nothing should make it out alive.

Voice: Sure, boss.

The call ended, and Njabulo tossed his cellphone to the desk.

Nokulunga: What about his family? You can't involve them in this.

Njabulo: The initial plan was to kill everyone close to

him, starting with that Thabile girl. But knowing Ace, he'd come for me tenfold if I leave him alive and with nothing more to lose.

Nokulunga sighed in defeat.

Nokulunga: Just don't go and get yourself killed.

Noxolo Ndebele

I opened the door, and in the threshold was Anna and Buhle.

Noxolo: I was about to come and get you from the stop.

Buhle: I met with Anna, and turns out she's your

niece so I followed her here.

I enveloped Buhle in a hug.

Noxolo: How are you doing?

Buhle: Things are looking up, I guess.

Noxolo: I heard about that boy's death. Serves him right.

Buhle: It is what it is.

We walked inside, and I closed the door.

Noxolo: Buhle, this is my sister, Khethiwe. Anna's mother. And dade, this is my friend's daughter.

Khethiwe shifted her gaze from the TV, a sour look on her face. She clicked her tongue and continued watching.

Anna: Don't mind her. She thinks that you're the reason Auntie left Alex.

She whispered loud enough for me to hear. I could see the confused expression on Buhle's features.

Noxolo: I'll explain later. For now, have a seat.

She sat on a vacant sofa. My phone vibrated in my pocket. The caller ID displayed Kaizer.

Noxolo: I'll be right back.

I skipped to the room I was sleeping in, and closed the door.

Noxolo: Kaizer.

Kaizer: We're off the hook.

Noxolo: What do you mean?

Kaizer: It seems like someone got to Bandile before my guys could.

Noxolo: Are you serious?

Kaizer: Yes, my contacts inside said that they were not the ones behind his death.

Noxolo: So someone else wanted him dead?

Kaizer: It seems like that. And you know Dube has a lot of enemies. It could be one of them.

Noxolo: Okay, thank you for letting me know.

Kaizer: Sure.

I hung up, and walked back to the lounge to find that a commotion had risen.

Khethiwe: You and your mother should be ashamed of yourselves. You got my sister to abandon us. You

and your stupid village!

Noxolo: That's enough. Buhle, please go with Anna and she'll show you around the neighborhood. I need to have a word with my sister.

She nodded, and soon Buhle and Anna walked out. I went to sit next to Khethiwe.

Noxolo: You should be expressing your anger towards me, and not Buhle.

Khethiwe: You were supposed to come back after two years, but you ended up staying 18 more years. It felt like you had forgotten about me.

Noxolo: That's not the case, Khethiwe. You know that Ace wanted me dead those years ago.

Khethiwe: Because you stole from him. You should've returned whatever you stole from, and he might have let you go.

Noxolo: He wanted to make an example of me. I could have return the package but he still would

have killed me.

Khethiwe: He ended the search a year later, since he couldn't find you. He almost killed me when he was looking for you, and thought I might know your whereabouts.

Noxolo: I know, but it was my decision to stay back in the village even after Ace stopped looking for me. It was not Nomthandazo, and definitely not Buhlenkosi. I wanted a life far away from crime. I wanted a fresh start, and I got that in that place.

Khethiwe: I hear you.

Noxolo: And I kept visiting you over the years. I didn't abandon you.

Khethiwe: It just made me angry. The mere mention of that village rubbed me up the wrong way. I saw it as a place that took away my sister.

Noxolo: And I understand. When I went into hiding there, I met Nomthandazo and she took me in. We became close friends, and she trusted me with her home when she became pregnant, and had to leave the village for about 3 years. You can't blame them

for my decisions.

Khethiwe: Do you think Ace would kill you if he were to discover that you're back?

Noxolo: I doubt. I don't think he even remembers how I look.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

A knock came at the door. I had wanted to rest after catching up with Auntie Nox. I hoped it was not for me. A knock again.

Me: Thabi, please answer the door.

Thabi: Can't you see that I'm busy?

I rolled my eyes.

Me: Busy with your phone. Really?

I groaned, and went to open the door. To my surprise, it was the therapist.

Me: Mrs Madonsela, what are you doing here? How did you know where I live?

Thabi: She called me, and said that it was important that she meets you asap. I'll give you two some space.

She slipped on her sandals, and stalked away. I closed the door, and offered the therapist a seat on the bed. We sat down, curiosity and anxiety poking me.

Me: So what was so important that you had to come all the way here?

Xoliswa: I hope that you haven't touched the antidepressants I gave you.

Me: I only swallowed two this morning. Why? What's going on?

Her face visibly relaxed.

Xoliswa: That's good. You haven't taken a high dosage that would drive you crazy. I'm going to need you to throw them away.

Me: And why would I do that?

Xoliswa: I'm Xolani's mother.

The name clicked into my head, and my face completely changed.

Me: Xolani? As in one of the guys who raped Thabile? Does she know?

She shook her head.

Me: Okay, you're not your son. I'm not going to pin your son's sins on you.

Xoliswa: The thing is that I've been sourcing information from you and Thabile to help my son. You've to understand that he's my only son, and I wanted to protect him. So I changed the antidepressants for pills that would make you crazy. It was a revenge plot that they had in mind. I'm so sorry. I should have not deceived you, and I realise now that I've been nurturing a criminal. I've come to rectify my mistakes.

Shock danced within me, and anger seethed into my veins.

Me: I can't believe this. As a person who deals with mental health and knows how detrimental trauma is,

you went and did this? Not only should your license be revoked, you deserve to be reserved a space alongside your son in prison... I thank you for telling me the truth, but what you did is plain evil. Defending a rapist.

Xoliswa: I'm sorry. That is why I am here. I want to apologise.

I could hear the sincerity in her tone, but I didn't care. I was too angry.

Me: I think you should leave.

Xoliswa: Please-

Me: I don't want to hear anything else. You're my elder, and I don't want to find myself speaking out of turn.

She nodded, and stood up, reluctantly. I couldn't believe the evilness of some people. I trusted her with my life story and feelings. Not only did she

break the doctor-patient confidentiality, she broke my trust. She walked out and closed the door.

I typed in a quick message to Thabile that she could come back, and went to lay down, and soon I drifted off to sleep, my mind still in mayhem.

Thabile Mampane

I called my father as I roamed around res, giving Buhle and the therapist space. I wondered what they were talking about.

Ace: Hello, my child. How are you holding up?

Thabi: It gets better with every passing moment.

Ace: That's good to hear, Felicity.

I briefly laughed.

Thabi: Pa, you know that I don't like to be called Felicity.

Ace: Okay. Velocity will do.

Thabi: Mama told me that you wanted to name me that, and I couldn't believe it. Imagine being called velocity. Do you even know the meaning of the word?

Ace: I did go to school, you know.

When our laughter died down, I raised something that has been on my mind.

Thabi: Pa, there are rumors that you sent someone to kill Bandile.

Ace: Are you asking me or telling me?

Thabi: You know that I trust you, Pa and I'd never

believe strangers over you.

Ace: As much as I wanted to kill those boys, I had nothing to do with Bandile's death.

Thabi: Thank you for clearing that up with me.

Ace: I'm not a saint, my child but you know I wouldn't lie to you.

Thabi: I know.

I heard shuffling in the background.

Ace: Look, my child. I need to go. Something just came up.

I didn't even respond as he hung up. A bad feeling settled inside me - the hairs on my neck stood. I didn't know where the feelings of apprehension and fear came from. I swallowed hard, and read a message from Buhle. I went back to the room, and locked the door. Buhle was sleeping. I prepared

some noodles for myself, and read through my textbook for a while until sleep dogged me.

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I was awakened from my slumber by my cellphone ringing under my pillow. The loud ringtone was muffled by the pillow, and I answered it, groaning.

Thabi: Mmmm.

Hysterical sobs pierced my ears.

Voice: Thabile...

Thabi: Libone, is that you?

Libone: It's...me.

Her voice cracked, erasing the sleep from my eyes.

Thabi: What happened, baby girl?

Libone was my younger cousin. She was around sixteen.

Libone: Thabi, I'm at the hospital.

Thabi: Why are you at the hospital?

That foreboding feeling returned.

Libone: I had stepped out of the house to go to the cinema with my friends. When I returned home, everything was turned upside down... and I found aunt and uncle lying in a pool of their blood. So I called for an ambulance.

The news tore my heart apart.

Thabi: How are... they?

Moisture was pooling in my orbs.

Libone: Uncle didn't make it... They say that he was shot 16 times and I haven't gotten an update on aunty... You need to come home.

My cellphone slipped from my hand, as my heart suffered numerous blows. It felt like someone was piercing through it a million times. The heaviness and sadness, the misery that settled into my heart could never be erased. Not my parents, I couldn't lose them. A heart-wrenched sob escaped my lips.

A month later

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Buhlenkosi Malinga

I closed my eyes, reciting a small prayer. I looked around the courtroom, filled with individuals - guards posted around, lawyers, opposition and the magistrate straight ahead. I looked at Thabile, her eyes emotionless and a version of her former self. Her father's death hit her really hard.

A verdict was delivered, and I held my breath in anticipation. "Xolani Madonsela and Shawn Brown, this court finds you guilty of the rape and violation of Thabile Mampane."

The excitement was abundant around me. "Therefore you'll be sentenced to 15 years." More cheers followed, and I saw my former therapist run her hand over her face.

"And to the deceased Bandile Dube's representatives, a fine of 1 million rand is charged..." My heart soared into the sky.

"Court is adjourned." After the judge trod away in a respectful manner, I went to Thabile and pulled her in for a hug.

Me: We did it! We won.

I couldn't contain my excitement, but Thabi didn't even reciprocate it. I pulled away, and hugged Mpilo, taking in his scent.

Me: Thank you for your help. We wouldn't have done this without you.

His hand awkwardly stroked my back, and I stepped back, my gaze all over but not on Mpilo.

Mpilo: Don't give me so much credit.

Me: We should definitely celebrate.

I piped in, the awkward silence threatening to swallow us.

Mpilo: That's a good idea.

I looked at Thabile, an impassive mask on her face.

Me: Thabi?

Thabi: I'll go share the good news with my mother and come join you later.

She gave me a smile that didn't reach her eyes. My heart bled for her. Her father had been killed a month ago, and her mother was in a comatose state, and

hadn't woken up ever since. I could see that everything was hard on Thabi; she was slowly slipping away and I didn't know how to reach out to her.

Me: Do you want me to come with you?

Thabi: No, I'll be okay.

I nodded.

Mpilo: We'll definitely save some champagne for you.

Thabi nodded, and walked out the courtroom, mine and Mpilo's eyes pinned on her retreating figure.

Me: I thought that since her preperators have been sentenced, she'd cheer up a bit.

Mpilo: You need to understand that she's lost a lot.

She was raped. Months later, her father is killed. Her mother is still in a coma to this day. She's going through a lot. You can only be there for her.

Me: I hear you. It hurts me to see her like this.

Mpilo: Let's hope that she'll join us for some drinks. Perhaps just to get away from everything momentarily.

Mpilo reached for his briefcase, and we walked alongside each other to the exit. I glanced back to see Xolani and Shawn being dragged away, and happiness settled into my heart. Peace had marked my life ever since Bandile was declared dead, and I hoped it'd stay that way. Kamva had stopped reaching out, and I was totally okay with that. Now I had to focus on my books since mid year exams were approaching and be there for Thabile.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

My eyes drilled into the TV, but my mind was elsewhere.

Zenani had snapped her fingers in my face, and I looked up to see her in front of me, the television switched off.

Nikiwe: I was watching that.

Zenani: Please, you were lost in your thoughts.

Nikiwe: What do you want?

Zenani: I've thought of the perfect plan.

Nikiwe: What is it now? I thought we were no longer going to deal with the Mkhizes anymore.

Zenani: I know what I said, but we can't let them get away from trying to kill us.

Nikiwe: What do you have in mind?

Zenani: I'm going need you to trust me.

Nikiwe: You're really going to keep your plan away from me?

Zenani: All in good time. All you need to know is that we're going to kill two birds with one stone. From Buhle to Mandlakhe.

I shook my head, pursing my lips.

Nikiwe: And how are you going to do that?

Zenani: We're going to use Buhle to get to Mandlakhe. She's the closet thing we have against the Mkhizes. I've been following her case closely. Her and her friend.

Nikiwe: You never learn, Zenani.

Zenani: They won't know what hit them.

Nikiwe: This time, it would be great if you don't involve me in your plans. I'll pass.

Zenani: They drove you out of the kingdom, Nikiwe.

They killed your child. We almost died because of them. And Buhle, you can inflict pain on her for the affair Mvelo had with her Nomthandazo. You know what they say about the sins of the parents passed onto their children.

Nikiwe: I'll pass.

Zenani: You will be singing a different tune when I show you what I've been planning.

Nikiwe: We'll see.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

The drinks kept coming, as I passed time with Mpilo. I was truly enjoying myself with him, awaiting Thabile.

Me: So who's the lucky woman in your life?

Amusement danced in his eyes, and I swallowed a lump that formed in my throat.

Me: I'm sorry. Alcohol tends to loosen my tongue.

Mpilo: You don't have to feel bad about asking.

I gave him a tight smile.

Mpilo: And to answer your question, I don't have anyone special in my life.

Me: And why is that? I mean you have everything a girl could ask for.

Mpilo: Is that what you think?

Me: Do you really want me to answer that?

Mpilo: It's hard for find someone who wants me for me. Not for my career, my money or the fact that I'm royalty.

Me: You're royalty? You never told us.

Mpilo: I like to keep my life private. Not a lot of people know that I'm royalty. I didn't want it to interfere with my career. I wanted my work to speak for itself. And most of the time, it doesn't really hold any value in the city.

Me: I hear you. Being of royal blood is so overrated. Looking from the outside, it may seem like the best thing but I think you'll agree with me that it really isn't easy.

Mpilo: You seem to know a lot. Talking from experience?

Me: I happen to be a princess, but it's a long story I don't even want to get into.

He gulped down his whisky, and poured himself another glass.

Me: You don't happen to be related to a man named Senzokuhle. Now that I think of it, you both have the

same surname and you're royalty. And I think I've heard your name before.

Mpilo: You must be the Buhle that he was supposed to marry, but she ran away the night before the wedding.

Me: You make it seem like a bad thing. I did what I had to do.

Things started clicking in place.

Mpilo: And I'm not judging you. It is a small world indeed.

Me: I heard that he got married to Kamvelihle.

Mpilo: That must be your sister. They've just gotten back from their honeymoon.

Me: See? Things worked out for them... If I may ask, what led to his paralysis?

Mpilo: Paralysis? Senzo was never paralyzed. He was putting up an act.

Me: Are you serious? Do people do that?

Mpilo: You'd be surprised.

We continued getting to know each other, and I must say I was enjoying his company greatly. Momentarily I had forgotten that we were still waiting for Thabile.

Mpilo: Do you think looks matter in a relationship?

Me: As you get older, you realise that looks don't sustain relationships. Character does. Moreover, it's about finding someone who will fully accept you for who you are, and genuinely make you happy. What's on the outside is not really important. You'll never know what the mask outside is concealing. Look at how Bandile turned out to be evil, but I would have never guessed because I thought he was a good guy, and he really was into me.

Thabile Mampane

My heart bled. The past month had been hell. Torture, and streaked with tragedy. I looked at all the machines connected to my mother, supplying her with oxygen and supplements. It broke my heart to see her like this.

Thabi: Mama, please wake up. You can't leave me like dad did.

My eyes were becoming glossy, glinting with unshed tears.

Thabi: I won the case, mama. I wanted you to be with me when my violators were arrested. Ma, they'll be imprisoned for 15 years. Isn't that good news?

I brushed her arm with my hand, and clasped her

own with mine.

Thabi: The doctors say that you cannot hear me, but I know you can, ma.

A feather like squeeze on my hand vibrated through my whole body.

Thabi: Please do that again. Show me that I wasn't imagining it.

I started to sing, my tears falling as the emotions poured into me.

"When it's cold outside
And the dark of the night
Steals the glow of the light
I can run inside

With your arms open wide
There is no need to hide
When I come undone
You put me together again
When I break your heart

You love me and call me friend
I look to you when I can't find my way
Only you getting me through each day
No matter what I face I'm covered in your grace
You keep giving me unconditional love
And you told me that I'm more than enough
And you showed me what it means to be loved
Because I didn't see what my heart disbelieved
And now I know unconditional love
And now I know unconditional love

Oh oh oh oh oh

Oh oh oh oh oh

Oh oh oh oh oh

Oh oh oh oh oh

When I'm lost in time

And my heart is a mess

In you I find my rest

Everytime I fall you lift up my soul

You keep making me whole"

I stopped singing and wiped my tears. I pecked my mother's forehead, and walked out to be met with two guards posted outside my mother's ward. They were delegated by my father's friend.

I gave them a faint smile.

Thabi: Take care of her.

They nodded, and I stalked outside the hospital, a slight breeze wafting past me.

With a heavy heart, I walked. Requesting an uber completely slipped from my mind while I was inside, and I hauled out my cellphone to request one.

Strong arms enclosed around me and my heart drummed in my chest. A cloth was positioned over my nose, and I involuntarily breathed in a chemical. My fear consumed me, and soon enough I was enveloped in complete darkness - my eyes slid shut.

Noxolo Ndebele

The stars clothed the sky as I kept digging into the

soil. With Ace's death, it was a green light for me.

I had marked this spot in the yard with a unique feature. My hands came in contact with a small, silk bag and I cuddled it in my hands. What was in this bag would change my life and family's lives forever.

My heart skipped a beat when I heard a voice.

Khethiwe: Noxolo, what the hell are you doing? You'll be accused of witchcraft.

Noxolo: You scared me.

She walked closer to me, the moon illuminated our surroundings.

Khethiwe: What are you doing?

My heartbeat returned to normal.

Khethiwe: What's in your hands?

I rose to my feet.

Noxolo: It's the package I had stolen from Ace.

She looked at me with narrowed eyes.

Noxolo: It's diamonds.

Her eyes widened.

Khethiwe: What are you saying to me, Noxolo?

Noxolo: We're rich.

Khethiwe: You want to tell me that you had

diamonds hidden here all this time? All this time, we've been walking over money.

Noxolo: I know. I wanted to tell you, but I couldn't. I didn't want you to crack in front of Ace.

Khethiwe: So this package that you've been talking about for all these years was diamonds all along?

I nodded.

Noxolo: I couldn't sell them, because I was sure that Ace had alerted his associates and everyone about a woman who might go around looking for buyers for the diamonds?

Khethiwe: So you waited for him to die?

You're one patient bitch. We've been living like poor people for 20 years, but you had diamonds all this time. I can't believe this. I want to scream but you'll never know who's listening.

I laughed.

Khethiwe: How much are we talking of here?

Noxolo: I don't know, but not less than a meter.

I jiggled the stones in my hand.

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I have other commitments this week, therefore we'll be back on schedule on 1 June 2020. Sorry for the convenience - I hope you'll all stick around for more drama. Let's work together to make the page grow.

Thank you

31

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I attempted Thabile's cell for the millionth time since last night. I sighed when it took me straight to voicemail. I didn't have a good feeling about this.

I packed my books for the day in my bag, and and grabbed a packet of biscuits for breakfast as I didn't have much of an appetite.

I opened the door, to see Dimpho approaching our room.

Dimpho: Hey.

Me: Hey.

Dimpho: I'm looking for Thabile. Is she still sleeping? She's not answering my calls.

Me: She didn't come home last night. Perhaps she's still at the hospital.

I locked the door, and we walked together to campus.

Dimpho: Maybe, but this is very worrying. It's unlike Thabile.

Me: I suggest that after our classes, we make a trip to the hospital and see if she's there.

Dimpho: That's a good idea.

Me: I'm worried about her. Everything has taken a toll on her, and I don't know how to help her.

Dimpho: You and me both. It seems like she's drowning, and we can't pull her out of the water.

Me: She's the strongest girl I know, and I know that she'll make it through.

Dimpho: I hope so because life has really been unfair to her.

Me: At least, she's gotten justice. She will never be bothered by Bandile, Shawn and Xolani.

Dimpho: Bandile did us a huge favour by dying.

Me: Okay, I'll see you later. Let me know when your last class ends.

Dimpho: I'll text you.

Me: Ok.

We headed in separate ways. I collided into someone as I hustled through the students.

Ofentse: Oh, I'm sorry.

Me: It's okay.

Ofentse: It was great seeing you.

He turned to walk away but I stopped him by calling out his name.

Me: I never got the chance to thank you for what you did. You don't know how much your testimony helped us.

Ofentse: You don't have to thank me. I did what was right. I could have been with them in prison, but you

and Thabile came through for me. The university almost expelled me.

Me: I'm glad your hearing went well. I hope it's a lesson to you and other men out there who stand by and watch women getting raped, and do nothing. Remember you were as guilty as the preperators, but you were given a second chance.

Ofentse: And I'll always be thankful for that.

Me: And be mindful of the friends you keep.

Ofentse: I'll keep that in mind.

Me: Okay, I'll see you around.

Ofentse: Have a productive day.

Me: Same to you.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I showed Kamva to the lounge, and she took a seat. I was glad my daughter finally answered my calls. I was missing her a lot, and I wanted to see her.

Nikiwe: Thank you for coming.

I remained standing, and grinned at my only child.

Nikiwe: Would you like anything to drink?

Kamva: No, I'm not here for that. Would you get to the point?

I plopped down onto the couch.

Nikiwe: So I saw pictures of you and your husband in Seychelles for your honeymoon. I'm glad that things are good between you two.

I was hurt that she didn't mirror my enthusiasm, but I had to soldier on.

Kamva: Well, I had to make the best of my situation. I'm happy now.

Nikiwe: I'm happy for you.

Kamva: Ma, please get to the point. I don't have time for small talk. I have to meet my husband for lunch in an hour.

Nikiwe: I wanted us to fix things, Kamvelihle. I miss us. I miss my daughter. I want my daughter back. We used to be so close.

Kamva: You should have thought about that before you killed my father. I see that I've wasted my time by coming here.

Nikiwe: Please don't leave. I know that you won't believe me, but I didn't kill your father.

Kamva: Only a fool would believe your lies. Are you going to sit there and pretend that you didn't confess? You said it with your own mouth that you killed Baba

and uncle Qhawe. You even attempted to kill uncle Mandlakhe. So we must have all been dreaming.

Nikiwe: I know that it doesn't make sense, but that was not me. Something completely overtook my spirit and said those words. I didn't kill anyone, Kamva. You have to believe me. I'm your mother.

Kamva: Not anymore. I thought I might come here to hear your side of the story, but it seems that you're hell bent on lying to me.

Nikiwe: You're blinded by anger, Kamva. Do you really think that I'd do this? Do you think the woman who raised you would kill someone? I'm innocent. Your father's family never liked me, and you know this. They've always wanted to get rid of me, and they've achieved that. I'm out of their hair and their kingdom, but I never thought that my own daughter from my womb would turn against me like this.

Tears streamed down my face - I had to make it believable. I hated lying to my daughter, but I had no other choice.

Nikiwe: I know that I'm not a saint, but I never killed your father. You have to believe me.

She seemed to be deep in thought. She rose from the sofa and gazed at me long and hard, until her eyes softened.

Kamva: I'm sorry about your miscarriage. I was looking forward to having a little brother, but it is what it is. I'll leave now, I don't want to be late.

She walked away, and I heaved a sigh.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I navigated to my room after the hot shower I had. A towel was wrapped around my naked self. I unlocked my room, and walked inside and found my cellphone ringing.

Me: Dimpho. Was she there?

Dimpho: No, I couldn't even be let in without family.

Me: So she's not at the hospital?

Dimpho: No, I spoke to the guards posted outside her mother's ward, and they say that she hasn't been in to see her mother today.

Me: I find that hard to believe. Thabile always made sure that she makes time to go and see her mother everyday.

Dimpho: I know. That's why I'm worried. Her phone is off.

Me: I think we need to file a missing person's report.

Dimpho: That's a good idea.

Me: I just hope that she's safe wherever she is.

Dimpho: Look, we'll talk later.

Me: Okay, bye.

I pursed my lips as worry and apprehension seeped into me.

Me: Where are you, Thabile?

I scrolled through my notifications, and saw a missed call from Thabile 30 minutes ago. I attempted to call her, but it didn't go through. I typed in a message to her. 'If you don't assure me that you're alright, Thabile, I'll go to the police.' I pressed send, and went to lotion my body and wear some comfy clothes. My phone beeped, indicating a message. 'I'm okay. I promise.'

I paced around the room, and typed in another message. 'How do I know that it's you?' There was no reply, and minutes later my phone rang with her

name.

Me: Thabile, I was worried about you. Where are you?

Thabi: I'm fine.

Me: You sound different. Are you sure everything is okay?

Thabi: It is. I'm just exhausted.

Me: Okay, so where are you?

Thabi: I can't tell you that, but I'm fine. I wanted to take a few days off away from everything.

Me: So you're not coming back anytime soon?

Thabi: I'll be back.

Me: What about school? Mid year exams are approaching.

Thabi: I know. Don't worry about me.

Me: Thabile, you're not convincing enough.

Thabi: Fine! I need to lay low a bit. You know that my father was murdered. I have a feeling that the same

people who killed him are after me. You're not going to be able to contact me for a while. They might use my number to track me.

Me: Okay, be safe and come back to us. Your mother needs you. Is she protected?

Thabi: I'd like to think so. Please don't involve the police.

Me: What you're asking of me is hard. The police will be able to help you.

Thabi: Just do as I ask.

Me: Okay.

The call ended abruptly, and I admitted some of my nerves were eased by hearing of her safety, but something just wasn't right.

Somikazi Nkosi

Things were slowly falling into place. It still hurt that I'd never see my father again, but I accepted that. Nhlakanipho was finally crowned. Senzokuhle was happy in his marriage with Kamva, and there was peace in my family with a little drama here and there. I clinked my flute of champagne with Lwando's glass of whisky.

Somi: To new beginnings.

Lwando: To new beginnings.

I took a sip of my gold liquid.

Somi: I'm proud of you. Such a big milestone at 37.

Lwando: I still can't believe it.

Somi: You deserve that position. No one is as hardworking as you. HOD of Mathematics. That's my best friend, everyone!

We laughed.

Lwando: It's surreal, Somikazi. Some teachers retire before reaching those positions.

Somi: Next, we're gunning for the principal's seat.

Lwando: I think I'm okay where I am.

We downed our liquor over a light chatter, and Mzi walked in, an envelope in his hand.

Mzi: I see you're having fun.

Somi: Finally he returns. A whole month, I didn't know where you were, Mzi. I don't know why you keep stalling the divorce.

Lwando: That's my cue to leave. Have a good night.

Lwando placed his glass on the coffee table.

Lwando: Mzi.

And after that acknowledgment, he was gone. Mzi threw the brown envelope on the table.

Mzi: And if you must know, I was not stalling. I had business to attend to.

Somi: For a whole month. Yeah right.

Mzi: I've signed the papers. You can take them to be processed.

I rose to my feet, and sighed.

Somi: Thank you.

Mzi: You can keep the house. I'll be back soon to collect my things.

I reached for the envelope, and tore it into half.

Mzi: What are you doing, Somikazi?

Somi: I love you, Mzi. I want us to work out things.

Mzi: So you think that this is all a game to you, Somikazi?

Somi: Can't I change my mind, Mzi? I love you, and I don't want us to give up.

Mzi: I'll be gone for a week. We'll talk about this when I come back.

Somi: And you think that's a good idea? What am I supposed to think? You could be gone for the week with another one of your mistresses? How am I supposed to trust when you do this?

Mzi: It's business. And this is what I'm talking about. You want us to go back to a marriage that doesn't have trust? I love you, and I know that I'm the one who messed up. Like I said, we'll talk about this when I get back.

Somi: That's your problem right there, Mzi. You

apologise. You say that you're changing, but your words are never backed up by actions. Your commitment, I don't even want to talk about that. I don't know what I was thinking. I thought that I might give us another chance, but sometimes love is not enough.

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Good afternoon, I hope that all of you have been good.

32

Simnikiwe Mkhize

The waitress came again.

Her: Would you like anything, mam?

Nikiwe: I'm still waiting for someone, but a glass of white wine would be appreciated.

She nodded, and trod away. I kept checking my phone. Kamva had agreed to meet up with me, but she was late. 30 minutes late, and I was starting to think that she was not coming. My heart plummeted to the floor. I wanted my daughter back. I kept waiting, with the little hope I had left running out, I was even served my wine but still no sign of Kamva.

I took out a few notes from my handbag for the bill, but Kamva's voice stopped me.

Kamva: I'm so sorry I'm late. I hope I didn't keep you waiting for long.

Nikiwe: You kept me waiting for close to an hour. I know that you're angry with me, but I'm still your mother. This behaviour was unacceptable. You could have told me that you don't want to meet

instead of having me look like a fool in front of everyone.

Kamva: I'm sorry.

I couldn't help the hint of annoyance lacing my tone. I softened at her apology. She sat down, and placed her clutch on the table.

Nikiwe: Do you want anything? What do you want to eat?

Kamva: We'll order after we talk about everything.

Nikiwe: Okay.

Kamva: I've had time to think about everything and I believe you, ma.

Nikiwe: What are you saying to me, Kamva?

A small smile played on my lips.

Kamva: I believe you. Everything you said to me makes sense. If anything, I'm starting to believe that the Mkhizes don't care about anyone else but themselves.

Nikiwe: I'm glad that you believe me. I was scared that I'd lose my only daughter to lies.

Kamva: But ma, do you think they would go to such lengths to get rid of you? Even blaming Baba's death on you?

Nikiwe: You can't put it past them. That village almost killed me and Zenani. If I was really guilty, Kamva, don't you think that I would still be in jail?

Kamva: I hear you. And I really missed our mother and daughter bond.

Nikiwe: It's never too late to work on that. We still have each other. Don't let lies break us apart.

Kamva: I won't. Not again. You're the only person who has ever been there.

We rose to our feet, and shared a warm embrace. It

felt good having my daughter in my arms.

Kamva: We should order. I'm craving some meat.

I pushed the guilt aside, and flagged down a waiter.

Senzokuhle Ngubane

I was going through some files for the day, and the door opening ceased my reading. I looked up to see my PA. She neared my desk.

Senzo: Tshegofatso, is there a meeting that I perhaps have forgotten about?

Tshego: No, sir. I was hoping to talk to you.

I gestured for her to take a seat.

Senzo: I'm all ears.

Tshego: I don't know how to put this, but I wanted to thank you for everything that you've done for me. You've treated me more than an employee, and I'm thankful for that because it gave me and others a safe and comfortable space to work in.

She slid an envelope across my desk.

Tshego: This is my resignation letter. I've been offered a job elsewhere, and I think that it is time I spread my wings.

Senzo: I can't say that I won't miss you, because I will. You made my job easier and practically organized my life. It will be sad to see you go, but you're right. You have to spread your wings and I wish you the best of luck.

Tshego: But I'll officially leave when you've found a

new PA. I've already asked HR to alert the public of the vacant post.

Senzo: Okay, try not to limit other applications by asking for experience.

Tshego: I'm afraid that's impossible. There are a lot of people without jobs out there. Listing experience as a requirement for the post makes it easier for us. We receive hundreds of CVs everyday.

Senzo: I hear you. Find the top 5 candidates for the post and I'll interview them personally.

She stood up.

Tshego: Noted. Let me get back to work.

Senzo: And order a bouquet of roses for my wife and have them delivered to my address.

Tshego: And the card?

Senzo: Just my name.

She nodded.

Senzo: Thank you, Bless.

She walked out, and I returned back to my paperwork. My cellphone rang, pulling me away from my work. A smile appeared on my face.

Senzo: So how did lunch with your mother go?

Kamva: Not even a greeting, but I fixed things with my mother.

Senzo: That's great. She's the only parent you have left.

Kamva: Thank you for talking me into meeting her halfway. She was trying, and I never gave her a chance to explain.

Senzo: I'm glad you did.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Dimpho dragged me into the library.

Me: This is the first time you actually talk of wanting to study.

Dimpho: Don't start with me.

I scanned the library. There was nobody.

Me: Where is the lady who usually signs us in?

Dimpho: There is a surprise waiting for you. I wish Thabile was here. We'd have a good laugh at your expense.

Me: What are you saying, Dimpho?

Dimpho: Just enjoy, and save me some chocolate.

I looked at her with confusion lacing my features. She laughed, and retreated until her laughter was no longer heard. As I walked further, there was a trail of white roses' petals on the carpet, and I followed it. I navigated through the many shelves of books, until my eyes drank in a beautiful scenery. In all his glory, Mpilo was rooted by a blanket with a picnic basket and two pillows. Petals were sprinkled around, and my heart soared at the sight.

Me: What is the meaning of this, Mpilo?

He came forward, and the fluttering in my stomach started again. I loved this.

Me: Please tell me I'm not dreaming.

Mpilo: This is as real as it gets.

He took my hand in his and led me to the blanket. He plopped me down on one pillow, and he sat on other one.

Me: This is beautiful.

Mpilo: I'm glad you like it.

My smile disappeared.

Me: What does this mean, Mpilo?

Mpilo: I thought it's always been obvious that I liked you, but I didn't want to tell you until after the trial.

Me: I don't know about this.

Mpilo: Shhh. Stop with your negative thoughts, and go with the flow. We're here to enjoy ourselves.

Me: Mpilo, you don't understand.

I sighed, as I covered my face with my hands.

Mpilo: Buhle, this is simple. If you don't like this, tell me and I'll leave.

Me: Noo! That's not what I meant.

Mpilo: You're thinking of Bandile.

Me: Mpilo, I don't want your name to be ruined because of me. That video is still out, even though people have stopped talking about it.

Mpilo: That doesn't define you, Buhle.

Me: Let's not spoil the mood by talking about that.

He nodded, and rummaged through the basket.

Me: So do I need to ask how you managed to get the library closed?

Mpilo: Let's just say that I have friends in high places.

I shook my head with a smile.

Me: Thank you for doing this.

He smiled, and sprayed a strawberry with whipped cream bringing it to my mouth. My heart was content with this moment.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I trod to the lounge, and flung myself on the sofa. Exhaustion hounded my bones. Zenani was busy on her laptop.

Zenani: I cooked. Your food is in the oven.

Nikiwe: Thank you, but I'm full. I can't stomach any more food.

Zenani: Okay.

Nikiwe: What are you busy with?

She lifted her gaze from her laptop and settled it on me.

Zenani: You could call it something like the dark web. Black market. It is so encrypted that even the police can't penetrate the walls.

Nikiwe: Okay, it sounds dodgy. What are you doing there?

Zenani: There is a sale for diamonds worth around 5 million.

Nikiwe: Don't tell me that you want to purchase the diamonds. Where are you even going to get to the money?

Zenani: Don't be silly. I'm not going to buy them. I'm going to find a way to steal them, but there is a problem.

Nikiwe: And what is the problem?

Zenani: The seller is anonymous. The system is to ensure that the seller is unknown. Their identity will only be revealed to the buyer. We deal with dangerous people. It is to make sure that we're safe.

Nikiwe: Okay, so how are you going to find the identity of the buyer?

Zenani: I'll lure them out, or I'll ask Sifiso to crack the walls and perhaps pinpoint their identity. It's going to be very hard to do that, and time-consuming.

Nikiwe: Okay, I don't understand how that works, but when you do find the seller, and manage to steal the diamonds, what are you going to do with them?

Zenani: I have a friend that owns a diamond mine. I'm sure he'll appreciate them.

Nikiwe: Why go so much trouble? Black market shit?

Zenani: We don't have licences to trade the minerals. Think of it like human organs sold on the black market. The authorities can't know of that.

Nikiwe: That's some complicated shit. It sounds like

things that can get you killed, Zenani.

She closed her laptop.

Zenani: So how did it go with Kamva?

Nikiwe: We fixed things. I'm so glad that I have my daughter back.

Zenani: That's like music to my ears. Remember I asked you to convince Kamva to stay in her marriage. It's time to collect our dues.

Nikiwe: What are you talking about, Zenani?

Zenani: Since Kamva and Senzokuhle never signed a prenup - they're married in community of property so Kamva is entitled to 50 percent of his assets.

Nikiwe: I don't want to know where you're going with this. I just fixed things with my daughter, and I'm not going to ruin things.

Zenani: She'll get over it. All we need to do is make Kamva and Senzokuhle sign divorce papers

unknowingly, so that 50% of Senzokuhle's assets are transferred to Kamva, and we make Kamva sign papers to transfer the ownership of the assets to us.

Nikiwe: I thought I was evil and conniving, but you take the cup.

Zenani: I'm gunning for that company of his.

Nikiwe: As tempting as that sounds, I don't want my daughter to be touched. Leave her out of your games, and stick to the diamonds.

Zenani: Where do you think I get the money to live big, Nikiwe? I got to keep the money coming in.

Nikiwe: I hear you, but I'm not going to scam my daughter.

Zenani: Think about it. Let me call Sifiso and tell him that I have a job for him.

She walked away, leaving me shaking my head.

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Buhlenkosi Malinga

We were dismissed from my last class for the day, and I packed my books into my backpack and students filed out of the door. I walked out, only to have Dimpho grasp my wrist and pull me to the direction of res.

Dimpho: And how did it go yesterday?

She let go of my hand, and I rolled my eyes.

Me: You could have called or asked me on the phone.

Dimpho: Did you save me some chocolate like I asked?

I started smiling, the memories of yesterday hitting me tenfold.

Me: I enjoyed myself.

Dimpho: See, that wasn't so hard.

We plopped down on a staircase.

Dimpho: Now tell me, are you guys officially a thing?

Me: Dimpho, you move too fast. We were just enjoying each other's company. Nothing hectic.

Dimpho: So you're going to tell me that you don't like him?

Me: I do like him. A lot.

Dimpho: So what are you waiting for?

Me: What do you mean?

Dimpho: If it was me, I'd have rode that dick a long time ago.

I gasped, my eyes widening.

Me: You're too explicit. I don't think another relationship is what I need at the moment. A lot has happened in the past months.

Dimpho: I understand, but are you really going to allow your past to hinder your future? We move, Buhle.

Me: But we can't move without healing. Dimpho, that video is still out there. Mpilo might say that it doesn't define who I am-

Dimpho: And he's right. Your mistake was putting your trust in a boy who would never be a man and that's not your fault.

Me: I don't think you're hearing me, Dimpho. That video will still be there when I turn 30. I may find a way to have it buried on the internet, but it will always be in my head. I have never been so humiliated like that in my life. How long until Mpilo

realises that I'm not worth it? I may as well be a prostitute. Everyone has seen me naked.

Tears streamed down my face, and Dimpho scooted closer to me, and enfolded me in her arms.

Dimpho: It doesn't help feeling sorry for yourself, Buhle. You're bigger than that video. You're much more than your past. You lost your parents, but you pulled through. This is nothing compared to the loss of people you loved. Start by loving yourself all over again. Respecting yourself, because no one will give you what you haven't given yourself. Accept all that has happened and pave a way for a future filled with blessings.

I wanted to let go of all the pain and hurt. To accept the past, and move forward.

Dimpho: There is a lot to be grateful for.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I reserved my car from the parking lot of the mall, and eased down on the road with my phone on loudspeaker as Somi spoke on the line.

Somi: I think I'm depressed.

I shook my head.

Kamva: And why is that?

Somi: I thought things between me and Mzi would get back to normal, but I'm still in this big house alone.

Kamva: You brought that unto yourself. Mzi gave you

what you wanted, but you tore the papers. And then you come to me, and complain.

Somi: I know, but I still love him. I can't let him go.

Kamva: I'll never understand your relationship with Mzi. He was gone for a whole month, and now another week. He doesn't have a problem letting go of you, Somi but you do.

Somi: I know. I'm still debating whether I'm sad or depressed.

Kamva: You're drinking, aren't you?

Somi: I'm on my third bottle... I think I'm sad because I know the reason behind the sadness.

Kamva: Are you sure you'll be alright? I can come there if you want because this doesn't sound like something you can deal with on your own.

Somi: I'll be fine. I'm used to it, but if you do come, don't forget to bring along some wine. I might be running out.

The line suddenly went dead, and I sighed,

thoughtless. I drove past the houses in the suburb I lived in, until I reached home. I dismounted the car, and handed the keys to the guard who was quickly by my side.

Kamva: Bring in the groceries.

He nodded, and I paced to the manor. At the threshold of the entrance, I scanned the room and saw Sensokuhle overlooking me at the top of the staircase. A smile adorned his face, and confusion hounded me when my eyes darted to a sheet concealing one of his paintings hung on the wall behind him.

I ascended the stairs.

Senzo: I have a surprise for you.

He engulfed my hand with his when I reached the top.

Senzo: Do the honors.

He gestured to the sheet with a curtsey. I smiled at his silliness.

Kamva: I should remove it?

He nodded, and I stepped forward to take down the sheet. My eyes drank in the painting adorning the wall. My eyes watered, and I fell in love with my husband again. My hand trailed on the canvas.

Kamva: You painted me?

Senzo: Do you like it?

Kamva: I love it. Thank you so much, Senzo. It's so beautiful. When did you even get time to do all this?

Senzo: I had all the time in the world.

I blushed, as my orbs lingered on the strokes of paint that blended in together to form a beautiful, and detailed artwork of my face.

Kamva: I love you. Thank you for doing this.

Senzo: And I love you too.

We found ourselves lost in a passionate kiss.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Zenani came and threw herself on the sofa. I closed the magazine I was passing time with and looked at her.

Zenani: So have you thought about what we talked about yesterday?

Nikiwe: I told you that we're not going to play games with my daughter.

Zenani: You've always been like this, Nikiwe. You fail to see the bigger picture. We're doing this for Kamvelihle. I want us to build an empire.

Nikiwe: You're not doing this for Kamva. You do realise that this is not only going to ruin Kamva and Sensokuhle's marriage, it's going to ruin our relationship.

Zenani: Fine, I'll back off but do let me know when you change your mind.

Nikiwe: Good. And the diamonds, how is your plan coming along?

She smirked, a devious glint sparkling in her globes.

Zenani: I've told Sifiso to abort mission. I've thought of a new plan.

Nikiwe: And what is the plan?

Zenani: I've set the bar too high. I'm willing to pay 6 million for the diamonds.

I furrowed my brows in confusion.

Nikiwe: I thought you don't even have 5 million, but you're offering to pay 6?

Zenani: That's what I want them to think, and I'll strike.

Nikiwe: You're going to lure out the seller?

She nodded.

Zenani: I've requested a meeting. We'll see how everything goes.

Nikiwe: But how exactly are you going to steal the diamonds?

Zenani: Don't worry.

Nikiwe: You're so secretive, Zenani. I'm still wanting for you to tell me about the plan you have for Buhle.

Zenani: All in good time. Let's execute the plan for the diamonds first, and we'll get to Buhle later.

Noxolo Ndebele

Khethiwe came to sit next to me on the couch, agitated.

Noxolo: You look like you want to kill someone.

Khethiwe: I'm waiting for that niece of yours. She can't be out this late.

Noxolo: Relax, she'll be home.

Khethiwe: Noxolo, Anna is in matric. She can't afford

to be on the streets this late.

I nodded, and returned my gaze to the TV.

Khethiwe: So have you found a buyer yet?

Noxolo: I've had a few requests, but the one that stood out the most offered me 6 meter.

Khethiwe: Yoh, people have money to waste out there.

Noxolo: The person asked for a meeting, but it will be according to my terms.

Khethiwe: So did you have someone check out the diamonds?

Noxolo: Yes, and he confirmed that they're real.

Anna walked in the house seconds later. Khethiwe stared at her.

Khethiwe: You better have a good reason why you're home so late.

Anna: I was at study group. I'm sorry I didn't let you know.

Khethiwe: I hope that you were not with the boy you call a boyfriend. He's for the streets, Anna. You can do so much better.

Anna: I'll be in my room.

She walked away.

Noxolo: What was that about?

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34

Senzokuhle Ngubane

I walked into my office to find one of the candidates already seated. Her phone was pressed to her ear.

Her: You can't keep asking me to do things as if we're married. We're not married, so I don't have to.

I cleared my throat, and rounded my desk. I went to stand near the glass that spanned from the ceiling to the floor, gazing at the activity outside.

Her: I need to go. We'll talk later.

I went to take a seat.

Senzo: Sometimes relationships fail because you're not putting your all.

Amanda: Well, sometimes you can't perform wife duties in a girlfriend position.

Senzo: Fair enough. Let's get to it.

I scanned her CV, and she gave me basic information about her background.

Senzo: Amanda, I see that you're fresh out of university.

Amanda: My graduation ceremony was a month ago.

Senzo: I like what I see but if you can clear up some things for me.

Amanda: Not a problem.

Senzo: So it's important for us to do background checks on people before we hire them, and I've come across something that doesn't sit well with me.

She shifted in her chair uncomfortably.

Amanda: And what is that, sir?

Senzo: You've been a troll on social media. I can't exaggerate enough the importance of the youth not posting things that might cost them their future. You tweeted some hurtful words against a rape victim and that is equivalent to cyberbullying.

Amanda: That's true, and I'm not going to deny it. The thing is that my older brother was accused of rape, and weeks later we discovered that the girl was lying. But the damage was already done and his reputation was tarnished. I didn't want the same thing to happen to my younger brother. It felt like history was repeating itself. I know that's not an excuse for my actions, but that's where it all stemmed from.

Senzo: I want to give you a chance despite all that. If only people understood that whatever you decide to post to the public, may it be a joke or dark humor as some individuals call it, it may come back to bite you.

Amanda: I understand, sir.

Senzo: You've gotten the job. I have your contract drafted. I'll give you today to read through it and if

you're happy with everything, you'll report to work tomorrow.

She couldn't contain her excitement when I slid the paperwork to her.

Amanda: Thank you so much, sir. You have no idea what this means to me!

I smiled, and called Tshegofatso to come to my office.

Amanda: You won't regret this.

Senzo: I hope so.

Tshego walked in.

Tshego: You called me?

Senzo: She'll be taking your place. Amanda, Bless here will take you through everything.

Tshego: Amanda, please give me a minute with the boss. I'll find you outside.

Amanda nodded, and exited my office.

Tshego: Are you sure about her?

Senzo: Everyone deserves a chance.

Tshego: As long as you're sure, because there were a lot of candidates who were suitable and experienced for the job than her.

Senzo: That will be all.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I turned towards Zenani.

Nikiwe: I've thought about it.

Zenani: You've thought about what?

Nikiwe: Kamva and her marriage. It's a good idea, and it's going to make us money.

Zenani: The Ngubanes are the third richest family in South Africa. Of course, we're going to make a killing.

Nikiwe: But we can only do it if we manage to bring Kamva on board.

Zenani: You were doing well until you mentioned letting in your daughter on the plan. She loves the man. There is no way she's going to agree.

Nikiwe: But we're not going to go behind her back, and ruin her marriage.

Zenani: You've grown soft, Nikiwe. Where is my sister who had balls bigger than the whole male population?

Nikiwe: Zenani, you don't understand. What's the

point of making all this money? Kamva is the only family we have. You say we're doing this for her, what's the use if we push her away? I had the worst time when I spent weeks without talking to my child. She was angry with me but we fixed things. I don't want to ruin things with her again because this time, she'll never forgive me.

Kamva: Ruin things with who, ma?

My heart jumped out of my chest when I heard Kamva's voice.

Zenani: How long have you been standing there, Kamva?

Kamva: I just got here. It seems that I interrupted a serious conversation.

Nikiwe: We were talking about you. Remember what we talked about before you got married to Senzokuhle.

Kamva: We talked about a lot of things.

Nikiwe: You said that I should let you know when I come up with a plan to get you out of the marriage, and I have.

Zenani eyed me, mouthing no but I ignored her.

Kamva: There is no need for that. A lot has changed. I'm happy in my marriage.

Nikiwe: You know that I'd never let you down, right?

Kamva: I know. Let me go to the kitchen. I hope you have some leftovers from last night. You know that I suck in that department.

She was already heading towards the kitchen.

Nikiwe: I thought you all have a chef.

Kamva: I missed aunty's food.

Zenani sported a serious look.

Zenani: What was that, Nikiwe? Have you lost your mind? You wanted to tell her our plan?

Nikiwe: I was testing the waters. Relax. We're going to have to find another way to work around this. If we're going to do this, it can't lead back to us. She can't know that we're behind it.

Zenani: We'll think of something.

Nikiwe: We'll need to find someone else we can transfer the assets to. Someone we can trust.

Thabile Mampane

I pounded my fist on the door. I wanted to cry. I wanted to go home. I wanted to see my mother.

Thabi: Please open this door.

I paced around the room, sighing dejectedly. There was no source of light stowing into this room I was kept in.

Thabi: Please let me out.

I went to sit on the bed I've been occupying for the past few days. Different kinds of emotions surged through me.

Thabi: If you're going to kill me, **JUST FUCKING DO IT ALREADY!**

Silence engulfed me. I buried my head in my knees, rocking back and forth. I thought of my father and my mother. The door opened, and a group of men

filed inside. I looked at them with fear.

Thabi: Please tell me why I'm here.

The man sporting a suit spoke up - he seemed familiar. The others were in black vests - their bulging muscles exposed, and jeans.

Him: Leave us.

Two men trod away, and they were only two left.

I raked my head for a name. This man was familiar. I rose from the bed.

Thabi: You're that man who hit on me a while back at a club.

Him: Is that so?

Thabi: What's your name again? Mzi. Yes. Mzi.

Mzi: You have a very good memory.

He fixed his tie.

Thabi: So you're just a thug in a suit? Tell me, what am I doing here?

Mzi: Were you never taught patience, my darling?

Thabi: I want to go home. If you're the ones that killed my father, why am I still alive? Why haven't you killed me?

Mzi: Because we're actually the opposite.

Thabi: Are you going to tell me, or I must keep guessing?

Mzi: We were business associates of your father. You're seeking refuge in one of his biggest labs.

Thabi: You're not making sense.

Mzi: We have an idea who killed your father, but we'll

reveal that information at a later stage. We're equipped to seek revenge but it is all up to you now.

Thabi: I don't understand a word you're saying, Mzi.

Mzi: Do I have to spell out everything for you? Your father ran a drug empire. This is one of his warehouses where everything is done. Seeing as that he's gone, you'll have to take over. We've brought you here to step in your father's shoes.

Thabi: That can't be true. What do you mean that my father ran a drug empire? You mean he was dealing drugs?

Mzi: That's what I'm saying. This is all yours.

Thabi: And now you're saying I must be a criminal like the rest of you? That's never going to happen. Gao swabe? Lying about the dead? Let me go. My mother will agree with me that this is all bullshit.

Mzi: We'll give you time to think about everything, but remember that this is your life now, Thabile. This is my brother, Qaphela. He'll show you the ropes and soon, you'll run one of the biggest drug empires.

Thabi: You're mad. I'm still schooling, Mzi. I don't want to be here.

Mzi: Don't worry, we'll ask the university for your exam timetable, and we'll fly you down to Joburg everytime you write. I'll be back tomorrow. Hopefully you'd have written down everything you need.

Thabi: Where the hell am I? You do know that this is kidnapping. Let me go, and we'll forget that this ever happened.

Mzi walked away, leaving me in my pool of shock. His brother tossed a transparent plastic bag to the bed. It looked like clothing.

Qaphela: Training will begin in a week. You have big shoes to fill. Let's hope you're not going to disappoint your father.

He also left me, and locked the door. I banged the door again.

Thabi: Is this how you're going to treat your boss' daughter? IDIOTS!

I cussed, hoping to wake up from this nightmare.

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35

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I walked into Senzokuhle's office with a paper bag containing seafood. I saw a girl standing behind him, scanning through paperwork, I assumed. I cleared my throat, and the girl rounded the desk.

Senzo: Baby.

Kamva: I thought I should bring you lunch.

Senzo: It's okay to say that you missed me.

Kamva: Flattery won't get you anywhere.

I went to take a seat.

Senzo: Baby, meet my new PA. And Amanda, this is my lovely wife.

I smiled, and extended my hand. Amanda shook my hand, with a faint smile.

Amanda: Nice to meet you, mam.

Kamva: Likewise.

Amanda: I'll leave. Enjoy.

She exited the office, and I turned my attention back to my husband, hauling out the food from the paper bag.

Senzo: Thank you for being thoughtful. I'm famished.

Kamva: I know how you get when you're working. Time passes you by easily.

Senzo: That's true, but am I really in the mood for sushi and prawns? You know I love home cooked meals.

Kamva: Are you complaining?

Senzo: No, I'd have appreciated some steak though.

Kamva: You happen to be the one who introduced me to seafood. Now I can't get enough of it.

Senzo: I remember the first time I ordered you prawns on our honeymoon. When the platter was served, you looked ready to vomit.

I chuckled.

Kamva: Do you blame me? It's not very pleasing to the eye, but the taste tells a very different story.

We munched on the food.

Kamva: So your new PA?

Senzo: What about her?

Kamva: She seems like a nice girl, but I don't like her.

Senzo: So do you want me to fire her?

Amusement danced in his orbs.

Kamva: No, but she mustn't get too comfortable.

Senzo: Is that jealousy speaking?

Kamva: No, but she likes you.

He narrowed his eyes and shook his head.

Senzo: You're seeing things, Kamva.

Kamva: Trust me, as a woman, I know these things but she's not going to be a problem.

Senzo: You're reading too much into things. It was her first day here.

Kamva: I was just saying. You can deny it all you want, but I know what I'm talking about.

Senzo: Well, it's a pity because I only have eyes for one woman and she's staring at me right now.

I blushed profusely.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Nikiwe: Exchange only works in kidnapping and ransom situations. I don't understand how this is going to work.

Zenani: The seller said that we're going to do things according to his terms. It seems that they don't want their identity to be revealed. So I'll be texted a location where I'll have to drop off the money. At that place, I'll also find the diamonds waiting for me.

Nikiwe: Not a good idea. You don't even have the money. What if they decide to double cross you, Zenani? I mean that's the circle of people you associate with. They can't be trusted.

Zenani: I know, but it's a risk I'm willing to take.

I shook my head.

Nikiwe: Okay, I hear you. When will the exchange take place?

Zenani: They'll let me know.

Nikiwe: What are you going to do about the money?

Zenani: Don't worry, I have a plan.

Nikiwe: Just don't go and get yourself killed. I think

you should send somebody else in your place.

Zenani: I'm going to do this myself, Nikiwe. Trust me, I know what I'm doing.

Nikiwe: I hope so, because I'm not ready to lose you.

Zenani: I'm glad to know that I'm loved.

She pulled me in for a hug, and wiggled my body. I smiled with a roll of my eyes.

Nikiwe: That's enough.

She laughed, and let go of me.

Zenani: So have you thought of how we're going to take ownership of Senzokuhle's assets?

Nikiwe: I'd like to think that Senzo is smart, and he wouldn't sign anything without reading it. So to have him sign the divorce papers unknowingly, it wouldn't

work. We have to shake up their marriage. Push them to divorce.

Zenani: It could go both ways. If they initiate the divorce, Senzo could change their marriage status and have Kamva sign a prenup.

Nikiwe: I know, but it's our best shot.

Zenani: How are you going to mess up their marriage?

Nikiwe: Leave that to me. I'll think of something. And if everything goes according to plan, and Kamva obtains 50% of his husband's assets after the divorce, we would not need to find someone to transfer the assets to. We just need to keep Kamva close.

She nodded thoughtfully.

Nikiwe: I hate doing this to my only child, but we got to hustle. Love will leave you stranded and with nothing. Look where I am. Where is Mvelo? Dead. He

can't do anything for me from his grave. He couldn't stop his family.

Zenani: That's because you killed him.

I clicked my tongue.

Nikiwe: What I'm trying to say is that you can never know with men. Today they love you. Tomorrow they don't. It's only a matter of time before Sensokuhle messes up. It's in their nature to mess up.

Zenani: We're doing this for Kamva.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Mpilo parked his car on a parking space next to a park surrounding by high trees. When I scanned it

properly, I saw two people playing on a swing. They weren't many people. He rounded the car, and came to open my door. I clambered down and thanked him.

Me: So what are we doing here?

Mischief glinted in his eyes. He loosened his tie.

Mpilo: Turn around.

I turned around, and I felt him wrapping his tie around my head, concealing my eyes.

Me: What are you doing? I hope you're not planning to kidnap me.

Mpilo: Don't give me ideas.

Laughter rumbled out of our mouths. He led me into

oblivion. I didn't where he was taking me, but surprisingly I trusted him.

Mpilo: Are you ready?

Me: Where have you taken me?

Mpilo: You can remove the blindfold.

I unwrapped the tie, and my eyes drank an absolute act of simplicity and romance. A genuine smile crept up on my face and happiness seeped into me. There was five children in ragged clothes who each held a A3 paper with writing in bold inked in colourful colours. I read the first four who were standing up, holding their posters.

Me: WILL YOU BE MY

My eyes moved to the cute girl in front, planted on her butt on the grass.

Me: GIRLFRIEND?

I looked at Mpilo, as tears gathered in my eyes.

Me: This definitely needs a memory.

I snapped a picture of them, and Mpilo came to me.

Mpilo: So what do you say?

I hugged him, as the butterflies in my stomach exploded.

Me: I'd love to be your girlfriend.

We pulled away from the hug, and a huge grin

sported his face.

Mpilo: I'll take it as slow as you want me to.

I nodded, and he went to the children. I still couldn't believe my luck.

He crouched down before them.

Mpilo: He said yes. I couldn't have done this without you guys.

They shared his excitement.

Mpilo: Please be here tomorrow. You're going to love your new home. I don't want to see you on the streets again.

The taller one - a male and the oldest I assumed - stepped forward.

Him: We're fine where we are. Being on the streets keeps us together. Going to an orphanage would mean that we would be separated and we don't want that. We did this out of the goodness of our hearts, and we're happy that she said yes.

My heart melted.

Mpilo: Are you sure?

Him: The streets are our home. We're happy.

A lone tear fell.

Mpilo: Okay, but I still want you to come here tomorrow. I have a surprise for you.

Anna Ndebele

The nightfall blanketed over us. I was leaning on the bonnet of Jozi's car. My boyfriend passed me the joint. Music softly blared. I pulled a long drag of the weed, and blow out the smoke. It felt soothing.

Cindy, a friend of mine and Jozi were quarrelling in front of us.

Jozi: Cindy, don't you want to join us?

Cindy: I don't have time for your nonsense, Jozi.

Jozi: When did you start to become such a bore?

Cindy: Relax, Jozi. You're not worth breaking rules for. My parents come first. Atleast they won't cheat

on me with someone else's daughter.

Jozi clicked his tongue.

Anna: Friend, is everything okay between you two?

Cindy: He's taking me for a fool, A. I don't have time for him.

Jozi: You're hurting my feelings, baby.

He said with a smirk.

Cindy: I'm not risking my future for you anymore, Jozi. I'm done trying my best to make you happy only for you to go and fuck the next skirt.

Shakes: Heavy.

I playfully hit his arm, a small smile on my face.

Anna: It's not funny.

Cindy: A, I'll cover for you. But if your mother calls mine to confirm whether you really slept at my house, you're on your own.

Anna: Thank you.

Cindy: Don't forget the assignment for Life Sciences. Tomorrow, it's the submission date.

I cursed.

Cindy: Don't tell me that you forgot about it.

Anna: I'll ask for an extension.

Cindy: The way you're going, A, it doesn't look like you want to pass your matric. I do hope you know what you're doing.

Anna: I'll be fine.

Cindy: I'll see you tomorrow at school. Let me go home.

She came to hug me.

Jozi: I'll walk you home.

Cindy didn't protest and they walked away together.

I passed the joint to Shakes.

Anna: There's something I've been meaning to tell you.

Shakes: Shoot.

I took a deep breath, preparing to tell him what has been eating me up for the past two weeks.

Anna: I'm pregnant.

He coughed, choking on the weed. I waited for him to calm down.

Anna: I've been experiencing the symptoms for a while, and I decided to purchase three home pregnancy tests. They were all positive. So I went to the clinic, and found out I was really pregnant. I opted for an abortion but I couldn't go through with it because I've passed the stage of having a medical abortion.

Shakes: Does your mother know?

Anna: I'm going to have to tell her. I'll start showing soon, and I can't go for a backdoor abortion. I heard that they are very dangerous.

Shakes: We're in this together, A.

Anna: Shakes, you don't understand. I can't have this baby. You do realise that by the time I reach the last trimester, I'll be writing my finals.

My voice cracked, as tears started streaming down my face. Shakes enveloped me in his arms.

Shakes: Everything will be okay. Tomorrow I'll go and have a word with your mother.

Anna: My mother doesn't like you, Shakes. I don't think it's a good idea. I don't even want to think of the disappointment on my mother and aunt's face when they hear this.

Shakes: Shhhhh. Don't cry. Shakes will handle it.

He rubbed my back, and my sobs ceased.

Jozi: And then?

Shakes: Jozi, please drop us at home.

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Buhlenkosi Malinga

Our lunch was served, and I dugged in, exhaustion hounding me from the busy morning we had.

Me: I still can't forget how those kids' faces looked when we walked with them in the mall, and said that they could buy anything. They were so happy, and you made them happy. You're a very good man, Mpilo.

Mpilo: Thank you. I try.

He smiled, and we continued eating in a comfortable silence. I found myself counting my lucky stars for Mpilo. He was such a gentleman.

Our lunch was interrupted. I looked up to see Amanda.

Amanda: I see that you're both cosy.

Mpilo: What can we help you with, mam?

Amanda: I'm a very good friend of Buhlenkosi. I'm surprised that she didn't tell me that she's found a new man.

I narrowed my eyes.

Me: You must be mistaken. I only have two friends. Thabile and Dimpho.

She curved her lips into a fake smile and turned towards Mpilo.

Amanda: I must say that you've chosen good this time. If anything, your girl is good from jumping from one man to another.

Anger blazed in Mpilo's eyes.

Amanda: Opening her legs, and exposing her private part to the whole world.

Me: Mpilo, don't.

He let go of her wrist.

Mpilo: This better be the last time you disrespect me and my girlfriend. I'll sue you for defamation of character.

A few heads popped in our direction.

Amanda: Good luck with that, Mr Lawyer. Everything I said is nothing but the truth. Oh, and please tell Thabile that I want to talk to her. My calls aren't

going through.

Me: Maybe that's because she doesn't want to talk to you.

She left us in peace, and I drank in Mpilo's clenched jaw.

Mpilo: Are you okay?

Me: I'm fine, Mpilo. I don't take anything Amanda says to heart. She's a piece of work.

Mpilo: I don't know where she gets off thinking that she can come and disrespect us like that.

Me: Thank you for standing up for me.

Mpilo: Your value doesn't decrease based on someone's inability to see your worth. I want you with all your flaws.

My heart soared at his words. He smiled, and we continued eating. Amanda was really a job and a half

but I couldn't let her ruin this moment.

Narrated

Shakes rubbed his hands together, sweating lacing his forehead. He didn't know how he would share the news of Anna's pregnancy with her family. He pounded his fist on the ajar door, but there was no answer. He knocked again, but nothing. He walked inside, scanning the area.

Shakes: Hello?

He spoke softly.

He heard voices, and followed the source.

Khethiwe and Noxolo conversed in the bedroom.

Noxolo: I've kept the diamonds safely in the house.

Shakes' eyes popped when he heard the mention of diamonds.

Khethiwe: Do you think it's a good idea?

Noxolo: We're the only ones who know about the diamonds.

Khethiwe: I hear you. When do you want the exchange to take place?

Noxolo: This weekend.

Khethiwe: So in a few days, we'll be 6 million richer.

Shock swam through Shakes and he returned to the sitting room, hauling out his cellphone and dialled

his father.

Shakes: Tyma, I think I might have found the solution to our problems.

Him: What do you mean?

Shakes: We'll finally be able to pay off that loanshark and get him off our backs and have money to make our lives better.

Him: I hope you're not talking about going into crime.

Shakes: I'm coming home. I'll explain everything to you.

Him: Okay, buy me some beers on your way home.

Khethiwe and Noxolo trod to the sitting room, and were surprised to see an intruder in their home.

Khethiwe: And then you? What are you doing here?

Shakes' heart drummed in his chest, and hung up.

Noxolo: Who let you in because I don't remember anyone of us inviting you in?

Shakes turned around, and looked at the two sisters, scowling.

Shakes: I'm sorry. I was looking for Anna.

Noxolo: Anna is still at school.

Khethiwe: You see what I was talking about, Noxolo. These boys have no respect for anyone. He wants to recruit my daughter to be a dropout like him.

Noxolo: We'll let Anna know that you were here. What's your name?

Shakes: I go by Shakes.

Noxolo: Are you my niece's boyfriend?

Shakes: I'm sorry, but I need to go. My father is

waiting for me. Have a good day.

Shakes slithered off, and let out a sigh of relief.

Thabile Mampane

I wore the boots hurriedly as Qaphela came and led me somewhere. I kept scanning my surroundings for a way to escape but there seemed to be guards everywhere with guns.

Qaphela: I'm going to teach you your father's favourite rule.

I rolled my eyes, as he kept pulling me.

Thabi: You're hurting me.

Qaphela: I'm not going to treat you like an egg just because you're your father's daughter. We're here to work, not to play.

He led me to a room whereby a woman was tied to a chair. I walked closer to her, and the ropes dugged into her skin.

Thabi: What is going on here, Qaphela? What are you doing to this woman?

My heart hammered in fear. He wheeled a metal table towards me, and my fear intensified tenfold when I saw a butcher knife and a pistol on the table.

Thabi: Are you going to kill her?

I swallowed hard.

Qaphela: No, you're going to kill her yourself.

My eyes widened as my heart started beating fast. The woman grunted. "Please let me go."

Thabi: No, you can't ask that of me. Please. Why are you doing this? What did she do? Please forgive her.

Qaphela whistled, and a man approached us.

Thabi: I don't want to be a part of this, Qaphela. I never agreed to killing people. An innocent woman at that.

The man shoved a cellphone in my face, and my tears rolled out when I saw a gun pointed to my mother on her hospital bed.

Qaphela: Now are you going to choose or should I make you?

Thabi: Please don't do this. I beg of you.

I even kneeled before him, and pleaded.

Qaphela: It's your mother or her.

I looked at the knife and pistol staring back at me. I picked up the gun.

Qaphela: Good girl, now do what you must.

I circled the girl, my hands shaking. I stood next to Qaphela, and cocked the gun in the air. He smirked beside me, and with heightened speed, I had the gun pointed to his head, standing behind him.

Thabi: If you move, I promise you, I'll shoot your brains.

I looked around me, fear clawing at me when guards cocked their machines towards me.

Qaphela: Have you used that before? It's not a toy.

Thabi: I'll not allow you to turn me into a murderer. Neither will I allow you to kill my mother, but if you push me too far, I swear that I'll kill you.

Qaphela: Your mother or her? It's not a difficult choice.

Thabi: What wrong has she done to me? Qaphela, please... I'm begging you. Don't make me do this.

The woman spoke up. "Please let me go. I have a daughter... Please don't kill me." Qaphela whistled once more, and I felt something piercing my arm

which carried the pistol. Strength evaded me, and unconsciousness plagued me - enveloping me in darkness as I collapsed on the floor.

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Thabile Mampane

I stirred on the bed, as I awakened from my slumber. I sat upright, and looked around the room. Yesterday's events came flooding back into my head. Different emotions poured into me. I hoped that my mother was okay. I couldn't lose another parent.

I trailed my finger on my arm where a needle was embroidered.

A guard walked in as I recited a short prayer. He led

me to an office, and he knocked.

I heard a voice from within. "Give us a minute." We waited outside the closed door. I couldn't help but hear the conversation inside as I leaned on the wall besides the door- I could even differentiate the voices.

Mzi: I think you're being too hard on the girl, Qaphela. What happened to taking it slow?

Qaphela: There is no taking anything slow in this business. This business is not for the weak hearted. That girl needs to toughen up if she is to lead this empire.

Mzi: I hear you.

I exhaled deeply. I didn't want to be involved in this business in the first place.

Qaphela: It's bad enough that she's a female in a male dominated business. People are not going to hesitate to play on her head, and walk all over her. She needs to give these men a run for their money. She needs to stand her ground.

Seconds rolled past, and the door was opened. I walked in, and Qaphela closed the door.

Thabi: Is my mother okay?

That's the first thing that came to mind.

Thabi: You wouldn't kill your boss' wife, right?

Qaphela: Let's get one thing straight. Your father was not our boss. He was a business partner. If we wanted, after his death, we could have cast you and your mother out in the cold, and take this business for ourselves.

Thabi: I never wanted this business. I didn't even know that my father deals drugs.

Qaphela: Well, it pays your pills and gives you a luxurious life so I don't think you have any other choice.

Mzi: Your mother and the woman from yesterday are safe.

I shifted my orbs to Mzi seated at a desk to Qaphela hurling darts at a dartboard, fully concentrated.

Thabi: So what happens now?

Qaphela: What did you learn from yesterday?

I shrugged.

Thabi: Was I supposed to learn something?

Qaphela: What do you think you're here to do? To

play?

Thabi: A lot happened yesterday, Qaphela.

Mzi: Your father's favourite rule was to never involve the innocent.

I chortled in disbelief.

Qaphela: Care to share the joke?

Thabi: No matter how you choose to spin the story, this business thrives on innocent lives. You sell drugs to civilians.

Mzi: Nobody is forced to buy.

Qaphela: If you're forced in a situation like yesterday whereby your family is threatened and an innocent life is threatened, and you have to choose, your choice would be?

I thought about it for a minute.

Thabi: Isn't it obvious that I would choose my family?

Qaphela: But you didn't choose your mother yesterday, you came for me.

Thabi: Because you were the threat. I thought perhaps getting you out of the way would mean that I don't have to choose between my mother and another woman's life.

Qaphela: Exactly. Faced with a situation like that, you have to do everything in your power to eliminate the threat. In this business, we're faced with threats everyday of our lives. Whether aimed at our loved ones or our empires, we eliminate them and we don't hesitate.

I nodded.

Mzi: I'm going back today. I might be back in a month or so.

Qaphela: Mzi, take her with you.

Mzi: What? Her training can't be over, Q.

Qaphela: Her disappearance is already raising suspicions, Mzi. Her friends or family might report her missing soon. She'll go back to her life for a week and be back here.

My lips curved into a smile.

Thabi: Oh, thank you so much. I'll be able to see my mother.

Qaphela: Don't even think about eloping or hiding from us or whatever shit you might be thinking. We'll find you.

Thabi: I won't.

Qaphela: Get your life in order. Your studies, and everything. We're giving you one week to align everything properly. After the week, you'll practically be a ghost to the rest of the world for months.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Me: So this is where the magic takes place?

We walked into his office after a tour of his building. He owned 25% of this law firm. We sat down at his desk.

Me: Have you always known that you were going to be a lawyer?

Mpilo: Not entirely. I've always thought of law as a difficult course. Not in terms of learning legal jargon, but morally. In this career, you leave your morals at the doorstep.

Me: What do you mean?

Mpilo: I've represented murderers before and I knew. It's common knowledge that you choose which

cases to take and to leave, but you don't get where I am by being picky. You see an opportunity where you're going to win, you take it. I'm not proud as a person, but as a lawyer I'm proud of where I am.

Me: I like that you're straight with me.

Mpilo: Though I've prided myself into not taking on domestic violence, child abuse and rape cases. I don't see myself defending women and children preperators.

Me: So correct me if I'm wrong, doesn't law take about seven years or so to obtain the degree? You're 30, and you've had about 4, 5 years to build your career, but you own a quarter of one of the best law firms in SA and you're a shark in the courtroom.

Mpilo: Connections are everything, Buhle. You can have the talent or skill but sometimes without connections, it does nothing for you. Since I was 18 doing my first year, I knew that this is what I wanted to do. So while I was still studying over the years, I've taken quite a number of pro bono cases, but with a mentor on my side.

Me: You were allowed to take on cases even though you hadn't finished your degree?

Mpilo: It happens that a lot of people can't afford to pay for lawyers, Buhle and that's where I swept in. Desperation can make you agree to anything, and I've only taken minor cases that helped build my name. It's a tough world, Buhle. My father plugged me in with a friend of his, Mr Zulu, the majority shareholder of Zulu and Partners Law Services, but my hard work got me this far.

I nodded.

Me: I don't know what to say other than you're good at your job. I've seen you with Thabile's case and the fact that you had only two weeks to organise things, prepare witnesses and rebuttals and all that, is impressive. On top of that, you had to deal with the passing of your father. I heard it takes months for preparation of trials. You're really amazing.

Mpilo: Thank you.

I was in awe of this man before me. I snapped out of it, and looked at my watch.

Me: Would you look at that? Time goes fast when I'm with you. I have 30 minutes before my next class starts.

Mpilo: I'll drop you.

I nodded, and we rose to our full heights.

Mpilo: I've been meaning to ask... My brother wanted me to invite you to dinner tomorrow night.

My eyes popped.

Me: You've already told your brother about me. Which brother are we talking about here?

Mpilo: Sensokuhle has a way of making me cough out things. I told him that I've found a woman that I like a lot.

Me: You think it's a good idea?

We continued talking as we navigated our way from within the building to his car.

Mpilo: I can tell him that you can't make it if you're not comfortable.

Me: It's just that I was supposed to marry him, and I walked out the night before the wedding. Does he know it's me?

Mpilo: He didn't take it personal. It will be fine.

Me: Okay, I hear you. It will give me a chance to talk to Kamva. Perhaps we can try to mend things.

Thabile Mampane

Qaphela looked at me, a needle in his hand and I swallowed the lump stuck in my throat.

Qaphela: The anesthesia will wear off in a few hours. You can't know where we are or the path that leads here. It's for your safety.

I nodded. I was just happy I'd go back to my life for a week.

Qaphela: You'll be asleep, and Mzi will drive you to the university.

Noxolo Ndebele

I heard puking sounds. I circled the house, and found Anna emptying the contents of her stomach. I looked away from her vomit.

Noxolo: Do you know where the toilet is?

Anna: I'm sorry, aunty. I couldn't hold it any longer.

She wiped her mouth with the sleeve of her shirt.

Anna: I'll clean up.

Noxolo: Are you pregnant, Anna?

Her eyes widened. I analysed her face.

Anna: No, auntie! What makes you say that?

Noxolo: I'm not a child. I can see that something is happening with you, Anna.

Anna: Aunty, it's just food poisoning. I'll be fine.

Noxolo: Hitch up your shirt.

I wanted to see it for myself. Perhaps she was starting to show.

Anna: No, aunty. It's not my problem that you don't trust me. Why can't you take my word for it?

Noxolo: Because I was once your age. Has your mother even had the sex talk with you?

She showed me her belly, and I saw nothing that screamed pregnancy, but she wasn't off the hook. She could be in the early stages.

Noxolo: You should test.

Anna: I'm not pregnant, aunty.

Somikazi Nkosi

Lwando played a song on his cellphone, singing along to it and we downed our liquor continuously, dancing together.

Lwando: Do you know who sings this song?

Somi: That voice belongs to only one person. Drake!

Lwando: Tooise Slide. Released yesterday, the 16th.

Somi: Aren't we too old to be jamming to Drake's songs?

We laughed.

Lwando: Don't you wanna dance with me? No?

I could dance like Michael Jackson

I could give you thug passion
It's a Thriller in the trap where we from
Baby, don't you wanna dance with me? No?
I could dance like Michael Jackson
I could give you satisfaction
And you know we out here every day with it
I'ma show you how to get it

It go right foot up, left foot, slide
Left foot up, right foot, slide
Basically, I'm sayin', either way, we 'bout to slide, ayy
Can't let this one slide, ayy (Who's bad?)

We laughed until our lungs hurt. We kept dancing until I almost slipped, accidentally knocking off Lwando's cellphone from the table, and it fell to the floor - the song stopping altogether. Lwando caught me with ease.

We gazed into each other's eyes, intoxicated and burning with desire. Our lips touched, smooching as our hands travelled to each other's bodies. I stopped him, breathless.

Somi: What about Mzi?

Lwando: Let's not ruin things.

Somi: You may be the remedy to my pain, Lwando but I will always reach for the poison. I love Mzi.

Lwando: Shhhhh.

He attacked my lips with a demanding and passionate kiss. Mzi's voice boomed through the whole mansion.

Mzi: Somikazi!

My eyes widened as I pushed Lwando away.

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Somikazi Nkosi

Lwando and I moved away from each other, panting.
My heart drummed fast.

Somi: Lwando, Mzi is here. You need to leave.

We were drunk out of our minds, but Mzi's presence
sobered us up.

Lwando: Okay.

He picked up his cellphone from the floor, and reached for his car keys.

Somi: Lwando, you can't drive in this state. I'll request an Uber for you.

Mzi walked into the lounge and approached us. I unlocked my cellphone, and requested a cab for Lwando.

Mzi: Lwando, it must be nice to be you. You spend more time with my wife than I do.

Lwando: I must leave. I have work tomorrow.

Mzi: It's a first for a teacher to be drinking on a weekday.

Lwando: Have a good night.

Lwando skated away, and I heaved a sigh of relief. Mzi snaked to the built in bar, and poured himself a

glass of whisky.

Mzi: I come back from a business trip to find my wife drinking with another man. Tell me, is that okay?

Somi: I'm not doing this with you right now.

He gulped down the liquid, and came to stand next to me.

Somi: Lwando is my longest friend, Mzi.

Mzi: I know, but there are boundaries. He can't be in another man's house so late at night.

Somi: I'm sorry. I called him here because I was alone, and my husband was away on business. You couldn't even care less about how I was doing while you were gone.

Mzi: You have Kamva for that.

Somi: Kamva is a married woman with her own husband.

Mzi: Doesn't this Lwando have a girlfriend or something? You're always together. I'm sure people are mistaking you for a couple.

Somi: What's with the many questions? I'm sure you've had a long week. You need to rest.

He pecked me on the kiss with an intense look in his eyes.

Mzi: If I ever hear that you're cheating on me, I'll not hesitate to kill the motherfucker and have you watch the show.

I swallowed hard.

Somi: You forget that I'm nothing like you. Cheating is your cup of tea, not mine.

Mzi: On second thoughts, you had your chance to leave me, but you didn't take it. You're stuck with me

forever. I hope I've made myself clear.

Somi: I think you're forgetting who you're talking to. You're now resorting to threats. Don't forget that I know a lot about you. Your threats won't work on me.

Thabile Mampane

Buhle attacked me with a tight hug the minute I woke up.

Buhle: I've missed you so much. I'm glad that you're back.

Thabi: I missed you too.

I scanned around the room. Nothing had changed.

Thabi: It feels like I was gone for a year.

Buhle: You've never been a heavy drinker. I was surprised when a man brought you here, passed out.

Thabi: A man?

Buhle: Said his name was Mzi. The security had thought he did something to you, so I'm glad to see you're still breathing.

I nodded.

Buhle: So are you out of danger? Is that why you're back?

Thabi: I'm only back for a week. I don't think I'm completely out of danger. My father's friend thinks it's better I lay low until they can find out who killed him.

Buhle: I understand, but perhaps the police could help you. You need to work together to find the killer.

Something clicked into my head.

Thabi: Buhle, could you give me a moment alone?

Buhle: No problem, I was on my way to class anyways. You need to also get the hang of things. You've missed a lot of classes and you're behind with your work.

Thabi: That's the least of my problems. I think I should just drop out. I'm dealing with a lot of things right now.

Buhle: Second year, Thabi? You've come too far to throw in the towel.

Thabi: Well, a piece of paper is not more important than my life.

Buhle: Okay, we'll finish this conversation later. I have a lot to tell you.

She grabbed her backpack, and exited. I hauled out the burner phone Qaphela gave me from my sock, and called him.

Qaphela: Any problems?

Thabi: Something is not right here. It can't be a coincidence that Bandile is killed, and 2 days later, my father is also murdered. These two murders are somehow connected. It could be that someone was attempting to avenge Bandile. I mean how do you explain 16 bullets? Now I'm only going to ask you once, did my father call a hit on Bandile?

Qaphela: Thabile, we'll talk about this when I see you. Don't go and do anything stupid.

Thabi: The truth was staring me right in the face. How could I have not seen this? Bandile's father or family or whoever. They're the ones behind my father's death.

Qaphela: Thabile, I beg of you. Don't go anywhere near him. He'll not hesitate to kill you. So I want you to think of your mother. We'll help you seek vengeance. Right now, you're not a match for him. He'll kill you, and kill your mother.

I let out a sigh.

Thabi: Dammit!

Somikazi Nkosi

I woke up to a message from Lwando. "Your happiness comes first, Somi. That's all that matters to me, but I don't think I can continue with this friendship anymore. I've always loved you but I couldn't tell you. Enjoy life... Text me when you're ready for us to meet."

I sighed, and deleted the message - blocking all thoughts from my head. I went to take a shower.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Mpilo led me to the door. My nerves skyrocketed.

Me: I'm not sure about this, Mpilo.

Mpilo: Relax.

Kamva opened the door, and her eyes sported shock when she saw me.

Kamva: You don't say. So Buhle, you're the woman Mpilo has been telling us about.

Mpilo: She's your half sister, so I guess introductions are not needed.

Kamva: Come in.

She made way for us to enter, as Senzokuhle descended the stairs. It felt weird that he was not occupying a wheelchair anymore even though Mpilo had already informed me that he lied. Senzokuhle's gaze lingered on mine and Mpilo's intertwined hands, and a genuine smile crept up on his face after the shock fled. I looked up the staircase to see a painting of Kamva.

Kamva dished for all of us at the dinner table, as the awkwardness subsided with every passing moment.

Mpilo, Senzo and Kamva engaged in a light conversation - Mpilo tried hard to accommodate me but I didn't feel like talking.

Senzo: So Buhle, tell me something. I hope you don't mind if I divulge into the past.

I faintly smiled.

Me: Not at all.

Senzo: So I've heard that you walked out on me because I was paralysed. Is that true?

My eyes bulged out of their sockets.

Mpilo: Senzo, the past should remain in the past.

Me: Mpilo, it's okay. I'll answer him. I think your wife should be able to answer you. I couldn't go through with the marriage because I wanted a different life for myself. I wasn't born into royalty. It took me a while to adjust, but I was never ready to marry someone I don't love. I wanted to pursue my dreams. Apart from that, I also wanted to spite my stepmother. I'm not perfect... I grew tired of the mistreatment from her. And that is me being honest with you.

Kamva: Why are you bringing my mother into this? You're using her to cover up your selfish ways. You're mad.

I let out a humorless laugh.

Me: Are we talking about the same woman that killed our father? But what do I expect? You've always been your evil mother's tail.

My temper was flaring and all calmness flew out of the window.

Kamva: You're one selfish girl. You left us to clean up your mess. I had to take your place, Buhle. It's tradition in royalty for our parents to choose spouses for us. I don't know what made you think that you're special and you don't have to follow the rules.

Me: Is it me or you're uttering absolute nonsense? I'd have had no problem with the marriage had you gotten married first. You're older than me. Why did your mother not arrange a marriage for you? You

must be mad. Whatever you're smoking is making you lose your mind.

I was fuming.

Senzo: Why the hell are you both blowing things out of proportion? I asked a simple question. Why are you taking it by the chest? We're all happy, aren't we? Things worked out for the best. So I don't see a need for you to quarrel like toddlers.

Kamva: No, Senzo. This girl has it out for my mother.

Me: You're crazy. Don't tell me about that murderer. I don't care about her.

Kamva hurled a piece of meat, and it struck me on my face. The table was suddenly a mess as we attempted to have a go at each other. Mpilo and Senzo tried to hold us back - as profanities spewed from our mouths.

Kamva: It's not our fault that you were never loved by your parents. Don't take it out on us!

Me: I'm better being a orphan. Atleast I know that my mother didn't kill anyone. You were birthed by the devil himself! You and your stupid mother, you can go and die for all I care.

Kamva: I hope a train runs you over! Piece of shit!

Mpilo: THAT'S ENOUGH!

We kept quiet as me and Kamva glared at each other while Mpilo and Senzo lectured us.

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Kamvelihle Ngubane

I helped Sensokuhle put on his shirt, buttoning it for

him.

Senzo: You do know we have people to do that?

Kamva: I know, but I can't have other women iron my husband's clothes.

He went to the bed to collect his tie.

Senzo: I want us to talk about last night.

I heaved a sigh.

Kamva: We're going to end up fighting, Senzo.

Senzo: What you said to Buhle was uncalled for, Kamva.

Kamva: So you're going to take her side?

Senzo: No, I'm not taking sides. Both of you were wrong.

Kamva: She started it.

Senzo: You and Buhle are going to have to fix your shit. The way Mpilo was talking about her, it seems that she's going to join the family soon.

Kamva: She can forget about that. Mpilo's mom would never allow that. You remember how she was talking about Buhle. She has seen her sextape. I'm telling you. Hell will freeze over before MaNdlovu blesses their relationship.

Senzo: I'm asking for one thing from you. Talk to her, she's your sister. If you could forgive your mother, you can surely attempt to mend things between the two of you.

I was starting to become irritated.

Kamva: I don't get why you're always painting my mother as the bad guy.

Senzo: Where there is smoke, there is fire. And remember that I'm the one who pushed you to talk to

your mother, because the tension between you two was starting to affect our marriage. Don't tell me that you think your mother is completely innocent in this.

Kamva: I didn't say that, Senzo. She's not perfect, but I wish people would stop bothering her. She's been through a lot.

Senzo: And so has Buhle. She might need her sister.

Thabile Mampane

I was beyond exhausted. My mind was filled with mayhem. My body was tired.

Buhle's cellphone rang, but she didn't answer it.

Thabi: Aren't you going to answer that?

Buhle: It's Mpilo.

Thabi: I still can't wrap my head around the fact that you're dating him. I did miss a lot.

Buhle: That dinner last night rubbed me up the wrong way. My sister really does know which buttons to push.

Thabi: So you're going to punish Mpilo because of your sister?

Buhle: Thabile, I've had enough drama with Bandile to last me a lifetime. I want peace in my life.

Thabi: You're confusing me now because your sister was in your life way before Mpilo. So the drama didn't come with him. Stop acting like a child, and pick up his calls. You have a good man on your side.

Buhle: I know.

She sighed, and her phone rang again. She answered it this time.

Buhle: Okay, I'll be down in a second.

She dropped the call.

Buhle: I'll be back. There is a delivery for me.

Thabi: Okay.

She walked out, and my thoughts reverted back to my father and his killer. I got angry just by thinking about it.

Minutes later, Buhle walked in with a wrapped up box.

Thabi: Is it from Mpilo?

Buhle: I think so.

I wore a smile.

Thabi: He must be one romantic guy.

Buhle: That he is.

She planted herself on her bed, and tore the ribbon.

Buhle: Since today is Saturday, I was thinking that we could go out.

Thabi: That's a good idea.

Buhle: I will invite Dimpho.

She opened the lid of the box, and jumped backwards and let out a squeal, fear doodled on her features.

Thabi: What is it, Buhle?

I neared her, and looked within the box and my heart leaped out of my chest. My globes drank in a dead snake, a small knife plunged into its head, with a note plastered to its skin. The note was merely written 'Buhle'.

Thabi: Buhle, what the hell is this?

Buhle: I don't know.

She looked afraid - mirroring my expression.

Thabi: Is someone threatening your life?

Buhle: No, I don't know what's going on. It could be a prank.

Was it possible that Bandile's father was behind this?

Thabi: This is not a prank. You need to be careful.

Buhle: I think I should go to the police.

Thabi: You should.

My cellphone vibrated - an incoming call from my cousin.

Libone: Finally you answer my calls.

Thabi: Libone, now is not a good time.

Libone: Auntie is awake, and she wants to see you.

Thabi: Okay, I will be there as soon as I can.

I ended the call, and looked at Buhle.

Thabi: Will you be okay? I need to go to the hospital. My mother has woken up.

Buhle: I'll be fine.

Thabi: Call Mpilo. He might be able to help.

Buhle: I don't want to put his life in danger. I think I know who sent this. I can only think of one person.

Thabi: Who?

Buhle: My stepmother.

Thabi: Alert the police, and have that discarded as soon as possible. Keep a knife on you at all times in case your life is in danger. I'll see you later. Keep me updated.

She nodded, and closed the box. I pocketed my cellphone after requesting for a cab which drove me straight to the hospital. I paid him, and skipped to my mother's ward.

I walked to see Libone seated beside my mother's bed. My eyes watered, and I went to embrace my mother. My tears fell involuntarily.

Thabi: I thought I'd lose you.

She stroked my back with one hand.

Kamogelo: It's okay, baby. Mom is still here.

I couldn't help it. I felt happy that my mother survived, and didn't meet the same fate as my father. But at the same time, I was saddened by my father's death.

Thabi: I love you, mma.

Kamogelo: I love you too, my baby.

I grasped Libone's wrist, and pulled her aside, away from my mother's ears. I whispered to her.

Thabi: I think it's best that we don't tell her about her husband's death. The news could set her back.

Libone's eyes roamed around the room.

Thabi: You've already told her, haven't you?

Libone: That's the first thing she asked, Thabile. I couldn't hide it from away.

Thabi: How did she take it?

Libone shrugged, and I looked at my mother, nearing her bed.

Thabi: Ma, about dad-

She raised her hand, silencing me.

Kamogelo: Have they gotten to you?

I darted my eyes between her and Libone, settling them on my mother.

Thabi: Libone, please go and buy me coffee.

Libone: You could've bought it on your way here.

Thabi: Please.

She didn't protest any further, and she skated away. I looked back at my beloved mother.

Thabi: So it's true? Dad was dealing drugs?

Kamogelo: Libone tells me that I've been in a coma for more than a month. I've missed a lot. I want to know what you've found about the business.

The doctor walked in, stethoscope wrapped around her neck and clipboard in her hands as I was about to say something.

Her: I see that you're recovering well.

My mother nodded as she monitored her progress and vitals.

Her: We'll keep her here for a few more days for observation, but it's looking good.

Thabi: That's great news.

Her: We thought that we would lose you, but Mrs Mampane here is a fighter... A miracle.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

My cellphone was pressed to my ear.

Kamva: Ma, when was the last time you talked to Buhle?

Nikiwe: The day before the wedding. Why do you ask?

Kamva: She called to attack me again. It wasn't enough that she started a fight with me last night, she wanted round 2 today. She says that you delivered a dead snake to her. She was asking for your numbers. She wanted to tell you off.

I quirked a brow.

Nikiwe: What does she mean I sent a dead snake to her?

Kamva: I think someone is threatening her, so in her head, it's you.

Nikiwe: She must not make me mad. She came to Joburg to make enemies and now she's blaming me. I don't have time to play.

Kamva: So you had nothing to do with that? I'm not going to be angry. You can tell me.

Nikiwe: I have no idea what she's talking about. I swear. If it was Zenani, she'd have told me. But we're

not evil, Kamva. Buhle must leave us in peace.

Zenani walked in the lounge, sporting midnight clothing - a huge bag dangled over her shoulder and a gun in another hand.

Kamva: You know how she is.

Nikiwe: Listen Kamva, there is an incoming call. We'll talk.

Kamva: Okay.

The line went dead. I eyed my sister suspiciously.

Zenani: And what's with the look?

Nikiwe: You didn't happen to threaten Buhle's life, right?

Zenani: What are you talking about?

Nikiwe: Apparently she was gifted a dead snake and

she thinks it's from me.

Zenani: It definitely wasn't me, but I think I know who's behind it. Look, I need to go.

Nikiwe: Don't get yourself killed.

Noxolo Ndebele

I camped under a tree in the nightfall with Khethiwe- the long grass helped us conceal ourselves. Wind wafted through the secluded area. I used binoculars to look at the warehouse where I planted the diamonds.

The buyer finally arrived in a car, and my eyes followed her movements. I used a burner phone to call her. She picked up.

Noxolo: She's here.

Khethiwe: Let's hope everything goes well.

Her: I'm here.

Noxolo: Turn into the alley, and look for a torch.

She rounded the abandoned warehouse, and came back minutes later.

Noxolo: Switch it on.

Her surroundings was illuminated.

Noxolo: Okay, now I want you to show me the money.

She opened her bag, and used the torch to illuminate the inside of the bag - I was satisfied with the notes.

Noxolo: Now, I'll tell you where the diamonds are and if you dare try to double cross me and run with the money and diamonds, I'll not hesitate to shoot you. I have a perfect aim.

Kaizer helped me with a rifle and the binoculars. I looked at Khethiwe who had the rifle cocked ahead.

Her: You can trust me.

Noxolo: Now go put the money where you found the torch.

She followed the same path, and came back.

Her: I've done everything you asked. Now tell me, where are the diamonds?

Noxolo: You see that torch you're carrying, you'll find a compartment where I've stored the diamonds.

She fiddled with the torch and found the compartment where I placed the gems.

Her: It was great doing business with you.

She glided back to her car, and drove away. We scanned the area for any danger in case we were double crossed but the exchange seemed to have gone according to plan.

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Noxolo Ndebele

The minute we got home, I skipped to my bedroom. Khethiwe called out Anna's name.

I placed the rifle and binoculars on the bed, and proceeding to open the bag of money. A huge grin adorned my face. We were six million richer.

I emptied the bag onto the bed. My heart collided with my ribcage as I was left perplexed and shocked when I analysed the bundles of the notes.

I took one bundle, and removed the elastic band. The upper and bottom notes were real cash, but between the real, it was merely stacks of white paper.

Noxolo: No.. No!

I staggered backwards, everything shattered. I checked the other bundles, but it was the same. Someone played me for a fool, and I let out a heartwrenching scream. Khethiwe quickly came to my bedroom, concern plastered on her face.

Khethiwe: What's wrong, Noxolo?

Anger wormed into me. I pointed to the notes.

Noxolo: We've been played.

Her eyes widened.

Khethiwe: You can't be serious.

Noxolo: Worst part she had her face covered with a balaclava. We don't know who she is. Shit!

Khethiwe: What are we going to do, Noxolo? It seems that everything is going south.

I've had too many surprises for the night.

Noxolo: It seems like Ace is working from the grave for the diamonds. Dammit!

I kicked my bed, fuming.

Khethiwe: Is there no way we can find the person behind this?

Noxolo: She's not going to be stupid enough to have another sale. I don't think we're ever going to find her.

Khethiwe: The real notes there probably don't even add up to 5k. We've been played bad.

Noxolo: Now I regret wanting to keep my identity hidden. I've never killed anyone before, and if I find this motherfucker, she's going to regret double crossing me. I'll skin her alive and feed her to the dogs.

Khethiwe: Okay, we need to calm down, and think of a way forward.

Noxolo: Does this motherfucker know everything I've went through for those diamonds? I almost lost my

life because of them. I went into hiding for them, and some bitch thinks that she can come and ruin all my hard work!

The front door creaked, and Khethiwe went to the sitting room. I ran my hand over my face in frustration.

Khethiwe: Is this the fucking time to come home?

Anna: I was bored alone since you and aunty weren't here so I went to chill with Cindy. I must have lost track of time.

Khethiwe: So you're roaming the streets so fucking late at night? You want to be raped? We can't be dealing with our own issues, and deal with your misbehavior.

I've never been so pissed before in my life.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I paced around the room, my heart hammering.

Thabi: Buhle, I want to sleep.

Me: I'm not stopping you.

I kept racking my head for an answer. That snake haunted my thoughts.

Thabi: Your stepmother has gotten you so frustrated. You should not let her get to you. I don't think she'll kill her.

Me: I'm starting to think that it's not her.

Thabi: What do you mean?

Me: Simnikiwe would've come straight for me. She's

not the type to play hide and seek. One thing I admire about her is that most of the time, she's always straight about her intentions. She considers you an enemy, you'll know. She's coming for you, you will know.

Thabi: I hear you, but don't be afraid to sleep. They can't reach you here.

Me: How do I sleep knowing very well that someone out there is plotting against me? I can't let my guard down and be killed.

I was so worried and fear clawed at me.

Anna Ndebele

Shakes was waiting for me outside the school premises. When the bell rang, I files out the

classroom quickly.

Anna: I'll catch you later, Cindy.

Cindy: Sure.

I hugged Shakes immediately after walking out the school gate.

Shakes: How was school?

Anna: Same old.

We started walking down the street. I asked him to pass me the weed blunt.

Shakes: Have you forgotten that you're pregnant?

I pursed my lips thoughtfully.

Anna: You should've seen how angry my mother and aunty were last night.

Shakes: Do you think that they jumped that we exchanged the real diamonds for fake ones?

Anna: I don't know, but they were very pissed. Do you think we did the right thing, Shakes? This is my mother and aunty we're talking about.

Shakes: I know, my love, but don't forget that we're doing this for our baby's future. He/she must never lack for anything. Your mother and aunt will survive.

I gave him a faint smile.

Shakes: We must take this secret to the grave. Your family can never know that it was us. Have they asked you anything?

Anna: They think I don't know so I don't think that they'd suspect me.

The guilt ate at me, but I'd survive.

'I'm sorry, ma and auntie.' I silently said in my head.

Narrated

Zenani was waiting for her friend who owned a diamond mine to come back. She looked around his office - her hands nursing her glass of champagne. The excitement to feel the texture of millions between her hands radiated off her.

She was surprised to see the bag of diamonds tossed to the desk by Dube, angrily.

Njabulo: You came to waste my fucking time, Zenani.

Zenani: What are you talking about?

Njabulo: Did you even think this through? You fucking came to me with fake diamonds. Did you really think that I wouldn't notice? I work with fucking diamonds!

Zenani was genuinely confused.

Zenani: I swear I had no idea. The exchange went according to plan...

Zenani thought for a moment, and she gritted her teeth.

Zenani: Unless we both played each other.

She thought of the papers she stacked in that bag.

Njabulo: I don't fucking care. You know that I hate people who waste my time.

Dube rounded his desk, and went to take out a gun from the drawer.

Zenani: I've told you what happened, Njabulo.

Njabulo: Were you trying to scam me?

Zenani: No, I wouldn't. You know me, Njabulo.

Fear was gnawing at Zenani. Njabulo held her head and pinned it to the desk - seeing red.

Zenani: Njabulo, please calm down. We can talk about this. How long have we known each other?

The gun lingered on her neck. Zenani's mouth dried

up.

Njabulo: Give me one good reason why I should let you live.

Zenani: Njabulo, this was a honest mistake. I'm sorry.

Njabulo: You're of no use to me. I might as well kill you.

Zenani felt the cold metal trailing on her neck, and she swallowed hard.

Zenani: Okay. Okay... Your son is alive. Is that good enough reason?

Njabulo applied more pressure to Zenani's head on the desk.

Njabulo: I hope you're not saying this because you

want me to spare your life. Because I swear I'll make you suffer for playing with my emotions.

Zenani: No, there is no need for that. I'm telling the truth. If you find out that I'm lying, I'll personally hand you a gun to shoot me dead.

Njabulo moved back, and Zenani straightened, rubbing her forehead and stretching her neck.

Njabulo: Now start explaining.

Zenani: It came to my attention that me and your son have a common enemy. So I recruited him.

Njabulo: How, because we buried him? I was there.

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Buhlenkosi Malinga

I unlocked the door to my room, and walked inside with Mpilo in tow. I tossed my bag to the bed, offered him a seat on the same bed. Thabile had gone back home for a few days.

Me: I'm sorry for not answering your calls this past weekend.

We sat across each other on opposite beds.

Mpilo: I was worried about you, Buhle.

Me: I'm fine. I've been stressed lately.

Mpilo: I hope it has nothing to do with how the dinner at my brother's place turned out.

Me: That has nothing to do with you, Mpilo. Kamva and I have never seen eye to eye.

I gave him a reassuring smile, but he didn't seem convinced.

Mpilo: Are you sure that you're okay?

Me: I am. Really. School has me by the tits, and it's frustrating. I have assignments to do.

Mpilo: I can help you.

Me: No, thank you. I'll pass. Your line of career is different from what I'm studying. I don't think you can be of any help, but thank you.

Mpilo: Is there something wrong, Buhle? Something has changed about you.

Me: You're thinking too much, Mpilo.

He cocked an eyebrow - my thoughts slowly drifting to the snake and its underlying threat.

Mpilo: Are we okay?

Me: Gosh, would you please stop asking me questions? I told you that I'm okay, or you don't understand English. Would you like me to repeat what I've said in another language?

His expression changed, and he rose to his full height.

Mpilo: I'm not going to play games with you, Buhle. And one thing I'm not going to have is you raise your voice at me. I'm not a child.

Me: I'm sorry, Mpilo.

Mpilo: You know where to find when you want to talk calmly to me.

I regretted my actions. I ignored his calls the whole weekend and now I can't even have a decent conversation with him without the threat drifting into my mind.

Me: Please don't leave. I'm sorry.

Mpilo: I have work to do. I'll catch you later.

I rose from the bed to stop him, but he merely gave me a peck on the forehead, and walked to the door. When he reached the door, he halted.

Mpilo: I know I'm older than you by a good 10 years, and if that's going to be a problem, let me know. I would never deprive you from exploring life, but what you should remember is that I'm not going to play games. I'm too old for that.

And with that, he left before I could say anything further. I exhaled deeply. I'd have to keep a safe distance from him until I was sure of what I was dealing with.

Thabile Mampane

We were back in Mahikeng after my mother had been discharged yesterday. First thing in the morning, we traveled hours in the car to my hometown.

The police didn't waste time by coming to take my mother's statement.

The male detective scribbled down answers to the questions his female partner asked my mother.

Kamogelo: Everything happened fast. We were suddenly attacked with guns in our home, and bullets started flying. I couldn't identify any of the attackers because their faces were covered.

Other question was thrown to my mother. "We've questioned your niece, and it seems that nothing had been stolen even though your house was completely thrashed. So a robbery is out of the equation. Do you know of anyone who might want to hurt you or your family? Any enemies perhaps?"

Kamogelo: No. Nobody I can think of.

The female detective nodded. "Okay, we'll keep looking. Thank you for your time."

The male one added a statement before they departed, leaving me and my mother alone. "We're sorry about your husband. We'll do everything we can in our power to find the people behind this."

Once they were completely gone, I turned to my mother and gave her a brief hug.

Thabi: Thank you for not telling them the truth.

Kamogelo: I know very well that your father was killed by Njabulo. It won't end well if we involve the police in this. I'll have Ace's boys hunt for him, and kill him.

I was momentarily surprised by her words but I quickly recovered.

Thabi: No, ma. This is something I want to do myself. I want to bring that man to his knees. So it wasn't enough that his son along with his friends raped me. It didn't satisfy him, so he had to have my father killed. He has been doing as he likes for far too long. I won't have that.

A need for vengeance dominated my being.

Kamogelo: My child, this is not a life I want for you. You don't belong in this world.

Thabi: Ma, I'm not going to change my mind. That's why I've decided to drop out of university.

Kamogelo: Thabile, that's a bad idea.

Thabi: Ma, what's the point of that degree? What is it going to help me with when I'm attacked? When you're attacked? Things have changed now, ma and I can't run away from this.

Noxolo Ndebele

I kept thinking of the lost money - the betrayal. It didn't sit well with me and Khethiwe was agitated for a different matter. I didn't listen to her venting as I thought of how stupid I had been with the conduction of the exchange.

Khethiwe: Where did I go wrong, Noxolo? I tried to raise Anna to the best of my ability, but she goes and does this to me. I didn't want her to turn out like me.

We waited for Anna to come back from school after my suspicions of her pregnancy had been confirmed.

Noxolo: You did the best you could, Khethiwe. You can't blame yourself.

It didn't take a while before the door creaked, and she walked in. Her smile wavered when she drank in our expressions. Her eyes darted to the pregnancy test positioned on the table.

Khethiwe: Care to explain?

Anna didn't say anything as her face completely changed.

Khethiwe: What? Cat got your tongue, but you didn't seem to be out of a voice when you were screaming fuck me harder whilst making that baby.

My eyes popped as my sister uttered those words.

Anna: Why were you going through my things? Is there no privacy in this house?

Khethiwe: Privacy in whose house? As long as you're staying under my roof, there is no such thing as privacy.

Noxolo: What exactly are they teaching you at these schools, Anna? Your mother tells me that she's been trying to educate you about sex, but it seems that everything she has said gets in one ear, and out in the other.

Anna: Everyone knows that protection is not a 100%

safe. I didn't mean to get pregnant, but the baby is here and there is nothing I can do.

I clapped my hands in disbelief.

Noxolo: Exactly why sex is not for kids. You disappoint me. You've disappointed me, Bongiwe. I hate that people have normalized teenage pregnancy.

Anna: I don't get why this is a big deal. I'm following in my mother's footsteps. At least I wasn't 16, pregnant with my first child. I hate people that judge others on the same mistakes that they made themselves. It makes them hypocrites.

I clasped my hand on Khethiwe's wrist as she looked ready to kill.

Khethiwe: Was the dick so good that it made you disrespect your mother and spew nonsense? Let's

hope that the dick will be able to accommodate you with a place to stay.

Anna stormed away leaving her mother, fuming.

Noxolo: What are you doing?

Khethiwe: There are only two grownups in this house and if she thinks that she's now a woman, she's welcome to leave. I'll not be disrespected by someone I birthed. You want to tell me that I went through labour pains to be disrespected and undermined in my own house?

Buhlenkosi Malinga

A call interjected my thoughts. I picked up, and Thabile's voice reverberated in my ear.

Thabi: I'm sorry for leaving you.

Me: I'll be fine. I know you have important things to do.

Thabi: But I feel bad for leaving like this. You need someone by your side.

Me: I'm fine. There hasn't been any other threats or unusual things happening. Perhaps I was right from the start and it was a prank.

Thabi: I'm coming back tomorrow, and we're going out for drinks. I don't want to hear anything. We need to unwind.

Me: I'm in, anything to get my mind off things. But is it a good idea on a weekday?

Thabi: We'll just have dinner. Nothing hectic.

Me: Okay.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I rubbed my eyes when I saw a dead person walk into the comfort of Zenani's house.

Zenani: What are you doing, Nikiwe?

I blinked my eyes several times.

Nikiwe: Making sure that I left the ability to see ghosts back in that village.

Zenani: What are you talking about?

Nikiwe: Wasn't this boy declared dead on all news outlets a month ago?

Zenani: Another one of my plans. Have a seat, Bandile.

I freezed, my brows furrowing in confusion.

Nikiwe: You mean to say that he woke up from the dead?

Zenani: Don't be ridiculous.

Bandile sat on the individual sofa, facing us.

Bandile: An enemy of an enemy is a friend of mine.

Zenani: We'll wait for his father, and I'll start explaining everything.

Nikiwe: Zenani, you better start explaining.

Zenani tightened her lips into a thin line, and nodded.

Zenani: I don't have to explain the connection between Bandile and Buhle. I'm sure you know of it.

Nikiwe: He's the boy Buhle made a sextape with.

Zenani: He hates Buhle as much you do so we're

working together.

Nikiwe: I hear you, but why the hell isn't he dead?

Zenani: We came up with a plan to get him out of prison. We had to have everyone think that he is dead, so they wouldn't search for him and we'd be able to strike. So we scouted for a guard at the prison that had Bandile's physique, and height. He had to be similar to Bandile so we could pull off our plan.

I listened intently.

Bandile: We had to pay off a group of men who helped us execute the plan. We had them distract my friends, and have them think that I was killed by a toothbrush plunged in my neck while in actual fact I was stabbed in the shoulder. Those men pretended to be panicked, and left the communal showers with my friends - not wanting to be implicated in my death. Seconds later, three guards had appeared - one oblivious that he would be made a sacrificial

goat and we killed him, leaving me with the other two guards. We undressed the guard we killed - exchanging the overalls for his uniform and we poured his face with acid as it ate away his flesh to make his face unrecognisable. Since I was in his uniform, after his shift, I made it out of the prison safely.

Shock seeped into me. I couldn't believe the lengths the two went to.

Nikiwe: I can't believe this... Since you say that you poured acid all over his face, wasn't it the right thing for a DNA test to be conducted since you weren't recognizable? They couldn't just conclude that it is you.

Bandile: We flashed money, and automatically the results suited our agenda. The world thought that I was dead.

Zenani: And that guard that was killed, we made it look like he eloped because of human trafficking

charges we pinned on him.

Nikiwe: And you did this because you wanted to make Buhle pay?

Bandile: Buhle and Thabile, but I'm going to need to hold off on Thabile because it seems that she's being protected.

Nikiwe: What's your plan exactly with her? I assume you're the one who sent her a dead snake.

Bandile: Your sister says that I can do whatever I want with her as long as I teach her a lesson.

Zenani: So do you approve?

Zenani turned towards me.

Nikiwe: Anything or anyone that has the Mkhize blood pumping through their veins is an enemy of mine. I couldn't care less about what happens to Buhle.

Zenani: We'll start with that Buhle and move on to

Mandlakhe and those stupid uncles. They'll regret throwing us out like dogs, and almost having us killed. I'll not rest until I wipe them all from the face of earth.

I couldn't agree more. An angry man stormed into the lounge, and started lashing a belt at Bandile. We were taken by surprise.

Bandile: What the hell, dad?

He moved away from the sofa, and his father's anger.

Njabulo: Do you know the fucking mess you have put me in?! I killed Ace, thinking that he had a hand in your death, and I'm very sure that his people will come for me.

Bandile: I'm sorry, dad.

Njabulo: What's your fucking apology going to do for

me? His wife has been discharged from the hospital, and I don't know what she's going to tell the police.

Zenani: Njabulo, you can't blame that on us. You should have killed her and finish what you started. If she tells on you, it will be because of your reckless behaviour.

Njabulo: I thought I didn't have to lift a finger and she'll never wake up from her coma.

I shook my head with a slight smirk. They started a fire, and I'd like to see how they'll take the heat.

Nikiwe: It doesn't matter now. We have to work together from now on.

He swung his belt in the air.

Njabulo: You-

He pointed to his son.

Njabulo: I'm not done with you. You fucking played with mine and your mother's emotions. You had your friends take the fall for something you did together with them.

Nikiwe: I hate to say this, but it seems that you've raised a monster and he learnt from the best.

His temper flared, and he trod away - leaving me, Zenani and Bandile in silence.

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Note: I'll be posting an insert every second day as I have schoolwork to catch up on.

Thank you for the growth of the page - slow growth but growth nonetheless.

Don't forget to like, comment and share.

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Somikazi Nkosi

Mzi popped on the stairs with his mistress. They descended the stairs in a light chatter, and I couldn't help but roll my eyes and continued to eat my breakfast.

A ringtone echoed around us.

Mzi: I'll be back.

He referred to his mistress, and trod away, his phone pressed to his ear.

I dug my teeth into the bacon, and chewed, until my bliss was disrupted. I turned to see Pearl standing beside me.

Somi: You want breakfast?

Pearl: What game are you playing at?

Somi: Excuse me?

Pearl: What exactly are you hoping for? It's clear that your marriage with Mzi is dead. So please step aside, and give us the youth a chance.

Somi: Look here. You found me in peace, and you're going to leave me in peace. I'm not going to fight with you.

Pearl: It's okay to admit that you failed. I don't understand why you stopped the divorce proceedings from going on.

Somi: Are you done?

Pearl: No, I'm not. The sooner you accept that I'm going nowhere, the better.

I shook my head, boredom seeping in.

Somi: I don't care, sisi. The fact that you came to me, picking a fight shows that you're feeling the heat. Deep down in that heart of yours, you know that Mzi doesn't care about you.

Her stoned look faltered a little, doubt creeping in but she regained her composure just as quick.

Pearl: You're nothing but an old hag. No wonder your husband seeks other women out there.

Her words stung badly but I didn't show weakness.

Somi: Sisi, you can have that bastard. I don't care about him anymore. Take him, and leave me alone.

Pearl: Why did you not go through with the divorce?
It's clear that you love him a lot, but he's mine now.

I rolled my eyes. I had been down this road too many times, and it was time I changed routes.

Somi: Okay, that's good for you. One thing before I go, remember that the same way you got Mzi is the same way you'll lose him. I don't have the energy to quarrel with you. You're not worth it.

I dropped my fork on my plate, and scraped the chair backwards. I slithered outside, wanting to catch some fresh air. I bumped into someone.

Somi: Oh Q, I'm sorry. I didn't see you there.

Qaphela: What's gotten you so worked up?

Somi: Talk to your brother, please. I swear his disrespect is on heroine.

Qaphela: What has he done now?

Somi: He has the nerve to bring his loose girls here, and do his nonsense under my roof. He's mad.

Qaphela's hands lingered in the air in a surrendering manner.

Qaphela: I can't help you with that. You know that I don't involve myself in matters that don't concern me.

Somi: I know, but I don't know what I was expecting from your brother. He's just a disappointment. Last night has made things very clear to me, and I've gotten the message loud and clear... Anyway, you don't tell me that you're in town.

Qaphela: I'm here to do a few things. Speaking of which, where is Mzi?

Thabile Mampane

I handed my mother a small vase which contained my father's ashes. Tears dropped down her face, as my own heart was consumed with sadness.

Thabi: You know that it was his wish to be cremated.

Kamogelo: He didn't see the point of wasting money on a funeral.

Thabi: I remember him saying that most people work hard preparing for their deaths, with expensive caskets instead of using that money to create wealth while they're still alive.

Kamogelo: He was a wise man indeed.

We faintly smiled and she nursed the vase delicately in her hands.

Kamogelo: Are you sure that this is what you want to do? You're leaving your safe life for a dangerous world.

Thabi: Mama, I believe I can handle it. I want to bring dad's killer to justice.

Kamogelo: And we can do that, but you can't leave school, my child.

Thabi: Mama, let's face it. Unemployment rate among graduates is very high. It's better I do something that's guaranteed to bring us an income, rather than struggling out there like many graduates without a job.

Kamogelo: Until this empire lands you in jail. Be careful that you don't lose yourself.

I smiled reassuringly.

Thabi: I won't. I'm doing this for dad, and when it's time, I'll leave this business.

Kamogelo: Okay, I'll miss you so much.

She placed the ashes on the table and pulled me in for a tight embrace. It felt good to be in my mother's arms.

Libone appeared with my bag.

Libone: Do visit us more. Ever since you've started university, it seems that you have forgotten about us.

I took the bag from her, and hugged her.

Thabi: Take care of mama. And ma, remember that I'm only a phone call away.

She winked with a huge grin.

Libone: Sis, we still need to talk about the guards

you've assigned for me.

Thabi: That's not up for discussion. We talked about this. Your uncle's murderer is still out there. Better safe than sorry.

Libone: Okay, have a safe journey.

Narrated

Bandile walked into the kitchen and noticed his mother washing dishes at the sink.

He strolled to the fridge and grabbed a snack for himself.

Nokulunga: I'm glad that you're home, my child.

You could hear the happiness and love in her voice.

Bandile: I'm sorry for everything I've put you through. I can't imagine the pain you felt when you thought that your son was dead.

Nokulunga: It hurt like hell. I won't lie.

There was a momentarily pause, before she spoke again.

Nokulunga: Bandile, what you did to that poor girl was wrong. I could never imagine that my son would rape a girl. Have you ever stopped and thought how you'd feel if it was done to your loved ones? What if it had been me, Bandile? You need to rectify your mistakes. You can't keep running from this. Your friends are in jail, paying for their wrongdoings whilst you're here. Where's your sense of responsibility? You need to take accountability for your actions. I love you, son but I'm not going to hide the truth from

you and acknowledge your mistakes. You don't seem remorseful for your actions and that worries me.

Bandile didn't say anything as he thought deeply about his mother's words. He pulled on his hoodie, and addressed his mother, evading her words.

Bandile: I need to go, ma.

Nokulunga: Where are you going?

Bandile: I can't stay here, ma. People don't know that I'm alive and I'd like it to stay that way.

Njabulo walked into the conversation, and his face morphed into one of anger.

He grasped a bottle of water from the fridge.

Bandile: Dad, may I talk to you?

The father ignored his son, and simply trod away.
Nokulunga noticed the tension between them.

Nokulunga: Don't worry, he'll come around.

Bandile: I hope so.

Nokulunga: Before you go, write down your number. I want to be able to talk to my son wherever I want to.

Somikazi Nkosi

I barged into Lwando's class in time as his last lesson for the day was over. He noticed me, and shook his head with a smile. I waited for the class to clear, leaving only the two of us. I stalked towards him at his desk.

Lwando: What are you doing here?

Somi: I needed to see you.

Lwando: I know that the school is out of your way so whatever brings you here must be important.

He was leaning against his desk, facing me. I stepped closer, and wrapped my hands around his neck - bringing his head closer to crash down my lips onto his.

He returned my kiss with as much fervor.

"Sir... Oh, I'm sorry." We pulled away from each other when a female student stood at the door.

Lwando: What can I help you with, Cindy?

Cindy: I waited help with a certain sum, but

tomorrow is another day. I'm so sorry for disturbing you, sir and mam.

Lwando: Are you sure? I can spare a few minutes.

Cindy: It's okay, sir. Enjoy the rest of your day. Mam.

I looked at Lwando with eyes popped, and a half smile.

Somi: Seems like we're always being caught.

Lwando: Now where were we?

Somi: We can't do this here. Pack your things. You'll find me outside.

Anna Ndebele

I walked in the house to find my mother seated,

watching TV. I recalled the deceit I and Shakes pulled on my aunt and her and the way I had talked to her yesterday and immediately guilt consumed me. I pushed it down.

Anna: Ma, may I please have a minute?

Khethiwe: What do you want, Bongiwe?

She only called me that when she was hurt and angry with me.

Anna: Ma, I wanted to apologise for the way I spoke to you yesterday.

Khethiwe: I did everything for you, Anna. Where did I go wrong?

Anna: Ma, it's not your fault. Please don't blame yourself.

Khethiwe: I've never been so disrespected like that ever in my life. It's going to take more than a lousy

apology from you for me to forget that.

Anna: I'm sorry, ma.

She completely disregarded my apology.

Khethiwe: What's done is done. Who is the father of the baby? Forget that, I'm asking an obvious question. I wished you could have stopped and thought about the kind of father your boyfriend would be before you conceived.

Anna: He's going to inform his family about the baby. He wants us to do things the right way.

Khethiwe: Let's hope he's not going to run away from his responsibilities like your father did.

I didn't miss the bitterness in her voice. It was not directed at me and I understood her concerns but I trusted Shakes. He wouldn't do me like that.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

The vodka I gulped down burned my throat. Thabile and I had hit the club and ever since the drinks were flowing as I drank to temporarily forget my problems.

Me: I need... to take a piss.

I slurred over my words. Thabile nodded and I glided to the restroom. I got in one of the toilet cubicles and released my pee. I flushed the toilet, going to the basin to wash my hands. My vision was blurred as I looked into the mirror.

Suddenly a figure hovered behind me. I couldn't make out who it was in my drunken haze.

Hands trailed up my bare arms and my stomach churned in disgust.

A male voice spoke in whispers. "It hasn't even been long but you've already given up my pussy to another man."

I knew that voice, but my mind couldn't form coherent responses and thoughts.

Me: Who are you?

My voice cracked slightly, fear poking at me.

Him: Your worst nightmare. I'll be back, and next time I'll take you for a joyride.

Me: Leave me... alone or I'll scream so loud you'll be deaf.

Him: How did you like your new friend? I hope it didn't scare you too much. But how could it? You two are like birds from the same flock. You're a snake in human form, but don't worry, I'll fix that soon.

Something told me that it was Bandile, but it couldn't be. He was dead. I was imagining things. That had to be the only explanation.

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Thabile Mampane

Thabi: I'm going to check Buhle in the toilets. She's been gone for a while, and I want my bed right now.

She continued dancing, and I shook my head with a brief laughter, skating to the restroom. I found Buhle

standing in front of one of the basins - water streaking her face. I automatically became worried.

Thabi: Buhle, are you alright?

I held her at arm's length, shaking her out of her reverie.

Buhle: Bandile was here. I heard him... He touched me, Thabile.

I didn't quite understand her.

Thabi: What do you mean Bandile was here? Bandile is dead, Buhle.

Buhle: I know that but I also know that he was here. I heard his voice.

Thabi: I think you've had too much to drink, Buhle.

Bandile can't be alive.

Buhle: Are you saying that I'm crazy? I know what I saw.

I heaved a deep sigh and I looked around to see another woman walk in.

Thabi: We can't talk about this here. Go find Dimpho. I've requested a cab. We'll talk about this at home.

Buhle: Okay.

I fixed her slightly dishevelled self, and she set off back to the club. I ran my hand over my face and waited for the restroom to clear before I did a minor search for Bandile in the restroom and the club. It produced nothing - leaving me in more confusion. Could it be that Buhle was imagining things or Bandile was really alive and he perhaps wanted to play games?

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We walked into our room, and locked the door. The supervisor already gave us a tough time and I wanted to sleep but my slumber could wait.

Thabi: Buhle.

Buhle: You don't have to say it. I know it was crazy. Maybe I really am going mad.

I didn't say anything, as I discarded my dress for comfy clothes. Buhle did the same.

Buhle: Thabile, do you think that I'm going mad? It must be that... It must be those pills that therapist gave me. Maybe they're starting to kick in.

Thabi: Buhle, calm down. What are you on about?

Buhle: You remember I told you that the therapist was Xolani's mother and of the plan they formulated against me.

Thabi: But she said that you didn't take a high enough dosage for you to lose your mind.

Buhle: I know what she said, but that's what makes sense at the moment. Or it must be the alcohol.

I pursed my lips, deep in thought.

Thabi: The problem is here now, and we must find a way to solve.

Buhle: It doesn't make sense. Last time I checked, Bandile was dead.

Thabi: I don't know what's happening but we need to find out and soon.

Buhle: It's clear that he's after me, or am I merely grasping at straws? Maybe it was my imagination. Maybe I'm just looking for someone to blame.

Thabi: Well, better safe than sorry. I think Mpilo needs to know about this. He's your man, and he was the one dealing with this.

Buhle: Do you think that he faked his death?

Thabi: I don't know, but the police and the prison - we need answers from them. We don't know who killed Bandile - they're dragging their feet.

Buhle: That's if he's really dead.

Thabi: Someone must have helped him. There is no way Bandile would pull this off alone. His head is full of water. It can't be him.

Buhle: It could be his father.

Thabi: It can't be. If his father really helped Bandile fake his death, why would he go after my father and kill him? None of this makes sense.

I racked my head for an explanation or theory, but came up with nothing.

Thabi: Look, the day after tomorrow I'm leaving, but I assure you that I'll do my best to help you. Maybe you're going to need to stay with someone until we can understand fully what's going on.

Buhle: Where exactly are you going?

Thabi: I can't tell you that.

Buhle: I don't think the police are going to take me seriously. I mean how does this slip them?

Thabi: You would be surprised at the the amount of corruption in the system.

The bastard can't be alive. I hoped that we were wrong.

Thabi: Be careful, Buhle. Keep a weapon on you at all times. I don't think that the police are going to do much. Don't do anything reckless.

Buhle: No.

I blinked my eyes.

Thabi: What do you mean no?

Buhle: No, I'm not going to let Bandile have power over my life anymore. I mean he's the one that wronged us but we must live in fear because of that small boy. No, that's not going to happen. He must stop hiding like the coward he is, and face us. He's a little coward, and he doesn't scare me.

Thabi: This is not the time for your stubbornness, Buhle. Yes, Bandile is a coward, but a dangerous one at that. We don't know who he's working with.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Sneakily, I slid Kamva's cellphone under the table in the kitchen as she served away at the stove - making lunch.

I kept throwing quick glances at her and she seemed occupied. I looked for Mthunzi's number in her

contacts and my heart soared in happiness that she hadn't deleted the number. I wondered why. I shared it via WhatsApp to my number, and quickly deleted the message.

I placed the phone where I got it, and tuned in my attention to my daughter.

Nikiwe: My child, please promise me one thing.

Kamva: It depends on what it is. I don't want to find myself making empty promises.

Nikiwe: Promise me that you'd never sign a prenup.

She whirled around, wiping her hands and neared me.

Kamva: What are you saying, ma? Where is that coming from?

Nikiwe: Just promise me.

Kamva: Ma, I didn't marry Sensokuhle for his money. I know our marriage wasn't the best at the start, but we've come far.

Nikiwe: Kamva, I won't be here forever. I don't doubt that Senzo loves you but you can't be naive as to think that everything will be perfect forever. I didn't think Mvelo would cheat on me but he has another daughter to remind me of his affair everyday. Look at where I am now, Kamva, I have nothing. The Mkhizes have ruined my reputation... I just want you to be vigilant. And if he ever asks you to sign one, you must know that something is very wrong. I mean you wouldn't ask someone you plan to spend the rest of your life with to sign one. Think about it, or you'll find another woman taking your place after years of marriage with nothing to show for your hard work and love. Perhaps it's not in Sensokuhle's nature to cheat, but you'll never know. I don't think Somikazi thought that her husband was unfaithful when she married him, but look where they are right now.

Kamva: You have a point, but I don't want his money.

Nikiwe: Things have changed now, my child. I don't think the Mkhizes will happily accept you back in their lives when they learn that you still have a relationship with me. You must always think of your future.

I saw doubt flicker on her face, and I knew that mission was accomplished. Now I had to move on to the next phase. I didn't want to do this to my daughter but I was doing it for her.

Thabile Mampane

When Buhle had scurried to class, I stayed back in the room and thought of a way forward. I called Qaphela with the burner phone.

Thabi: Q, I need a favor from you.

Qaphela: I can't talk right now. Let's do this tomorrow when we meet.

Thabi: It's important.

He had already dropped the call, and I exhaled. Ever since Buhle told me that there was a possibility that Bandile could be alive, I was restless and wondered about his next move.

As I was deep in thought, my phone beeped beside me and it was a message from my mother with a link. I was connected on Zoom with her, Libone and another man.

Kamogelo: It's your father's will reading. Since we're not in the same province, the lawyer thought we could do this over the phone.

She clarified for me.

Thabi: Then we must thank technology. I had completely forgotten about his will. You had to be present for the reading, and since you were still alive, we had to wait.

Lawyer: Let's begin then.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

My mother's words kept buzzing in my ear as I drove through Somikazi's neighborhood. I saw a car similar to her best friend's one, and I halted my own a few houses away. Something impelled me towards it. I skipped to it, and I clasped my hand over my mouth when I saw my sister in law having sex in the car with Lwando.

I knocked on the window and they stopped, and looked at me - eyes widened. I moved back and moments later, they clambered down from the car - guilt on their faces.

Kamva: Aren't you supposed to be at school?
Helping your school obtain a 100% pass rate?

Somi: What are you doing here, Kamva?

Kamva: I thought I could come and see you. It's been a while since we caught up. I didn't expect to find you riding your best friend in the streets, Somikazi.

Somi: You should've told me that you're coming.

I looked at them intensely.

Kamva: What are you doing, Somikazi? Mzi could have been the one to find you.

Somi: So? I don't care.

Kamva: This is not right.

Somi: So it was right for Mzi to cheat on me countless times?

Kamva: You know that's not what I mean. So this is you getting even. Two wrongs don't make a right. I'm not judging you, but you shouldn't have tore the divorce papers.

Somi: I know.

Kamva: So you're going to sneak around with him until when? Until Mzi is the one to discover you.

Somi: And he'll know the pain I felt when he cheated on me.

I shook my head.

Kamva: But that isn't right, Somikazi. You're using Lwando to settle a score with him. Is that what this is? God knows that I don't like Mzi but this is not the way to do things.

Lwando clicked his tongue, and circled his car to the driver's seat.

Somi: Lwando, please wait.

Lwando: I told you about my feelings, and you think that this is a game. You want to use me to hurt your cheat of a husband?

The engine ignited and he drove away.

Somi: You see what you've done?

Kamva: Didn't he get the memo?

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Nikiwe: Why are you quiet?

Mthunzi: I'm trying to understand why the mother of my ex is calling me.

Nikiwe: I know that Kamva messed up but it wasn't her fault.

Mthunzi: I had to find out from other people that Kamva got married to another man, and she didn't bother to let me know. She blocked me. I don't understand why you're calling me.

Nikiwe: I was hoping we could meet.

Mthunzi: What makes you think that I'm in the village?

Nikiwe: Part of the reason why it was easy for Kamva to let you go and sacrifice her love for the sake of the kingdom was the distance. I know that you work somewhere around Joburg, and I'd like us to meet.

Mthunzi: And why would I do that? Does Kamva even know about this call?

Nikiwe: Don't worry yourself about that. If you still love Kamva, you'll make it tomorrow.

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44

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I stirred on the bed, awakening from my slumber. Senzo seemed to have already gone to work. I sat upright against the headboard, and recollected my thoughts before I got out of bed to start my day.

I checked my cellphone for the time, and it was quarter to 8.

As I looked for my slippers around the room, the door creaked, and I looked in that direction to see Sensokuhle walk in with a tray of food. A smile crept up on my face and I went closer to him.

Kamva: Thank you, baby. It's as if you knew that I'd be too lazy to make myself breakfast.

Senzo: Enjoy, I'm going to take a shower.

Kamva: We can eat together.

Senzo: I've already eaten.

Kamva: Okay.

He skipped to the bathroom, and I munched on the scrumptious breakfast my husband prepared for me.

To be honest, I enjoyed my married life and I was glad things played out the way they did.

As I wiped my plate clean of the pancakes I was served, I drank my juice. As I was sipping, I felt a solid thing in my mouth. I swallowed the liquid, and left the solid thing behind, spitting it out.

My heart skipped a beat when I saw a ring glinting in my hand. My heart soared in happiness, but a little confusion dogged me.

I skated to the adjoined bathroom.

Senzo had a towel wrapping around his waist planting in front of the basin, brushing his teeth. Excitement bubbled within me as he looked at me through the mirror.

Senzo: I see you've found my surprise.

Kamva: Is this what I think it is?

Senzo: I figured since we didn't have a white wedding, it would be a good idea for one.

Kamva: Couldn't you have thought of another way to propose?

I went to hug him, my arms wrapping around his

torso.

Senzo: Why propose what's already mine?

Kamva: I love you, Senzo. Thank you for making me a happy woman.

And I meant every word.

Senzo: I love you too.

The warmth that spread through me was hotter than a volcanic eruption.

Senzo: Put it on, and let's see how it looks on you.

Kamva: Let's hope it suits me.

Senzo: I have good taste, remember.

I snorted, and slid the diamond ring onto my finger. It didn't make sense that as a married woman, I wore no ring. It was a ring of simplicity, but beauty nonetheless.

He rinsed his mouth, and twirled around to face me.

Senzo: What did I say? It looks better than I imagined.

Kamva: I think we should take this celebration to the shower.

I winked, and started stripping my clothes.

Senzokuhle's eyes darkened in lust as he claimed my lips for a kiss.

Thabile Mampane

I walked into the hotel room I now owned 20% of. My eyes darted around the ground floor where the reception was and people were parading by. It was still surreal that I was partners alongside the Nkosi brothers.

I went to the penthouse apartment on the top floor with an elevator where Qaphela was waiting for me.

Qaphela led me inside, and my eyes darted around the magnificent interior of the place.

Thabi: Why didn't you tell me that my father owned part of such a beautiful establishment?

Qaphela: We did mention that we were associates of your father.

Thabi: Well, you're now looking at your new partner.

My mother inherited the rest of my father's assets and businesses. Libone was created a fund of 10 million which she can only access when she turns 18.

Qaphela: Not surprised. Let's get down to business.

He offered me a seat, and I happily accepted.

Thabi: So what exactly do you do in my father's dealings?

Qaphela: This hotel, you could call it a front for our dealings - we use it to launder the money we make from the drugs.

Thabi: Interesting.

Qaphela: So what did you want to talk about yesterday?

Thabi: I need you to assign a bodyguard or two for my friend. We have reason to believe that Bandile

Dube is alive, and he's coming for her.

Qaphela: That's not a problem. I'll look into it.

Thabi: We need to get to him before he gets to us.

Qaphela: Okay. I didn't expect this.

Thabi: A lot of things don't make sense, Q. We need to get to the bottom of this. Like how did it manage to slip everyone that Bandile is not dead?

Qaphela: You think his father has a hand in this?

Thabi: I don't know, but Bandile is mad. He keeps acting like we're the ones who wronged him. The world would be a better place without him and his sick family.

Qaphela: What are you thinking?

Thabi: I have a plan on how we can avenge my father.

Qaphela: Does your plan involve Bandile?

Thabi: Partly, yes. I want them dead. Bandile raped me and he never apologised instead he keeps plotting against us. His father killed mine... Qaphela, I'm tired of people walking all over me. It ends now.

I've never been so consumed with hatred and anger before.

Thabi: We need to keep a close eye on Buhle, and protect her. It seems that Bandile is obsessed with Buhle, and he can't stay away from her. Sooner or later, he's going to make a mistake and we'll have him.

Qaphela: Don't worry, it will work out. I'm sorry for everything you've gone through.

Thabi: It's fine. Killing everyone who has hurt me will atleast bring me some peace. The wounds inflicted on me will never heal, but I can make each and everyone who has caused me pain pay and I'll stop at nothing.

It was true that once a need for vengeance consumed you, nothing else mattered. Everything else you stood for would vanish. The flame within

me continued burning vehemently.

Qaphela: I don't see a need for you to go to the main lab for training anymore. We'll do everything here, Thabile but we must be careful.

Thabi: Thank you. I'd like you to take me through the business.

Qaphela: Not a problem. I'll help you.

I closed my eyes, blinking away tears as memories flooded me.

Qaphela: You're a strong woman. You've been through things that would make a grown man cry.

Thabi: I have always thought that you were intimidated by me.

A throaty laughter rumbled out of him.

Qaphela: Never. I just didn't like the idea of a woman in this business - hence why I was a little hard on you.

Thabi: I can handle it, but never in a thousand years did I think that I'd find myself in this situation.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I mulled out the shelves lining the area of Woolworths shopping centre, picking random groceries and tossing them into the trolley Zenani pushed beside me. I accidentally collided into a woman, making her drop her items.

Nikiwe: I'm so sorry. I didn't see you there.

I helped her pick up her items, but her presence unsettled me. My eyes roamed from head to toe, and the beads she wore didn't go unnoticed. A unusual sound emitted from her, as her gaze was fixed on me.

Nikiwe: Mam, is there something wrong?

I addressed her with respect as she was elderly to me.

Her: I'm surprised at the amount of darkness that resides in your heart.

I looked at Zenani with furrowed eyebrows - she mirrored my expression.

Her: I'm baffled that you want to ruin everything around you.

Nikiwe: What are you on about?

Her: The bad ancestors of your bloodline are protecting you, but that protection will soon cease and light will swallow the darkness. You may think that you've evaded your past and the dead, but your time is running out.

Absentmindedly, my hand travelled to my pendant around my neck as I took in her words.

Zenani: I think you have the wrong person.

Her: That necklace around your neck will lose its powers soon and unleash the dead you've wronged. Continue doing bad, but you've been warned. You can't save yourself anymore because you've angered a lot of forces, but don't make things worse by playing with other people's lives.

Zenani: We've accepted that we're going to hell, and we're going to do everything in our power to drag everyone with us.

Her: You're agents of evil and darkness.

The woman shook her head as another sound escaped from her mouth before she walked away in the opposite direction.

Nikiwe: That scared me. I don't want to lie.

Zenani: Don't mind her. As long as you have that necklace, you'll be protected.

Nikiwe: She said that our time is running out.

Zenani: Doesn't matter. The truth is that everyone is going to die. That's a part of life we can't escape.

We went to pay, and trod to where Zenani had parked her car. A security guard approached us, and offered to help us load the plastic bags.

Nikiwe: Let me go meet Mthunzi. I'm running late.

Zenani: I'll wait for you.

Nikiwe: There's no need. I'll take a cab.

Zenani: No, go and have a word with Mthunzi. I'll go to clothing stores to pass time. I'm in dire need of new clothes anyway.

I went to a restaurant where I found Mthunzi waiting for me.

Nikiwe: I'm sorry I'm late.

I briefly explained to him why I called him, and the plan I had devised.

Nikiwe: So what do you say?

Mthunzi: What makes you trust me enough to share your plan with me? I mean I could go to Kamva and tell her everything to get in her good books again.

I leaned in closer.

Nikiwe: You'd be asking for your death. I'm sure you've heard about everything that I've been accused of. Between me and you, they are true.

He didn't look intimidated.

Mthunzi: What's in it for me?

Nikiwe: You have another shot at a relationship with Kamva.

Mthunzi: There's nothing special about your daughter that I haven't found in another woman. I came to meet you because I was curious. And between the two of us, I'll only agree to help you because I want to see your daughter sweat a little. It angered me that she didn't have the decency to explain everything to me.

Nikiwe: Whatever your reasons are for doing this, I don't care... Let's shake on it.

Mpilo Ngubane

Mpilo: So you say that you're getting married again.

I was genuinely happy for my brother.

Senzo: And I want to be my best man.

Mpilo: You know I've got your back. So when is the wedding?

Senzo: We haven't agreed on a date yet.

Wedding bells made me think of Buhle, and we hadn't spoken in forever. I wanted us to move at her

pace as to not overwhelm her.

The door creaked, and someone walked in. A female's voice resounded around. "Oh, I wasn't aware that you have a visitor but this is urgent."

Senzo: What is it?

"Mr Gumede is here and he has a problem with a clause in the contract. He'd like to see you." Senzo was already up from his chair.

Senzo: Okay, I'm coming.

Mpilo: I can come with you. Contracts and legal matters are my cup of tea.

Senzo: That's not necessary, but I'll call you when I feel like he's bullshitting me. I'll be back. Amanda, take care of my guest.

Senzo left, and the woman approached me and asked politely. "Is there anything I can get for you, sir?"

I pivoted my head, and my smile subsided.

Mpilo: You're that girl who thought it was okay to disrespect me, and Buhle.

Her gaze was everywhere else but on me.

Amanda: I'm so sorry, sir.

Mpilo: You're also one of those rapist's sister if I remember well.

She didn't say anything.

Mpilo: You work for my brother and if I wanted to, I

could get you fired for your stinking attitude, but I'm not that petty. Next time, you better think twice before you disrespect me and Buhle. If I hear any complaints from her about you, you won't like what I'll do. Have I made myself clear?

Amanda: Yes, sir.

My phone rang in my jacket, and I hauled it out.

Mpilo: Leave me.

She retreated, and Buhle's voice resounded in my ear. I smiled, and it faltered when I heard her words slur over each other.

Mpilo: Buhle, are you drunk?

She giggled, saying inaudible things.

Mpilo: This is not normal, Buhle. Where are you?

Buhle: Soothing Launch.

She laughed, and I internally rolled my eyes. I picked up that she was at a club called Soothe Lounge.

Mpilo: Okay, I'm coming. Don't go anywhere.

I typed in a short message to Senzo telling him that I had left.

I drove to Soothe Lounge hurriedly and skipped to inside the club immediately when I halted the car. I scanned around the busyness and the noise of the place at dusk for Buhle. She was pumping herself hard with alcohol, and I stalked towards her booth.

Buhle: You came. Yippee!

I shrugged off my jacket, and made her wear it. She passed out, and anger seeped through me. I skipped to the bartender, they couldn't allow her to drink so much. I understood that they ran a business, but this was not right. Alcohol poisoning was a thing.

I gave him a piece of my mind for the next few minutes, and he apologised. However I didn't realise that turning my back for a moment would be fatal. My heart hammered in my chest when I didn't see Buhle anywhere around anymore.

I went back to the bartender.

Mpilo: Did you see anything unusual?

Him: A lot of unusual things happen here everyday.

Mpilo: Where the hell is my woman? She couldn't

have possibly walked out of the club on her own. She passed out... She's no longer here.

I couldn't help the feeling of apprehension overwhelming me. I went outside from the noise hoping to see Buhle. I jogged to the parking lot, my eyes scanning my surroundings for anything unusual.

My heart plummeted against my ribcage when I saw all the wheels of my car flattened. There was no way.

Could it be that she was kidnapped? But what did that have to do with my car or me for that matter?

Or did she run away to avoid me and flattened my wheels? But that didn't make any sense. Where the hell was going on? Shit was crazy.

I went back inside the club to find someone who'd

lend me a phone to make a call seeing as that Buhle may have took off with my jacket which housed my cellphone.

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Please don't read if you can't stomach bad things.
Sensitive readers have been warned.

45

Buhlenkosi Malinga

My eyes opened with my body aching everywhere.
My surroundings were unfamiliar, and that got my stomach in knots with fear pulsing through my veins.

Bandile: You're awake?

I started breathing faster. This couldn't be happening. I looked at the mattress I was sleeping on - it didn't have a good stench to Bandile who was rooted atop a metal chair.

The last thing I remember was hitting a club, and tiny fragments of Mpilo. His scent wafted into my nostrils, and I noticed that I was wearing his jacket. My heart pumped fast as nothing made sense. My head throbbed badly probably because of all the alcohol I consumed. I was rattled to the bones to be in the same room as Bandile.

Me: So I was not imagining things. You're really alive.

I didn't want to show him my fear.

Bandile: I thought you'd be happy to see me.

Me: Bandile, why are you doing this?

Bandile: Isn't it obvious?

Me: Please let me go.. I promise that I won't tell anymore that you're alive.

Bandile: I did tell you that I'd be coming for you. Why are you surprised?

Me: Bandile, please... What have I done to you to deserve this? I should be the one angry at you. Thabile should, but you keep wanting to make our lives a living hell.

Bandile: I did warn you that nobody messes with me, and gets away with it.

Me: What do you want from me? Please have a heart for once.

He scoffed, and my heart shattered. I was in a room with a rapist, and a psychopath perhaps. My chances of making it out alive were thin.

Bandile: Who knows about me? Who did you tell that I'm alive?

I thought about his question. It could go either way.

Me: Bandile, you have no chance. Let me go, and run. They will come for you.

Bandile: And I thought that I might trust you with my secret, but you've proven to be nothing but a whore. You've already given my pussy to another man.

Me: Did I hear you right?

I inhaled slowly and exhaled - weighing my options. I had to tread carefully; I couldn't afford to make him angry.

Me: Bandile, we once had something special. Don't ruin it.

Bandile: You ruined it when you teamed up with Thabile to bring me down. I did warn you but you didn't listen.

My hands and legs were not tied - I had to cast the fear aside and think of something.

Bandile: You don't have a chance, Buhle. Try anything funny and I'll make your stay torturous.

He trailed his gun on his trousers.

Me: What do you plan to do with me?

My mouth was suddenly dry and I couldn't fathom what his response would be.

Bandile: You'll find out soon. I'm a man of my word. I did promise to take you on a joyride.

He exited the room and I heard him lock and secure

the door. My tears starting falling uncontrollably. Why was it that I never had peace in my life? Why don't things ever go right? I'm always fighting evil, and I don't think I can fight anymore. I'm beyond exhausted. Why does evil always triumph in my life?

When my sobs had ceased, I skimmed the room to look for anything I could use as a weapon.

I took off Mpilo's jacket, and hugged it.

Me: Thank you, Mpilo, for showing me love. You've given my life meaning. You've showed that love does indeed exist in a short period of time. I love you.

I heard a low vibration somewhere around me.

I realised that the sound was coming from the jacket. I fished through its pockets to find his cellphone.

The little hope that was wilting came back. The vibration had stopped.

I hoped that there were no cameras around.

I couldn't access his phone due to the passcode. One thing was for sure - I had to keep this phone in my possession otherwise it was only a matter of time before Bandile discovered it. I placed it on mute, and thought of something.

I removed the pin from my hair, and kneeled beside the mattress. With the blunt sharpness of the pin, I drilled a hole into the side of spongy mattress to house the phone. It did fit, and hope had returned.

Me: Thank you, Mpilo.

I attempted the emergency call but I heard footsteps

and voices approaching. I quickly hid the phone in the hole, and acted like nothing had happened. Seconds later, the door opened and Bandile with another guy made their way inside.

Bandile: My friend here will keep you company.

That was not good. I'd be watched 24/7.

Me: I'm thirsty.

Bandile: I'll bring you something to eat.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

Senzokuhle was driving me to a potential wedding venue. We hadn't even set a date, but excitement

and happiness emitted from the depth of my heart.

Senzo: I can't believe you made me miss work for this.

Kamva: Baby, I'm so excited about this. I never thought that a person could find so much happiness.

Senzo: I love you.

Kamva: I love you too.

Straight ahead, someone waved their hands in the air.

Senzo: It seems that his car has broken down. We should try to help him.

Kamva: Senzo, that's not a good idea. What if it's a pretence to hijack us? You'll never know these days. Keep driving. Someone else will help him.

Senzo: This is a very quiet road. Not a lot of cars pass here. We might be his last option.

Kamva: You and being a good Samaritan.

We halted, and stepped out from the car approaching the man.

Senzo: What seems to be the problem, my man?

My eyes widened, shock swimming through them while I saw someone I never thought I'd see ever again.

Mthunzi: Oh, Kamva, I never thought I'd see you again. This is a nice surprise.

I forced a smile.

Senzo: Am I missing something here? Do you guys know each other?

Mthunzi: Oh, Kamva and I used to date.

Kamva: But we broke off things.

Mthunzi: More like you stopped talking to me, but I've heard that you've gotten married. This must be the lucky man.

He outstretched his hand towards Senzo. This was beyond awkward for me and my eyes darted to Senzo. I didn't see a hint of jealousy instead he smiled sincerely and shook Mthunzi's hand.

Senzo: I never thought that we'd stop to meet my wife's ex.

Mthunzi: We happen to live in a small world -

He trailed off, awaiting Senzo to introduce himself.

Kamva: Baby, this is Mthunzi. We have already established that he's my ex and Mthunzi, this is my

lovely husband.

They nodded, and stepped back.

Senzo: So Mthunzi, what seems to be the problem with your car? Perhaps we can help.

They walked to his car - leaving me shocked as Mthunzi kept throwing glances at me over his shoulder.

There was a point in my life where I would be happy to see him, but not anymore. He was non-factor in my life.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Zenani: I don't want to hear another word about that woman from the store. Forget about it, please. You'll give me unnecessary stress.

Her words kept playing in my head.

Zenani: Tell me how things are coming along with your plan for Kamva's marriage.

Nikiwe: Last night, she shared with me that Senzokuhle proposed a white wedding.

Zenani: Seems like their marriage is becoming stronger. We might not be able to break it, not even Mthunzi.

Nikiwe: Look at who you're talking to.

Zenani: Look at you blowing your own horn. Anyways, what's your plan?

Nikiwe: Kamva told me of a venue that she thinks would be a perfect place for her wedding to take

place. She said that they would be going there today to view the place. So it gave me and Mthunzi the perfect opportunity to stage a 'random' meeting. Senzo will meet his wife's ex.

Zenani: Let's see how everything goes. I'm still to witness your plan.

Nikiwe: But nothing will beat the plan you and Bandile formulated.

Zenani: You remind me. Bandile called me to tell me that he has the girl.

Nikiwe: Oh now, that's interesting. What does he plan to do?

Zenani: I don't know and I don't care.

Thabile Mampane

When Mpilo had called me to ask about Buhle's

whereabouts, I knew that Bandile had gotten to her. We didn't even have time to employ guards for her. I feared for her more than anything as I knew what that dog was capable of. I informed Qaphela and he suggested we had a meeting to discuss the way forward. It turned out that Qaphela and Mpilo were acquainted as Mzi was married to Mpilo's sister.

Mpilo: I still don't understand why you didn't tell me that Bandile is alive, Thabile.

Thabi: Don't start with me, Mpilo. I'm not your girlfriend. Moreover I told Buhle to tell you everything, and she chose not to. That girl is stubborn. I told her not to do anything reckless, but Buhle with her stubbornness goes out drinking. Alone on top of that. Buhle just doesn't listen.

Qaphela: It doesn't help going back and forth about this. What's done is done. We need to think of something.

Mpilo: Now that I've established that Buhle was indeed kidnapped, there's something that can help

us find her. I believe that she has my and her phone in her possession. We can attempt to track them.

Qaphela: That's if it's not too late. Bandile wouldn't be as stupid as to keep the phones around.

Thabi: Well, it's worth a try. Perhaps Buhle was smart enough to keep one phone hidden.

Qaphela: I'll get right on it.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Bandile: Take off your clothes, dammit Buhle!

He barked at me - demanding me to take off my clothes in front of him and three other men.

Tears started to fall.

Me: Bandile, please don't do this... Please, I beg of you.

My tears didn't seem to faze him. I was beyond the word scared.

Bandile: Buhle, don't make me angry.

He came to slap me across the face. I flinched at the impact.

Bandile: Take them off yourself or my friends here will be forced to do it for you.

My body started shaking as I reluctantly took off my clothes, leaving my undergarments on. The men were salivating over me, and licking their lips. I wanted to die instead. I wanted death to claim

instead of what Bandile wanted to do to me. I couldn't take it away. I prayed that someone found me before it was too late. Or rather, I die.

Bandile: Take that off too.

He referred to my panty and bra. I shook my head vigorously. He trailed his gun on my cheek.

Bandile: Boys!

Me: Okay! Okay. I'll take them off.

My voice wasn't my own anymore.

Once I was completely naked in front of these monsters, I prayed for death instead. I don't think I'd be strong enough to take everything in. Thabile must be the strongest person I know to survive this.

Bandile kneaded my breast, and I felt like vomiting. I couldn't experience this.

Bandile: You're still as sexy as I last saw you.

He moved away from me.

Bandile: Boys, let the fun begin.

Those guys started unbuckling their belts and pulling down their pants and boxers, releasing their rods. My knees started tumbling due to fear.

Me: Bandile, please just kill me. Take my life instead.

Bandile: Where's the fun in that?

My pleas fell on deaf ears.

The guys started caressing their groins, their moans filling the room.

I attempted by all means to block out everything.

"Fuck." One grunted as his sperms splashed onto the floor.

Bandile: Okay, that's enough for today.

They pulled on their pants, and evacuated from the room. I've never been so relieved in my life. At least I had to be thankful that I was safe for today. Tomorrow might bring another story, but I was thankful for today.

Bandile: Next time, they'll have permission to do as they want with you. I'm loving this game, but I don't

want us to rush things.

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Thabile Mampane

Mpilo: We'll find her.

He attempted so hard to assure me, and I had no doubt that we'd find her, but I dreaded in what condition we'd find her in.

Mpilo: Even if it's the last thing I do.

Thabi: You really love her, don't you?

Mpilo: I care about her a lot.

Thabi: You'll have her back.

We exchanged faint smiles hiding exhaustion. I didn't know it was possible to hate someone as much as I hated Bandile.

We were waiting for Qaphela at the hotel penthouse. You could see that Mpilo was growing impatient as each second rolled by. His fear, he masked it very well.

Thabi: This time, Bandile should really die. It's clear that prison is nothing for him.

Qaphela bursted through the door with a bag. We were already on our feet.

Mpilo: And?

Qaphela: The good news is that we've managed to locate your cellphone. I'm hoping that Bandile didn't

find it.

Thabi: He might be using it to make us lose focus, but we must follow the lead. We can't sit here and do nothing.

He opened the bag, and tossed a gun to Mpilo who caught it with ease.

Qaphela: I have men waiting for us downstairs. Mzi will also go with us.

Thabi: That's nice of him.

Qaphela: What's that supposed to mean?

Thabi: I thought he only cared about himself.

Mpilo: Let's not waste any more time.

I reached for a gun, but Qaphela shifted the bag.

Qaphela: What are you doing?

Thabi: What does it look like I'm doing? I hope you were not thinking of leaving me behind.

Qaphela: Of course, you're staying behind, Thabile. We don't know what we're walking into here. I'd have suggested we sit this day out, and monitor the place that they have kept the girl and plan an ambush, but I know Mpilo won't agree.

Mpilo: You're damn right, I won't. We're not planning a heist here. There is a life involved.

Thabi: I agree with Mpilo. The more we wait, things could be bad for Buhle. Bandile is a sick, and twisted animal. Buhle is not safe around him. Every woman is not.

Qaphela: But you're still staying behind. I can't be worrying about your safety, and the attack. I'm pretty sure Bandile didn't pull this off alone. Someone's helping him. We just don't know how many are they.

Thabi: This is not up for discussion. I'm coming with. Buhle is my friend.

Mpilo: Every second you spend arguing, Bandile could be planning to kill Buhle. You're going to make

me lose my mind.

Qaphela didn't protest anymore, and we returned the ammunition to the bag, and skipped to the elevator. I hoped that everything goes well.

Noxolo Ndebele

I've been attempting Buhle's number since morning, and my calls weren't going through. I didn't want to think about it much, but it was unlike her.

Noxolo: Call me when you get this. It's been a while since we talked. You're worrying me now, Buhle.

Anna's head peered into my bedroom.

Anna: She's probably busy studying. Shakes is here.

Noxolo: I'm coming.

I composed myself, and followed Anna to the sitting room where Shakes was seated on a individual sofa. Khethiwe occupied the other one, and me and Anna sat on the two seater. After the greetings were commenced, we directly leaped to the issue that led to this meeting.

Shakes: I've informed my family about the pregnancy, and they don't have a problem. They would like to meet you soon to talk about the damages.

Khethiwe: Tell your family to set a date, and let us know.

Shakes: I will do that.

Khethiwe: It's good to see a young man stepping up to his responsibilities. I know that I've never been your fan, but you've proven to be a real man.

Shakes: Understandable. No parent wants to know that their child is dating.

Khethiwe: I applaud you. Many men have failed to do right by their children.

Anna's boyfriend looked presentable and mannered in contrast to the rumours that I heard about him. I was kind of impressed.

Anna: Ma, that's not fair. You can't applaud him and look at me like I've disgraced and disappointed you.

Khethiwe: But you did disappoint me. I hoped that you wouldn't repeat the mistake I did when I was young.

Anna: It's still wrong. You can't be applauding him as if he's doing this child a favour. It's his seed, and he must take responsibility for it. There is nothing special about a man fathering his child. It's what they're supposed to do in the first place.

Khethiwe: It's too early for your political talks, Anna.

I'm not happy about this, but I'm glad that the father of the baby will walk this journey with you.

Noxolo: Dade, it's real talk. People will look at Anna different when they see her walk down the streets when she starts showing, but they're likely not to say anything to the father. I understand where she's coming from. You must remember that she didn't make this baby alone.

Khethiwe: Noxolo, I hear you. Don't forget that I've been through it... And Anna, there's a lot you should consider. Your boyfriend is going to need to start hustling and perhaps find a job to feed the baby.

Anna and Shakes exchanged looks.

Khethiwe: I don't know what's going to happen now with you in matric.

Anna: My plans haven't changed. I'm still going to finish my matric this year.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

After a long day, with the encounter with my ex and the viewing of the wedding venue, all I wanted was to hit the shower, and blanket myself in bed. We passed by Senzokuhle's office as he wanted to grab a few files for the day he missed today. A knock reverberated around us.

Senzo: Come in.

The door opened, and Amanda walked in with a basket in one hand, and flowers in the other.

Senzo: You're still here at this time. You were supposed to knock off an hour ago.

Amanda: That's true, but I was wrapping up a few

things.

Kamva: So you must be one lucky girl. Your man sends you flowers and goodies at work.

Amanda: I wish they were mine, but I believe that they're for you. They were delivered a while back.

Amanda gave the basket to me at which a smile tugged on my lips when I peered inside. There was wine, whisky and chocolates in the basket.

Kamva: Are these for me? Thank you so much, Senzo. You're the best husband.

Senzo saw a card within the flowers and read it out loud.

'Thank you for your help. Take this as my appreciation and wedding gift. From the stranded stranger.' I furrowed my brows.

Senzo: That's nice of him.

Kamva: Nice? There is nothing nice about this.

Senzo: What do you mean?

Kamva: We meet Mthunzi today, and he's already sending us flowers. And how does he know where you work?

Senzo: Mthunzi and I talked. I must have mentioned it in our conversation. It's not a big deal.

Amanda cleared her throat. Senzo was too calm about this. I know I'd flip if his ex suddenly showed up out of nowhere.

Amanda: I must get going. Enjoy the rest of your evening.

Narrated

Nokulunga, Bandile's mother kept debating with herself. Her conscience couldn't let her protect her son anymore.

She picked up her phone, and dialled the police.

Cop: How can we help?

Nokulunga: Bandile Dube is alive and I get this feeling that he's up to no good.

Cop: What do you mean that Bandile is alive? Please don't waste our time.

Nokulunga: I know what I'm talking about. He is my son, and I saw him a couple of days ago.

Cop: A girl approached us with the news a few days ago; we thought that she was crazy. Please send us your address. He is still a criminal.

Nokulunga: Very well, but he hasn't been home in the

past couple of days. I do have the number he's currently using though.

Cop: You're doing the right thing, mam. Thank you for the information.

She didn't want to think about what she has done, but she had been protecting her son for far too long. What he did was inhumane, and she realised that she'd be part of the problem if she didn't do anything. After she was now fully aware that her leniency ruined her son.

Nokulunga: You'll have to forgive me, son.

Her heart was heavy for some reason.

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Kamvelihle Ngubane

We walked into the place we called home. Senzo tossed his car keys to the coffee table in the lounge, and I carried the pizza boxes to the kitchen.

Senzo: I'm going to take a shower.

Kamva: In the meantime, I'll prepare food for us, and choose a movie.

Senzo: Today we should indulge in horror and action.

Kamva: You know that I scare easily.

Senzo: All the more reason for you to hold onto my arm.

I rolled my eyes, and placed the boxes on the counter. I thought of the shock of seeing Mthunzi and contemplated calling him. A larger part of me said I should leave it, but I ended up unblocking and

calling him. I listened to the phone ring.

Mthunzi: Finally the madam unblocks me.

Kamva: What are you doing?

Mthunzi: What are you talking about?

Kamva: Why the hell are you sending me and my husband gifts? I know you, Mthunzi. You're a troublemaker.

Mthunzi: What do you want from me, Kamva?

Kamva: I should be the one asking you that. I'm starting to think that our meeting was not a coincidence. You're acting way out of character.

Mthunzi: Please don't start with me. If anything, I'm the one who's supposed to be angry. I don't owe you anything. You failed to give me an explanation about your marriage. Now you want to call me, and tell me that I'm acting out of character. Since when do you know me?

Kamva: Is that supposed to be a rhetorical question?

Mthunzi: It's okay to say that you still love me. I mean you're catching feels over nothing. I was merely thanking you and your husband for your help.

Kamva: I'm very happy in my marriage. It'd be better if you stay away from me and Senzo.

Mthunzi: You wouldn't be bothered by my presence if you were really over me. I mean I heard that you got married in your sister's place.

Kamva: Don't flatter yourself. I just called you to warn you not to start any trouble.

Mthunzi: We met by coincidence. I'm starting to really believe that you still love me.

Kamva: You see that you're fooling yourself. If I really loved and cared about you, don't you think that I'd have found a way for us to continue dating? I mean we've been in the same city for months now. But then, I thought that you're not worth ruining my marriage for.

Mthunzi: You think that you're all that?

Kamva: Darling, I know that I'm all that.

Mthunzi: You're going to regret this. Don't say I didn't tell you.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I was once again forced to strip to nakedness. I didn't say much anymore, but I was starting to lose hope. It felt like I was gradually detaching from reality. Bruises adorned my skin as I refused to engage in Bandile's twisted games, but I had to play along. I knew I still wanted to live.

My mouth was wrapped around one of Bandile's friend's cock - my tears falling silently as I had to pleasure him at the expense of my pain and the disgust that hounded me. My clit was sucked by Bandile as I was straddling his face, hovering above him and my nerves were not stimulated instead it

felt like the greatest violation against me.

I don't know what happened next, but suddenly gunshots rained upon us and a deadweight crashed beside me. Darting my eyes to the door, I saw Thabile and immediately my hope returned. I heard Bandile cuss.

I ran to Thabile when Bandile clasped his filthy hand on my ankle and another string of gunshots resounded around me.

Bandile's hand loosened around my ankle accompanied with groans, and I ran to Mpilo who engulfed me in his arms, as naked as I was.

Mpilo: I'm sorry, baby. I'm so sorry.

I continued sobbing, but he pulled away.

Mpilo: Baby, you need to let us help you.

He took off his shirt, and made me wear it and concealing my nakedness. The shirt reached mid-thigh. I didn't have time to admire his rock hard chest, given the situation.

Me: You came for me.

Mpilo: Shhh.

He planted a kiss on my forehead, and returned his focus to Bandile. I also looked, and saw blood oozing from Bandile's arms. Thabile had the gun cocked towards him as she kicked Bandile's gun further away.

Bandile started laughing midst his pain- that's how sick and twisted this rapist was.

Bandile: I've been waiting for you. You decided to grace me with your presence.

Thabile's eyes were full of hatred and anger. Two men bursted through the door. They had a resemblance - they could've surfaced as brothers. They probably were. One I recognized as the man who had brought Thabile to res one time when she was passed out.

The one I didn't know said to Mpilo. "We've taken down everyone we could find. This bastard knows that he's wanted, but his security was disappointing."

Mpilo: Qaphela, please take Buhle to the hospital. We'll follow you guys shortly. Thabile, go with them.

Me: Mpilo, he didn't rape me. I'll be fine.

Mpilo: Buhle, please just listen to me. This dog has gone too far. I don't want you to see this. Your

bruises need to be treated.

I didn't need to question him any further. I knew what was to follow. Bandile was going to die, and my conscience didn't allow me to feel sorry for him.

Bandile: You can do whatever you want. You can even kill me, but all of you should know that none of you will ever know Thabile and Buhle the way I have. To the depths of their deep, tight pussies.

He laughed, and suddenly Thabile aimed for his kneecaps and the bullets pierced through his skin to his bones. Bandile choked on his laughter, wincing in pain. Thabile opened his legs with her foot - Bandile wincing at the movement.

I didn't know how to react.

Thabile: You motherfucker.

He pulled down his pants, and underwear; releasing his rod that had brought terror to many girls.

Thabile: You'll know me today.

Everyone looked at her. We didn't dare to say anything. She pointed the gun to his cock and fired four perfect shots. Bandile's screams were deafening, and blood and flesh spurted around.

Thabile: This one is for me.

She fired unto his ear.

Thabile: Buhle.

Crouching next to him, his eye was next.

Thabile: And Dineo.

His screams ceased when she shot right to his chest.
I never knew Thabile could do this.

Thabile: Today, you'll die and I'll make sure of it.

She fired random shots at any part of his body.
Mpilo squeezed my hand.

Thabile: You fucking dog!

Thabile suddenly stopped.

Mzi: Okay. Qaphela, go with the girls. We'll take care of the rest.

Thabile moved away from the bodies. Mpilo outstretched his gloved hand.

Mpilo: Thabile, the gun.

She handed it to him. All of them were wearing gloves. Everything kept playing in my head like a film. I never thought that Thabile was capable of murder. But Bandile deserved it. If so it be, I'll meet him in hell because I didn't feel sorry for him. Not even one bit.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I tentatively took off my pendant in front of the mirror in the bathroom.

My head started spinning, as images of Mvelo and Qhawe reflected in the mirror. I thought I heard Mvelo's voice speak. "Your very own daughter."

Qhawe's ghost added. "You can't hide forever."

Nikiwe: Fuck you both.

I wrapped the pendant back around my neck, and the images of the dead disappeared.

Mpilo Ngubane

The image I had walked in on transfixed me to the spot I was standing. I should have been the one to

kill Bandile. I didn't think I could be strong for Buhle from this day onwards. Moisture gathered in my eyes. My heart shattered into shards of glass.

Mzi: Mpilo, you need snap out of it. I'm going to the car for the petrol. Snap out of it, please. You'll go through the emotions when we're done here.

He didn't wait for me to say something before he was out the door. That sadness and heartache was replaced by anger and hatred on steroids.

I channeled my anger to Bandile, kicking his dead body. He was a motherfucker molester, and he died an easy death. He needed to suffer more. Shooting his balls was not enough. We should've sliced them off.

"This is the police... Hands up where we can see them."

Shock and frustration dogged me. I ran my hand over my face, whirled around slowly and surrendered to the police who filed through the door in numbers with weapons.

"You're under arrest. Four murders, it seems."

I murmured under my breath.

Mpilo: Shit.

I allowed them to handcuff me - nothing could be done now.

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Kamvelihle Ngubane

I found the helper, Dora dusting the furnishings in the lounge.

Kamva: Let me grab a cloth, and help you.

Dora: There is no need for that, mam.

Kamva: I should really find something else to do. I can't sit and do nothing the whole day. It gets tiring.

My cellphone rang in my pocket and I reached for it - the caller identity was my uncle's. I paced to the kitchen.

Kamva: Hello, uncle.

Mandlakhe: Hello, my child. How are you?

Kamva: I'm doing good. How are things that side?

Mandlakhe: Everything is going well, but there is

something that worries me greatly.

Kamva: And what is that?

Mandlakhe: I keep having bad dreams about Buhle and I've consulted with Phumla but the ancestors are not giving us answers. Is she okay?

Kamva: The last time I checked, she was doing well. I'll check with her but our relationship is rocky at the moment.

Mandlakhe: I hear you, but she needs to be careful. It seems as if there is a dark cloud following her.

Kamva: Uncle, you know I've tried to talk to Buhle about going home. I still stand with the notion that she needs to be cleansed. I'll talk to her again.

Mandlakhe: That would be good.

Kamva: Perhaps you need to talk to her directly. I've given you her number before. Have you attempted to reach out?

Mandlakhe: I have, but my calls never go through. She is harbouring too much anger and hatred.

Kamva: I'll try my best, but I'm not promising

anything. Buhle is very stubborn and she doesn't listen to anyone. Not me at least.

Mandlakhe: I hear you. Are you okay?

Kamva: I'm very well. In fact, I'm very happy. Senzokuhle and I have thought of having a white wedding.

Mandlakhe: That's good news, but both you and Buhle should be careful. I keep getting this feeling that a heavy storm is brewing.

Kamva: We'll be fine. Don't worry so much.

Mandlakhe: And how is your mother doing?

Kamva: I don't think we should talk about her. It's not going to end well.

Mandlakhe: Okay.

The line went dead; and I hauled out a glass from the cupboard, pouring myself water from the tap. My phone rang again, and this time, it was Senzokuhle.

Kamva: Hello, baby.

Senzo: I have bad news, Kamva.

My smile fell.

Kamva: What is happening, Senzo?

Senzo: Mpilo has been arrested.

Kamva: I hope it's drunken driving.

Senzo: Not even. I hear talks about murder. I don't have all the facts yet.

Kamva: That's bad news indeed.

Senzo: And it's only a matter of time before the media catches wind of this news.

Kamva: I wonder how your mothers are going to take it.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

After everything that happened the past few days, my heart was heavy with sorrow but I was thankful that things didn't escalate further. All in all, I was relieved that they didn't penetrate me. Everything that happened, I could work on moving on. I missed Mpilo so much right now. He didn't come to see me last night. I hoped that everything was okay, but this feeling of apprehension kept coming back but I brushed it off.

Moments later, a nurse walked in.

Nurse: How are you feeling today?

Me: Good.

Nurse: You should report the mugging.

Me: What?

She eyed me suspiciously.

Nurse: You were mugged last night, right?

Me: Oh yes, forgive me. My mind is all over, but I'll most definitely report the mugging. I personally think it would be a waste of time as I didn't see their faces and the police can't do much.

Nurse: I hear you.

She monitored a few things, and I watched her retreating figure. Thabile popped in the ward.

Thabi: Babes, how are you feeling?

Me: I'm alright. The doctor prescribed me painkillers and an ointment for my bruises.

Thabi: That's good, but how are you? Emotionally and mentally.

Me: I'm fine.

Thabi: You can't be fine, Buhle. The sight I walked in on was detrimental to your wellbeing. You can't possibly just sweep it under the carpet.

Me: I'm fine. I don't want to talk about Bandile anymore. He's dead, and you made sure of it. I just want to focus on my books and Mpilo. On that note, where is he? I thought he'd be the one to fetch me.

Suddenly, she couldn't maintain eye contact with me and I picked up that something was wrong.

Me: Thabile, what is going on? What are you not telling me?

Thabi: Mpilo was arrested yesterday.

Mixed emotions surged through me.

Me: That can't be. How bad is it?

Thabi: Four murder counts. It's not looking good.

Me: I was starting to find my feet in my relationship with Mpilo, and then the snake saga happened. Bandile happened, and now this? Don't we deserve to be happy? Things just keep going wrong and wrong. Forever going wrong. I'm sick and tired of this. You'd swear that we're cursed.

Thabi: Buhle, you can't break down right now. Mpilo needs us to be strong for him. He needs you to be strong.

I felt like shedding tears but Thabile was right.

Me: You're right, but how did that happen?

Thabi: As you know, me and Qaphela brought you to the hospital and Mzi and Mpilo stayed behind to clean up everything.

Me: He's been arrested with Mzi?

Thabi: No, he's alone.

Me: What? How can that be? How did the police even find out about this? Don't you think that Mzi

was the leak? I mean what are the chances of Mpilo going down for the murders alone? Those brothers must have planned it. I tell you.

Thabi: No, that's not how it went down. Mpilo stayed behind whilst Mzi went to the car to fetch the petrol and discard the weapons. He managed to hide when he saw the police but he couldn't alert Mpilo.

Moreover you had gone to the police about this. They must have believed you and managed to track down Bandile.

Me: I find that hard to believe, because they looked at me like I was losing my mind when I told them that Bandile was alive.

Thabi: Look, that doesn't matter right now. We need to work together and find a solution.

Me: Can't we just tell the truth?

Thabi: Qaphela said we must talk to Mpilo first and find out what story he has told the police before we can think of doing something. Trust me, it's eating me to think that someone might go down for me.

Me: He deserved to die. How are you feeling about

that? I mean it can't be easy.

Thabi: I never thought that I could take away someone's life, but what's done is done. Bandile ruined our lives and I'd be lying if I said that I regretted it. We should get going. Qaphela is waiting for us.

Me: We should go straight to where they have kept Mpilo.

Thabi: They say we can't see him today.

Me: What? That's ridiculous.

Thabi: We'll try again tomorrow.

Noxolo Ndebele

While going to the spaza, I bumped into Kaizer; a hammer in his possession. I stopped and greeted him.

Noxolo: Who are you going to threaten now? What's gotten you so agitated?

Kaizer: Imagine. I use my hard earned money to help this community when they're dire need of it, but one thinks that they can take off with my R20 000. I don't play when it comes to my money.

Noxolo: I tend to forget that you're a loanshark. Who's gotten in your bad books?

Kaizer: The biggest drunkard of Alex. Don't even ask what I was thinking lending money to someone I know is going to drink it away.

Noxolo: That hammer is going to get the job done for you. Who's this drunkard you're talking about? You know that Alex is full of them. They wake up with it. Piss with it in their hands. Go to sleep with it.

Kaizer: You've said it all. I feel sorry for Shakes with a father like that.

My confusion was not a match for the anger he

deciphered.

Noxolo: Shakes' father? Did his son take off with him?

Kaizer: I think so. I went to his house this morning, and their neighbors told me that they packed everything of theirs and left.

Noxolo: Wow, I guess me and Khethiwe spoke too soon.

Kaizer: What are you on about?

Noxolo: Shakes probably ran away from his responsibility. Why am I not surprised?

I clicked my tongue.

Mpilo Ngubane

The questioning room felt too small for me and Mthandeni. He was the lead investigator of this case.

Mthandeni: Are you ready to tell me the truth?

Mpilo: I'm sticking to what I told you before.

Mthandeni: Or so you happened to discover an abandoned warehouse with four dead bodies unknowingly? Is that the story you're sticking?

Mpilo: Detective, that is what happened.

Mthandeni: I don't know who you think you're talking to. Even a newborn baby will be able to pick up that you're telling me nonsense. Your lawyer must pop by soon, because I see that you want to keep bullshitting me.

Mpilo: I'm a lawyer myself. Have you forgotten?

Mthandeni: Mpilo Ngubane, how do you explain the woman's clothes we've found? The only guns we've discovered are of Bandile and his friends. It has their fingerprints.

Mpilo: Mustn't that tell you something? I didn't kill

them.

Mthandeni: You want to know what I think?

Mpilo: You're going to tell me anyway.

Mthandeni: Few days back, your girlfriend came to the police station to tell us that she suspected Bandile was still alive.

Mpilo: You seem to know a lot about my love life.

Mthandeni: Somehow it came to your attention that he was really alive and you planned to kill him. It makes sense. You had a motive, and that motive was to make Bandile pay for everything he's done. I mean you were Thabile's lawyer in her rape case against him.

Mpilo: I'm not going to say another word until my lawyer comes through.

Mthandeni: To think I used to respect you, only to find out that you're nothing but a murderer in a suit. Fine, have it your way. Forget about the weapons, I'm going to build a strong case against you without them. I want an example to be made of you to all

corrupt law officials that they're not above the law and we'll catch them. So prepare to rot in here.

Mpilo: I know my rights. You can't deny me visitors. I want to make my call.

Mthandeni: And you'll get your call but give it up already, Mpilo. The stakes are already high against you. I know you didn't pull this off alone. I want names.

He gathered his things, and rose from the chair he was occupying.

Mthandeni: We walked in on you kicking Bandile's dead body. We're not stupid, Mpilo. You must have had someone to get rid of the weapons. But very well, we'll talk when you're ready to admit the truth.

Mpilo: We both know what a dog Bandile was.

Mthandeni: That's true, but the moment you found out that he was still alive, you should have alerted the police. According to the constitution, everyone

has a right to life. You can't kill someone so brutally and expect to walk. It's clear that you wanted Bandile dead. He was shot so many times. His body was nearly destroyed, and self-defense won't cut it.

Frustration hounded me. On the one hand, I wanted to make sure that Buhle was okay and on the other, I needed to do something. Things were bad right now.

I needed to have Qaphela and Mzi here so we could brainstorm ideas on how I could get out of this mess. I wanted us to find a story regarding Buhle that would make all of us go scotch free.

Mthandeni: Guard, take him back to the holding cells.

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Narrated

In the Dube household, the parents of Bandile deciphered different sets of emotions at Bandile's real death.

Nokulunga: The police will release Bandile's body soon.

Njabulo: I don't care.

Nokulunga: What do you mean that you don't care?

Njabulo: Exactly what I've said. I'm not even sure Bandile is my child. I didn't raise a stupid child, Nokulunga.

Nokulunga: What are you trying to say, Njabulo? Bandile is your son.

Njabulo: Bandile is dead. I've already mourned him 2 months ago, and I'm not going to put myself through that shit again. I've already killed Ace because of his stupidity and lies. So don't involve me in this anymore.

Nokulunga: The police have asked to dig Bandile's grave. They need to find out who was buried in his place. This doesn't make sense, Njabulo.

Njabulo: Your son has never made sense. I warned him about making plans with Zenani. He's dead for real this time, and Zenani is going to continue living her life. I've been saying. Zenani is a snake.

Njabulo trod away from the lounge, leaving Nokulunga drowning in her sadness. Njabulo called Zenani.

Njabulo: Your stupid games got my son killed.

Zenani: He knew the risks involved.

Njabulo: Is that so? Don't forget I know how you planned this. I'm sure the police would be glad to know how he pulled this off. Tread carefully.

Zenani: Don't forget that I know that you killed Ace. Don't mess with me, Njabulo.

Njabulo: You've grown balls, I see.

Zenani: I don't like to be threatened.

Njabulo mounted his car, meanwhile his wife answered her ringing cellphone.

Xoliswa: Did you know that Bandile was still alive?

Nokulunga: I can explain, Xoliswa. Yes, I knew but I'm the one who called the police on him. I-

Xoliswa: Save it. My son was going to spend 15 years of his life behind bars while the bastard who started this roamed the streets freely.

Nokulunga: Believe me. I only found out a week ago.

Xoliswa: It's a good thing that he's dead or else I was going to kill him myself.

The words stung Nokulunga.

Anna Ndebele

I kept attempting to call Shakes, but my calls weren't going through. I was stuffing my books into my backpack.

Noxolo: You're going to be late for school, Anna.

Anna: I've been trying to reach Shakes since last night. He's not picking up. I hope he's okay. Perhaps I should pass by his house after school.

Noxolo: About that, there is something I need to tell you.

Anna: You're starting to scare me, auntie.

I didn't feel good. Her tone worried me.

Noxolo: Please don't faint on me.

Anna: Aunty, please come out with it already. You're making me anxious and it's not good for the baby.

Noxolo: Shakes and his father are nowhere to be found. Word on the street is that they have taken everything of theirs and left.

Anna: Aunty, that can't be true. They probably just rumors.

Noxolo: I went there yesterday, and I didn't find anyone. And you said that he's not answering your calls. His number probably doesn't exist anymore.

My heart couldn't handle it. It shattered into pieces.

Anna: How could Shakes do this to me? I trusted him and I loved him. We were going to bring a child into this world together, and he chose to throw away everything.

Tears were already finding their way out of my eyes.

Noxolo: It's okay, baby. We're here for you. You'll be fine.

Anna: Aunty, you don't understand the things I've done for him, and the future he promised me... You don't understand. If only you knew, you wouldn't be happy with me.

Noxolo: It's not your fault, Bongiwe. I can see that you're not okay. I'll let you stay home for today to calm down.

Anna: He played me. He made me betray the ones I love... Aunty, you don't understand. I trusted in him. I thought that he was different. I thought that I had a future with him.

She pulled me into her arms, stroking my back as I seek comfort from her. She didn't understand. It hurt so bad.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I hugged Mpilo when the guard gave us space. My heart soared into the sky at being in his arms again.

Mpilo: I missed you.

We went to sit down.

Mpilo: How are you holding up?

Me: I'm worried about you. Are they treating you good?

Mpilo: I think you should give therapy another go.

I narrowed my eyes into paper slits, shaking my head. It pained me to see him so exhausted and helpless.

Me: After what happened the last time, I'm not going there again.

Mpilo: There are other therapists out there. Not everyone will be like your former one. She must thank you that you didn't report her. She should have been stopped from practicing.

Me: Just like the way your career is threatened. Your reputation is going to suffer a huge blow from this, Mpilo. Everything you've worked for is going to come crashing down. I hate seeing you like this, and to think that you were only saving me from that monster.

Mpilo: It doesn't matter, Buhle. I'll find a way out of this.

Me: I hope so, but why haven't you told the police the truth? Surely they will understand that it was self-defense.

Mpilo: It won't help telling them the unfiltered truth. I might as well be sending all of us to jail. You saw what Thabile did to Bandile. The police told me flat out that self-defense is not going to cut it. I'll tell

them my version of the truth, but I'm going to need you to keep everything to yourself for now.

Me: Mpilo, this is going to blow up in our faces. We need to tell the truth.

Mpilo: Would you rather it be Thabile in my place? She's not going to survive in here and she's already been through a lot. I know you hate seeing me this, but remember that Thabile has been there for you through a lot of things.

I sighed deeply.

Me: I know. I'll follow your lead.

Mpilo: Good. I'll be out of here before you know it.

I attempted so hard to be hopeful, but I couldn't. I masked my fear from him.

Mpilo: It's going to be okay. So I'm going to need you

to focus on your books.

Indeed, my books were suffering and when the exams start, I don't think I'll be ready, and focused not until Mpilo finds a way to get out of this mess.

I wanted to be vocal about my thoughts of having one of those brothers take the fall for this, but it would come across as selfish and that was not the person I wanted to become. After all, they came through for me.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Zenani came to join me and Mthunzi in the lounge with raw wors in her hand. She munched on the uncooked meat.

Mthunzi: You eat raw meat?

Nikiwe: It's a bad habit of hers.

Zenani: What's the worst that could happen? It's meat. Uncooked or not.

Nikiwe: Let's get to the issue at hand. I think this is the perfect time to execute our plan.

Mthunzi: I read somewhere that Sensokuhle's brother has been arrested. We could hold off the plan a bit.

Nikiwe: Are you getting cold feet? I don't understand how you can't see that this is the perfect time to strike.

Mthunzi: You don't really know when to stop. They're in a crisis, and you want to add onto their problems. I'm starting to feel for Kamva. I know you're evil, but this is taking it too far.

I rolled my eyes.

Nikiwe: There is the door. We're not forcing you to do this. Anyway as I was saying, this is the perfect time to strike. Sensokuhle is probably stressed about his brother, and if we keep on pushing; it's going to add strain to their marriage. At the end, he'll be frustrated by Mpilo's future on one hand and on the other, his wife will be cheating on him. And if everything goes well, they'll be divorced soon.

Mthunzi: You'll brief me everything another time, but for now, I need to go.

He rose from the couch, and slithered away.

Zenani: You know I'm thinking. I wish Njabulo could release one or two bullets on Mpilo. I want to see something.

Nikiwe: Buhle would probably lose her sanity. You're so naughty.

We chuckled, as we high-fived.

Zenani: Net for control. Think about it. If Njabulo could lose his cool for Bandile's fake death and kill Ace, think about his son's real death. He called me breathing fire.

Nikiwe: You're so evil.

We continued laughing.

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Mpilo Ngubane

I shared my version of the story with my lawyer, my father's old friend and my mentor.

Mr Zulu: Let's go through it one last time.

Mpilo: I was having a talk with my brother when an incoming call from my girlfriend came through. I drove to the club where I found Buhle wasted and passed out from excessive drinking. Whilst giving the bartender an earful, I turned my back on her, and suddenly she was nowhere to be seen and she had my jacket and cellphone in her possession. Upon talking to her friend, Thabile, I discovered that Bandile may perhaps be alive and I set out to search for her. I used my cellphone to track her and luckily it led me there, but when I arrived at the warehouse, I found Bandile and his goons dead and Buhle nowhere in sight.

Mr Zulu: Makes sense. We can work with that, and get you out on bail atleast.

Mpilo: Thank you.

Mr Zulu: Your cellphone was discovered at the crime scene and Buhle is backing up your story so we should be good. As long as there won't be any surprises, I might get the charges against you

dropped.

Mpilo: Mthandeni isn't going to take it lying down.

Mr Zulu: He doesn't make final verdicts so he doesn't matter.

He gathered his things, and placed them into his briefcase.

Mr Zulu: Let's go. We don't want to be late for court.

Mpilo: Are you sure that this is going to swing our way?

Mr Zulu: It makes sense, so I don't see any reason why they should keep you here any longer. They don't have anything against you. As long as Buhle sticks to the fact that she didn't see who killed Bandile, we'll be fine.

Mpilo: There's a loophole. My brother in law took Buhle to the hospital along with Thabile, so we can't exactly lie about that. They could easily access the hospital's footage.

Mr Zulu: Mpilo, stop worrying. We've got everything covered. Thabile has inherited a percentage of the hotel Qaphela and Mzi runs. When Bandile and the rest had been killed, Buhle escaped and with the help of a good samaritan, she called Thabile whom was having a meeting with Qaphela which boils down to the fact that they took her to the hospital.

Everything seemed to be looking up.

Mpilo: Okay, let's go.

Narrated

Xolani and Shawn were scrubbing the floors in the communal bathroom; a mass of prisoners conversed around them.

Anger was easily detectable on their faces.

Xolani: I can't believe Bandile. After everything we've been through with that guy, he does this to us?

Shawn: It's a good thing that he's not coming back here. Otherwise I'd have finished him off myself.

Xolani: I couldn't believe it when my mother dished out the news to me.

Shawn: This only means one thing. He had us raped..

The memory of that fateful day plagued their mind. Their physical pain had subsided, but not the mental and emotional tumor it had brought upon them.

Xolani: Bandile has always been a selfish bastard. He left us to rot in here, while he went out and wreck havoc all over again.

Shawn: Imagine spending 15 years in here for shit

we pulled together, and Bandile is dead and Ofentse continues with his life.

Xolani: Imagine. This is Ofentse's fault. He got cheated on, and pulled us into his problems now we're behind bars for being good friends.

Shawn: He has had it too easy. I heard that he was not expelled from the university.

Xolani: But honestly speaking, we were wrong. We do need to apologise to Thabile.

Shawn: It's sad that it took the violation for us to see our mistakes.

Meanwhile, an intimidating prisoner pissed on the floor deliberately and patted Shawn on the shoulder. "Hey boys, you missed a spot."

Buhlenkosi Malinga

You didn't see my face when the charges were dropped against Mpilo. The happiness and relief that flowed through my veins was laden.

Mpilo enveloped me in his arms - mirroring my relief. I was beyond happy. We trotted off to the SUV I arrived in with Qaphela, Kamva and her husband and sister in law, and Thabile. We were attacked by the paparazzi and press wanting a story, but we drifted away from the flashing cameras and nosy journalists, Qaphela easing down on the road.

I was sitting on top of Mpilo, and his groin rose and started to poke my butt along the way.

I smiled slyly, and whispered into his ear discreetly; grinding against him seductively.

Me: Seems like you're hungry for something else.

Mpilo: This is not funny, Buhle.

Me: Tonight.

I had never performed the deed with Mpilo, and tonight, I wanted to completely give myself to him. The conversation and excitement in the car drowned out our own.

Somi: We should celebrate.

Senzo: Definitely.

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With the clouds darkening and the sun cowering away, the gents were by the patio; braaing the meat and the ladies in the kitchen, with wine and cooking.

Kamva: Buhle, you must thank Mpilo's ancestors for being with him.

Somi: I second that. It was too easy. I didn't think Mpilo would make it out so soon.

Thabi: The police had nothing concrete against him. They had to let him go, and focus on finding the real killers.

Kamva: But Buhle, to avoid further problems, you should leave Mpilo.

I rolled my eyes. She was starting again.

Me: I'm going to take that as the liquor talking.

Kamva: Girl, I'm very aware of what I'm saying.

Me: Kamva, please don't start with me. Is it so difficult for you to see me happy?

Kamva: Buhle, let's be real here. Everything you touch turns to dust. Look around, what has gone right with you around? You're like this bad luck that wipes off on everything and everyone surrounding you.

Her words were ringing some sense, but they were poking my heart.

Somi: Kamva, what are you doing? This is your sister. You can't be saying things like that.

Kamva: Must I shy away from the truth?

Me: It seems that you have a lot on your heart-

Kamva: I've asked you so much to go home and get your ducks in a row, but I must as well have been talking to a wall. Your uncle tried reaching out, but you seemed comfortable with going around ruining people's life. Your problem is that you don't want to listen to anyone. Your word must be law. You think you know everything and it's costing the people around you a lot.

Somi: Kamva, that's enough. You can't be behaving like this.

Thabi: Sis, you should get checked at a mental asylum because you seem to be losing your mind.

One minute, we're celebrating and the next minute, you're getting heavy.

Tears pooled in my eyes, as her words flowed like an waterfall - unstoppable.

Kamva: I'm tired of you people treating Buhle like a child. I wish that she'd see that her selfishness is affecting us in a bad way. But I'm always in the wrong. Everything I say doesn't make sense, her words make sense more, isn't it?

Me: Kamva, what is this about? I haven't done anything wrong to you, but you never miss a chance to hurt my feelings.

Thabi: Your hatred runs deep for Buhle. This isn't healthy, Kamva.

Kamva: You know nothing about me. So don't put your two cents where it is not needed.

Senzo skidded to a stop in the threshold of the

kitchen.

Somi: Do you need something?

Senzo: The police have come to arrest Mpilo again.

Thabi: What?

Kamva: See what I was talking about.

My heart raced. I had only got him back, and he was leaving again. My tears fell and all of us skipped outside to the patio where Mpilo was been cuffed by a male officer.

Mpilo: Mthandeni, what is the meaning of this? You can't keep arresting me like this. The charges have been dropped.

Mthandeni: I know, but I'm here because new evidence has surfaced.

Somi: This is ridiculous. My brother is not your toy. What evidence are you taking about?

Mpilo: We're arresting him for lying to an officer of the law and before the court and withholding information. Pushing my luck, for three murder counts, one attempted murder and protecting criminals.

I swear my heart dropped to the ground when he was dragged away, transfixed to the spot due to shock.

Senzokuhle Ngubane

Someone rang the doorbell whilst I was on the phone with Happy. This day had started off with uncertainty to a good note, and then another hurdle. I descended the stairs.

Senzo: What's your presence going to change?

Happy: Everyone is worried about Mpilo.

Senzo: I know, but there's nothing you can do. Just stay back, instead of coming with the whole family and stressing Mpilo. I'll keep you updated.

I hang up before she could further protest, and opened the door. A delivery man stood at the door with a box wrapped with a ribbon. I signed for it and closed the door. I was curious about what was inside the box. I unwrapped it and opened it.

There was a lingerie set inside and my eyebrows furrowed in confusion. I saw a note inside and read it.

'I can't wait to see you in this sexy number. Tonight it's me and you.'

I threw the box across the room and crumpled the note in my hand, and my voice rose a few octaves as I yelled out Kamva's name. My eyes darkened in

anger.

Kamva descended the stairs, confusion and concern doodled on her features.

Senzo: What the hell is that?

Kamva: It seems like a lingerie. Did you get it for me?

Her words seemed to spark my anger.

Senzo: Seems like you're cheating on me.

She read the crumpled note.

Kamva: There's no such thing. Perhaps the delivery got the addresses mixed up. I know nothing about this.

Senzo: Yes, sounds like an excuse you're making up

to shy away from the fact that you've been caught.

Kamva: Yeah, as if I'd cheat right in your face. Senzo, you're getting worked up over nothing. It must be a mistake with the delivery. I know nothing about this.

Senzo: Having another man sending my wife lingerie is not a big deal. Unless Buhle is to blame for this too.

The sarcasm flowed through my mouth.

Kamva: Maybe you're covering up for yourself. Who knows? You might be shifting the blame to me because you're the one who ordered that for your mistress.

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I'll post again tomorrow. Have a good evening.

Mpilo Ngubane

This man wanted so much to see me behind bars, and it was getting tiring. I needed explanations from him.

Mpilo: This is not funny anymore. You forget that I'm a lawyer. I'll sue you for harrassment.

Mthandeni: We've gotten some incriminating evidence against you.

Mpilo: What is this evidence you're talking about?

Mthandeni: Njabulo, Bandile's father said that you went to his house a few days back, guns blazing and threatened to kill Bandile.

I couldn't help but let out a humorless laugh.

Mpilo: So you brought me back here for that nonsense?

Mthandeni: It's not nonsense. It shows that you were after all planning to kill Bandile.

Mpilo: You should consider finding a new profession, because clearly this isn't working for you. You arrested me because someone I'm not even acquainted states that I went to his house. First of all, I don't know where he stays. That Njabulo is probably out for blood. It's understandable because his son died, but he's taking it too far.

Mthandeni: There's still more.

Mpilo: Listen here. How about you stop my wasting time and focus all that energy you have on finding the real killer? Not only that, seek to fix the corruption in that prison Bandile was held. The question you should be asking is how the hell did Bandile pull off his escape?

Mthandeni: Like I said, that's not all. There's someone I'd like you to meet.

He unlocked my cell, and chained my hands. I followed behind him as we walked past others in their

individual holding cells until we skidded in front of one at the far end.

Mthandeni: Do you recognize this man?

My eyes analysed him, but I wasn't familiarised with him. He was a total stranger to me.

Mpilo: Am I supposed to?

Mthandeni: We found him attempting to finish the job. I didn't tell you this, but one of the guys you shot down survived and it seems that you found out all on your own. So you're facing three murder charges and one attempted murder.

My heart raced to the news. There can't be a survivor. It would be bad if he could identify me or worse the people I was attempting to protect.

Mthandeni: Cat got your tongue? Look at this man carefully. You paid him to go kill the survivor in hospital. You knew that you'd go to jail when he awakens, but you thought ahead and planned to silence him permanently.

Confusion and shock swam in my globes.

Mpilo: This is ridiculous. I don't have an idea what you're talking about.

Mthandeni: Luckily we found him attempting to kill the guy in the hospital, and we drilled him until he confessed that you're the one who sent him.

I couldn't believe my ears. I gazed at the man behind the bars.

Mpilo: Who the hell are you working for?

He didn't say anything.

Mthandeni: You still think that the evidence we have against you is not damning?

Mpilo: Mthandeni, is this low you'll stoop to have me behind bars? Someone is trying their damndest hard to frame me. You can't tell me that you believe them. I have done nothing wrong. All I wanted was to find Buhle.

Mthandeni: We're just waiting for that guy in hospital to wake up. He might be have more information about the killers since you claim you don't.

Someone had me backed in a corner, and I could end up being jailed with fabricated evidence.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I handed Sensokuhle a cup of coffee, and he placed it on the table. I went to sit down across him.

Senzo: Thank you.

Kamva: I was hoping we could talk.

Senzo: I'm not in the mood to fight. I have an early meeting, and I don't want to attend it with stress.

Kamva: I don't want to fight with you. I wanted to apologise for the way I spoke to you yesterday. The thing is that you accused me of cheating and I didn't take it well.

Senzo: I'm sorry too for not giving you the benefit of doubt. I saw red when I thought of another man sending you such gifts and the note didn't make it easy.

Kamva: I understand, but I have no idea why we would receive such a gift. I still stand with the fact that it was delivered at the wrong address. The neighbors must be going crazy that it never arrived.

Senzo: I hear you. I'm sorry for snapping at you. It hasn't been a good week.

Kamva: I understand. All of us are worried about Mpilo's future. What evidence do the police have against him now?

Senzo: I pass by the station after my meeting.

Kamva: I think that he's not telling us the whole truth.

Senzo: I've noticed, but he probably has his reasons for doing so.

Kamva: It's going to cost him a lot. Let's hope that the evidence is nothing serious, because one minute we're celebrating and the next, he's getting dragged back to prison.

Senzo: I'll see you later.

He rose from the chair, and came to peck me on the lips before retreating and leaving me in deep thought.

Thabile Mampane

My gaze fixated on the hospital before us. We were enclosed in Qaphela's vehicle as warmth spread through the whole interior.

Qaphela: I still don't think this is a good idea.

Thabi: Q, I pass off as a nurse. You on the other hand, you'll raise suspicions.

Qaphela: I know but it's too risky. I'm pretty sure that they have tightened security.

Thabi: Well, that guy has to die. We don't know what he has seen or heard.

Qaphela: Everything is going to fall on Mpilo. If we succeed to kill that guy, it's going to point to Mpilo especially with that guy who's framing him in prison.

Thabi: Okay, I hear you. What do you suggest we do?

Qaphela: We find out what his weaknesses are.

That's our best shot.

Thabi: I still say he has to go.

Qaphela: You're starting to worry me now, Thabile. I thought you'd be feeling guilty after killing Bandile, but you seem to want to go on a killing spree.

Thabi: Well, my feelings died along with Bandile. I'm going to do everything I can to protect the ones around me.

Qaphela: Okay, we can simply pay a nurse to eliminate him and problem solved.

Thabi: No, we can't involve a sixth person into our secrets. Few months later, she'll be back to blackmail us. It never ends well.

Qaphela: You watch too many movies. This is real life.

I turned my gaze back to the building.

Thabi: What do we do about Njabulo? He's not going

to rest until he destroys everyone who touches his family. It's clear that he's the one planting all this evidence to frame Mpilo.

Qaphela: I don't know. What did you have in mind?

Thabi: Perhaps we need to create a distraction. Something to divert his attention while we work on getting Mpilo out of jail.

Qaphela: I'm listening.

Thabi: His mine. We can burn it down. He's going to need to do a lot of damage control.

Qaphela: You don't realise that his mine contributes to the country's economy.

I rolled my eyes.

Thabi: Really, Qaphela? You're telling me about the economy? Where was it when Bandile and Njabulo single handedly destroyed my life?

Qaphela: I'm just kidding, but burning it down is not a

solution. He could retaliate and set our hotel on fire.

Thabi: He doesn't have to know it's us.

Qaphela: He knows that you're after him. Especially since your mother did not tell the police the truth.

Thabi: You have a point, but we can't sit and do nothing.

Qaphela: We'll slowly bring him to knees and take him for everything that he has. You need to be smart and patient about this.

Thabi: Okay. Reverting back to Mpilo, can't we find a way to make the docket disappear?

Qaphela: We have to look into it, but I'm willing to bet a meter that they're not going to make a mistake with this case.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Kamva: I wanted to apologise for my behavior towards you lately. Even at the dinner weeks ago, it was uncalled for.

I planted myself on my bed.

Me: Well, it takes a lot for one to admit wrong and apologise.

Kamva: I realise I should have addressed everything with you calmly instead of blowing your head off and appearing as bitter and bitchy.

Me: Apology accepted. Thank you for reaching out.

Kamva: And for what it's worth, Mpilo will make it out. Don't lose hope.

Me: Perhaps you were right, and everything I touch turns to dust. Starting from Thabile, I agree that she had her own problems when she met me but I seem to have amplified them and now Mpilo.

Kamva: Everything will work out. When you find time, do go home.

Me: The problem is that I'm swamped with assignments. I need to catch up, and I'm starting to write in two weeks time. I also want to be there for Mpilo.

Kamva: Can't you spare one day or two?

Me: I can't. I'm literally drowning. But I'll make sure that I go home after my exams. And there's no saying what will happen when I get there. What if they say I need to stay back in the village for a week, or worse a month? I rather go after things start getting better.

Kamva: Okay, I'll leave you to your studying.

Me: Thanks for the calling.

I ended the call, and contemplated with myself, fiddling with my cellphone. I unblocked my uncle and after pondering upon it for full five minutes, my hesitant finger pressed call but it went to voicemail.

I sighed with disappointment, and went back to my

studying; attempting with everything in me for my mind not to drift to Mpilo.

Narrated

Njabulo leaned forward on his elbows on the metal table at the police station. Another guy sat across him after being uncuffed.

Njabulo: You've done a good job, Strike and for that, I'll reward you handsomely.

Strike: It's done. The police believe that Mpilo sent me to finish off that gent in hospital.

Njabulo: Very good. You don't touch my family and expect to live peacefully. He should be lucky that I'm not offloading bullets into his skull.

There was a momentarily pause before Njabulo spoke again.

Njabulo: I'll take care of your family outside, but don't worry, you'll be out soon. I'll pull some strings.

Strike: Sure, boss. You know I'll always follow your lead. I'll die where you die.

Njabulo: Music to my ears.

Strike: Salute.

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A week later

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I planted my butt on the armrest of the sofa as I

watched my plan come into order.

Zenani: Maybe I'll hide behind the sofa.

A camera dangled around Zenani's neck as she looked for potential spots to conceal her figure.

Zenani: So Nikiwe, has Kamva said anything about the lingerie set?

Nikiwe: No.

Mthunzi: Do you think they're fighting?

Nikiwe: We've planted the seed of doubt. Very soon, it will lead to divorce.

My eyes roamed around, deep in thought.

Zenani: Mthunzi, you know what to do.

Mthunzi: I know.

Zenani: Don't mess it up.

Mthunzi: I won't.

Zenani: Nikiwe, it's your turn now.

I reached for my cellphone on the table, and swiped across Kamva's name and it rang.

Nikiwe: Don't say a word.

I returned my attention to my cellphone as Kamva answered the call, her voice echoing in my ear.

Kamva: Hello, ma.

Nikiwe: Hello, my child. How are you doing?

Kamva: I'm okay.

Nikiwe: And how is your husband doing? It must not be easy for him especially with his brother's arrest.

Kamva: That's true, but he's doing his best to get him

out of prison.

Nikiwe: I hear you, my child. Look, I don't want to burden you with more problems, but this is important.

Kamva: Are you okay?

Nikiwe: Yes, I'm fine, but there is someone here who is being a nuisance.

Kamva: Who is it?

Nikiwe: He says that he's not going to leave the house until he sees you. I've tried everything, threatening him with security but he means it when he says he's not going to leave.

Kamva: I have an inkling idea who it is. He can wait. He'll eventually leave.

Nikiwe: Kamva, Zenani is not here and I want to do my own things. I can't leave him alone in the house. Please do something.

Kamva: Fine, I'm calling the police.

Nikiwe: Noo, Kamva. He's not fighting. He merely just wants to have a word with you.

Kamva: I'll be there... Some people know how to ruin your day.

She hung up, and I turned towards Zenani and Mthunzi with a smile.

Nikiwe: She's coming. You know what to do, right?

Zenani: Immediately when she walks in here, kiss her and don't let her leave without me getting the shot.

Mthunzi: You're not going to be here to nurse me back to health when she smacks me.

Zenani: Stop being a coward.

Noxolo Ndebele

I walked back to the lounge with a note in my hand, only to find Khethiwe surfing through the channels.

Noxolo: I think Anna has written us a suicide note.

Khethiwe glanced at me with panicked face.

Khethiwe: You don't play like that, Noxolo.

Noxolo: I was cleaning her room, and I came across this paper on her bed.

Khethiwe: It could be her schoolwork.

Noxolo: Maybe.

Khethiwe: Read it. What are you waiting for?

I unfolded the paper, and skimmed through each syllable which formed letters into sentences.

Noxolo: Ma and Aunty, there is something I've been

hiding from you. Before I tell you what it is, I wanted to properly apologise for the baby I'm going to bring in this world without a father. I know people always say that a child is a blessing, but sometimes it's hard to believe that. What I'm going to tell is probably going to make you hate, and I want you to know that I'm sorry from the bottom of my heart.

I paused and looked at my sister, holding her breath.

Noxolo: What do you think she has done?

Khethiwe: I don't know, Noxolo, but it doesn't sound good.

My eyes darted back to the letter to continue reading.

Noxolo: I don't know what you think happened to the diamonds you were harbouring, but because I was blinded with love, I helped my baby's father exchange the real diamonds for fake ones, and now

he has taken off. I know I messed up and I wanted to apologise. I'll be sleeping at Cindy's place because I know I've dropped a bombshell on you both, and my betrayal may cause you to hurt me. I am so sorry, and debated against telling you the truth but I thought you deserved to know the truth. Please find it in your heart to forgive me.

All the anger and frustration returned. Most of all, disappointment dominated my emotions.

Khethiwe: I knew what I was talking about when I told you all those years ago, that a child needs to have both parents in their life. That's why it takes two to mingle. Look now, Bongiwe looked for a father's love from boys out there. I've been there, but I wasn't that stupid that I'd give away everything my family worked hard for. You worked hard for those diamonds, and she easily gave them away. What was she thinking, because I fail to understand?

Thabile Mampane

I pulled on my coat and block heels. Buhle kept stealing glances at me.

Buhle: You look ready to kick ass. Where are you going?

Thabi: I'm going to solve our problems.

Buhle: What about school? We're writing soon. I can't be the only one who received a timetable.

She came to my bed, and rummaged through my things, picking up a matte lipstick.

Thabi: I don't think the trick to journalism lies in books. It is with passion, and I've had it since I was

in high school. I'll be fine.

Buhle: You're different. I can't wrap my finger around it, but you've changed.

Thabi: Change is bound to happen when you're violated, and your father is killed like a dog.

Buhle: You're hardly here anymore. You don't care about school. I'm starting to worry about you.

Thabi: You're worrying for nothing. You should relax.

Buhle: Okay.

Her eyes narrowed when she saw two ID's amongst the pile of mess on my bed. My heart drummed as I snatched them from her.

Buhle: Why do you have two IDs?

Thabi: One is Qaphela's. I forgot to return it.

She eyed me suspiciously, but didn't push it further

as I tidied my bed. I jiggled car keys in my hand, and clasped my clutch.

Buhle: Since when do you have a car?

Thabi: It's not mine. I borrowed it. I'll see you tomorrow. I'm spending the night at the hotel.

I bid her farewell, and skipped to the car I had hired. I ignited the engine - the plan I had formulated playing like a film through my mind. I drove all the way to Njabulo's mine. My phone rang in my clutch and I hesitated to answer it when Qaphela's name flashed on my screen but I did anyway. I stared at the security detail of the mine.

Thabi: What's up?

Qaphela: What are you up to?

Thabi: I'm doing something I should have done a long time ago.

Qaphela: Don't do anything stupid.

Thabi: I wouldn't.

Qaphela: What are you planning, Thabile?

Thabi: The problem with keeping an enemy alive is that you're giving them time and an opportunity to strike. I'm fixing that mistake. Our mistake was keeping the enemy alive, and giving them time to wreck havoc. Now we're paying for it.

Qaphela: Tell me what you're planning to do. It's better for me to know so that when things don't go accordingly, I have you covered.

Thabi: All you need to know is that I'm killing two birds with one stone. We'll talk, Qaphela.

I hung up, and looked in the rear mirror. I looked unrecognisable - not like Thabile. Makeup could do wonders.

I clambered down from the car and skipped to the gate. A guard waited expectantly for me.

Thabi: I'm here to see the big boss.

Him: And who are you?

Thabi: I'm here for his pleasure. You know the bedroom things.

He slowly nodded, and gave me a board sheet to sign upon and I did, but with a twist. He opened the gate.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I walked in my aunt's house to find Mthunzi and my mother.

Nikiwe: You took your sweet time. I've been waiting

for you.

Kamva: Is aunty back? I thought you said that she's out.

Nikiwe: She is.

Kamva: Isn't that her car I saw outside? Along with this nuisance's one.

Nikiwe: I asked her to lend me the car for the day. She took a cab.

She went to grab the car keys from a small basket atop a table pushed against the wall near the door.

Nikiwe: I'll leave you guys to talk. See you later.

She filed out of the door, and I turned to Mthunzi with as much anger I could muster.

Kamva: I'm here now. What do you want, Mthunzi?

Mthunzi: Kamva, there is something you need to know.

Kamva: You only have one minute, Mthunzi and I'm leaving.

Mthunzi: A minute is all I need.

He kept coming closer to me as I heard an engine powered.

Kamva: I'm listening.

Mthunzi: Kamva, I never stopped loving you. All I'm asking for is one last chance.

Kamva: I'm married, Mthunzi. Seriously, this is getting old... Let me guess, you're the one who sent me that lingerie a week ago.

Mthunzi: What? You didn't like the colour?

Kamva: You're sick in the head, I swear.

A lopsided grin adorned my lips. He kept moving close until he was close enough and captured my lips for a kiss. I couldn't move as I was puzzled at his boldness. After I registered what was happening, I pushed him away and slid my hand across his cheek.

Kamva: What is your problem, Mthunzi? I told you that I love my husband. Whatever we had is over.

Mthunzi: I see marriage couldn't even tame your fierceness. You still give hot slaps.

Kamva: You know what? I'm leaving. You better leave too, because if anything happens to go missing here, we know who to blame.

I so wished I could wipe off the smug look on his face.

Thabile Mampane

I walked into Njabulo's office, and I was glad he was nowhere in sight. I looked around his plain stricken office, pursing my lips and my eyes landed on a jar which occupied alcohol on a tray along with a glass beside it.

I quickly skipped to it, listening for any incoming footsteps and voices before I hauled out a small sealed glass from my clutch, and poured the poisonous, transparent liquid into the liquor jar.

Thabi: Your favourite whiskey will be the reason you go down today.

I returned the empty glass to my bag, and rubbed my gloved hands together as I continued scanning the office with my eyes.

Finally the devil showed himself.

Njabulo: This is a surprise.

That deep hatred I had for him came to bay.

Thabi: I've finally come before you.

Njabulo: We do have a lot to talk about.

Thabi: I'm here to strike a deal with you.

He went to pour himself a glass and trod to his desk and took a seat. I faintly smiled as my eyes were planted on him. He didn't take a sip yet.

Njabulo: You don't want a drink?

I kept my cool.

Thabi: No, I happen to not share drinks with enemies.

Njabulo: Well, what brings you here?

Thabi: I want you to fix the mess you created with Mpilo or else you're not going to like what I'm going to do.

Njabulo: What can you possibly do? You're just a little girl.

Thabi: That's your first mistake. Underestimating me. I'm not the same girl your son violated and I'm definitely not the girl who had a father. I mean you killed him.

Njabulo: I don't have time for your games. What? You came here to record me? To have me admit to things I don't know about. Your mistake is thinking that you're a match for me. I've been in the game longer than you have, my girl.

He downed his liquor, and a victorious smile played on my lips.

Thabi: It's either you get Mpilo out of this mess or I'll have you arrested for my father's murder. My mother could simply state that her memory is working perfectly again.

Njabulo: It's clear that you don't know me well.

He was starting to sweat, and it seemed that the poison was beginning to seep in his bloodstream.

Thabi: Your second mistake is drinking in front of your enemy. Don't worry, the poison will start to kick in soon, destroying your organs and you know what I like about it is that it is untraceable.

Njabulo: You're not going to get away with this.

He attempted to reach for his cellphone, but he couldn't move anymore.

Thabi: I already have and if it happens that I'm caught, atleast I'd have reunited father and son. I'll see you in hell. Do greet your son for me, and tell him that I had a great time killing his ass.

He was rapidly deteriorating.

Thabi: That bastard, is for my father.

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Noxolo Ndebele

I watched Anna take tentative steps to the individual sofa and planting her butt onto it. The anger was quietly rising, but disappointment choked my senses. I worked hard to obtain the diamonds but I have my niece who gave them away, deceiving and lying to us.

Anna: I know that you're angry.

Khethiwe: Of course, we're angry. I don't even want to begin about what Noxolo went through for those diamonds. She nearly died for them. She had to lie low from Alex, because she was a wanted woman, and you were able to betray us for a guy you met 2 seconds ago.

Anna: I'm sorry. I was blinded by him.

Khethiwe: This shows that you can go as far as killing us for your boyfriends.

Anna: No, ma. That's not true. Please believe me when I say that I've learned my lesson.

Khethiwe: I don't know who you are anymore. You think it's nice to be pregnant at such a young age. You'll miss out on things as you'll be taking care of your baby while your peers will be out there having fun and celebrating their youth. You'll be stuck here with a baby without the baby daddy. That's what happens when you hurry to become an adult. You'll think someone will learn from your mistakes, but

they want to learn the hard way. I don't even have words for you anymore, Anna.

Anna: Aunty, you haven't said a word since I got here.

I gazed at her, unblinking.

Anna: Please say something. I know I messed up, but this silent treatment from you is killing me. Please tell me what you're thinking. I can take it, because I know it will be the truth.

Noxolo: Bongwiwe, I'm no longer angry at you. I don't see a point going back and forth about the past because what's done is done. It's not going to change anything.

Khethiwe: You're taking this far better than I expected, Noxolo. But you can't run away from the fact that her mistake has cost you a lot. It has made us lose a lot. I'm her mother, and I love my child, but I'm not going to be soft on her when she makes mistakes. This doesn't even deserve to be classified

as a mistake. A mistake is accidentally dropping a glass and it breaks, not scheming with your boyfriend to steal from your family.

Noxolo: I know that, Khethiwe. It makes me happy that atleast with the transaction, we weren't the only ones scammed. We received paper, and equally they received fake diamonds. It brings a little happiness to my heart. It does hurt that some boy is going to reap the fruits of my hard work, but in life, you win some and you lose some. This showed me that for a hustler - I don't want to say gangster - I did a lousy job and I've been out of the game for more than 10 years.

Khethiwe: That's not the point, Noxolo. Anna was wrong. Period.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I was going through a section I didn't quite get for the second time for my first exam when I got a call from my uncle.

Mandlakhe: Hello, my child. I'm sorry I didn't return your call. I'm only seeing it now.

Me: Well, I did call a week ago. I thought you were ignoring me because I wasn't exactly nice to you in the past.

Mandlakhe: That's true, but I don't have time for pettiness. My phone had been to repairs for the past week so I wasn't ignoring you.

Me: Okay, I wanted to let you know that Kamva has gotten through to me about coming home and having a cleansing ceremony.

Mandlakhe: That's good. You and Kamva do have to come home soon. There is a lot that I need to tell you.

Me: Okay, I hear you, but I'm already starting with my exams, and there are other things I need to attend to.

So I'll come home when things have settled down.

Mandlakhe: Okay, but don't waste time. It's becoming quite urgent.

Me: I won't. You called while I was studying. I'd like to go back to it. Thank you for the call.

Mandlakhe: Not a problem, and make us proud.

He hung up, and my eyes darted back to my books. I heaved a deep sigh - days were going by while Mpilo was stuck in prison. I didn't want to lose hope. In fact, I also brainstormed ideas on how we could get him out. I was getting tired of seeing him helpless and exhausted because that pain spanned over to me.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Zenani sealed the envelope of the snaps she had taken of Kamva and Mthunzi's kiss. She tossed it to the table.

Zenani: Tomorrow, this envelope will land in Senzokuhle's hands.

Nikiwe: Do you think it will be enough for him to ask for a divorce?

Zenani: What I know is that chances are always given in relationships. It's not enough, but it's a start.

Nikiwe: Look, if this doesn't work, we're going to need to take things a step up. We'll need to level up.

Zenani: What did you have in mind?

I smiled widely; the wheels turning in my head.

Zenani: With that look, I know it's not good and it's something definitely big.

Nikiwe: I did tell you that I can manage this.

Zenani: Kamva will hate us when she finds out that we're the ones driving a rift between her and Senzokuhle.

Nikiwe: I know that this makes me evil, but it makes me happy when I play games with people's lives. With a snap of my fingers, things can come tumbling down for them. In the palm of my hand, I call the shots. It makes me feel in control. That feeling can be compared to winning a game of chess but with more excitement. It's liberating.

Zenani: I know exactly what you're talking about. It tastes like freedom. Like power. That feeling has always kept us going.

Nikiwe: Who are we to go against the laws of nature? In this world, it's survival of the fittest. You'll never see a lion accommodating its prey. The weak are a playground for the strong.

Zenani: You know it. Kamva must learn the hard way that it doesn't help having a good heart. One must think of themselves only or else everyone will play on top of your head.

Zenani powered on her cellphone, and scrolled through it.

Zenani: You won't believe what I've just come across.

Nikiwe: What?

Zenani: Njabulo was discovered dead at his office yesterday. It's all over the news. How did I miss this?

Narrated

Mthandeni along with his partner had since been investigating Njabulo's sudden death yesterday.

Mthandeni: This has Mpilo written all over it. I think he wants all the witnesses dead.

Partner: I agree with you, but we need to investigate first before we accuse him. We still have to wait for the autopsy report.

Mthandeni kept looking at the CCTV footage of the mine; tracking and searching for anything that raised suspicions.

Mthandeni: The guards who were on duty yesterday explained that this woman was the last person to see Njabulo before his sudden death.

He pointed to the screen.

Mthandeni: It's clear that she didn't want to appear on the camera. Her head was always down. So we can't see her face. I think we have our suspect. Once the autopsy report comes through, and the time of death is known, we can match that with the time this mystery woman departed from the mine.

The phone rang, and the female partner went to answer it, while Mthandeni racked his brain for answers. After the call creased, the woman turned to her partner.

Partner: I've just gotten off the phone with the car company. Luckily the guards at the mine had taken down the number plate of the woman's vehicle. I had it typed in the database, and it led us to this car hiring company.

She scribbled down a name on a piece of paper and handed it to Mthandeni.

Mthandeni: So what do they have for us?

Partner: Indeed the car was hired. By a woman named Unathi Sithole.

Mthandeni: Let's wait for the cause of death, before we can think of making an arrest.

Thabile Mampane

I opened the ID of Unathi Sithole and showed it to Qaphela who held a lit cigarette in his hand. We leaned against his car.

Qaphela: How did you pull this off?

Thabi: I got one of her housekeepers to steal the ID and I hired the car I used to go the mine with her identity.

Qaphela: Killing two birds with one stone indeed. I see what you did there.

Thabi: You did say that she was becoming a problem by poaching our clients. This will make her stay in her lane, and not to mess with us.

Qaphela: You're smart. I must give you that.

Thabi: I'll never be a suspect in Njabulo's murder. I mean I worn a weave and a heap of makeup, and everyone knows that's not my style. I prefer my short hair.

Qaphela: Your hair does need another coat of dye.

I smiled. It felt good to know that Bandile and his father would never bother me again.

Thabi: So what do we do about Mpilo?

Qaphela: My inside guy said it's impossible to make the docket disappear. This is a high profile case, and they're doing their utmost best to solve it. So we might have to wait until he goes to trial.

Thabi: That is not good. He can be awaiting trial for months. You know how it is, and he'll be losing weight and gaining complexion in a cell.

Qaphela: We just need to hope that the judge who will be handing his case, we're able to sway him. Everyone has a price.

Thabi: We still have to deal with the loose ends.

Qaphela: Get rid of that.

He pointed to the ID as he pulled a drag of his cigarette; nicotine hitting my nostrils.

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Senzokuhle Ngubane

I was packing my documents into my briefcase, my cellphone pressed against my ear by my shoulder at the dining table after indulging in breakfast and going through a pitch I had prepared for potential clients.

Happy: How is Mpilo doing?

Senzo: He'll be fine.

Happy: You don't sound convinced.

Senzo: Happy, what do you want from me? You caught me at a bad time. I was about to head to work.

Happy: You're not telling us anything. Next thing you'll be biting our heads off when we show up.

Senzo: Your presence is not going to do any good here. It's not looking good for Mpilo. Are you satisfied?

Happy: What exactly do they have on him? You know MaNdlovu. She is going mad here.

Senzo: Look, it's understandable if she comes this side. She's her mother after all, but please don't come with the whole family and the whole clan. You guys never cease to amaze me with your dramatics.

Happy: What is happening with your wedding? We were looking forward to it.

Senzo: News travel fast, but Kamva and I haven't set a date. We can't have a wedding while my brother is in prison.

Happy: Life goes on, bhuti. We don't know if Mpilo will make it out. You said it yourself that it's not looking good.

Senzo: You're already losing faith.

Happy: Look, I'm spitting reality.

Senzo: Bye, greet the family for me.

Happy: Don't end the call. I want to talk to Kamva. She might need my help with the wedding.

Senzo: Don't you have her numbers? Please, Happy, I don't have time to play. I have work to do.

I didn't wait for her response before I hung up and pocketed my phone. I closed my briefcase, and pushed the empty plate to the middle of the table. I had to get going, or else I'll be late.

The doorbell reverberated around the manor. I went to open the door, and found nobody on the other side.

Senzo: What's with the security of this place? People knock and disappear... Dora!

My eyes landed on an envelope on the floor. I picked it up and ripped the seal off, curiosity poking me.

My eyes sported shock when I drank in photos of Kamva kissing another man. Specifics: Mthunzi. What set me off was the date stamped on the photos. It was recent.

Dora: Sir, you called me?

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Noxolo: Are you alright?

Me: I'm pushing, Aunty. It's hard.

Noxolo: This Bandile is creating problems even from the grave.

Me: Tell me about it. Worst part the police keep acting like he was innocent in all of this. It's tiring. He's been making my life a hell from day one.

Noxolo: As long as you're trying your best to be there for Mpilo.

Me: I haven't seen you in a long time.

Noxolo: Things have also been spiralling out of control this side.

Me: I hear you.

I saw Mthandeni approaching in the reception of the police station.

Me: We'll catch up later. I need to go.

I rose to my feet from the bench, and trod to him.

Me: I've been waiting to see Mpilo.

Mthandeni: Come through.

He led me to Mpilo's cell, and my heart fluttered at seeing him. I gazed at him through the bars, and he looked up at me from his mattress. It hurt seeing him. You could see that he was becoming a shadow of his former self.

Me: Hey, Mpilo. How are you doing?

Mpilo: Still the same as yesterday. Nothing has changed.

Me: I thought I should come and see you.

Mpilo: And when do you find the time to study when you're always here?

Me: Mpilo, it hurts seeing you locked up, and knowing that it's my fault. Perhaps if I had done things differently, things wouldn't have turned out like this.

Mpilo: Look, it's not your fault. Bandile was sick in the head. He wanted to make you pay. Even if you didn't go clubbing that day, he was still on the loose and he'd have found you one way or the other... Just go home, Buhle. I'm not in the mood for visitors today.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I walked in the house carrying shopping bags, and trotted straight to the kitchen, placing them on the counter.

Kamva: There are more in the car.

Dora nodded, and retreated. I grabbed a chocolate from the plastic, and ripped it open, pacing to the lounge where I found Senzo seated.

Kamva: You're back so early today. Didn't you have that pitch you spent all night preparing for?

Senzo: I did, but I couldn't focus on my meeting, because your kiss kept drifting into my mind.

I was puzzled, as I took a bite of the bar.

Kamva: What kiss?

I swear my heart was drumming out of my chest. He cocked his head to the table whereby photos were laid on it. I cussed underneath my breath.

Kamva: I can explain.

Senzo: I'd like to hear this one. What excuse are you going to come up with this time? You're going to say that these photos were photoshopped. No? That they were taken while the both of you were still dating?

Kamva: No, the kiss happened, but I promise you that I didn't do anything I wasn't supposed to do. He kissed me, not the other way around and I pushed him because I'm a married woman who loves her husband.

She stood up, and I could see anger simmering in his orbs. Confusion overwhelmed me along with fear of losing Sensokuhle.

Senzo: Save it, Kamva. I have better things to do with my time than sit and listen to your lies.

Kamva: That's not fair, Senzo. You're not giving me a chance to explain.

Senzo: I don't want your explanation. I'll be sleeping in the guestroom.

As he twirled to walk away, I clasped my hand on his wrist.

Kamva: Senzo, please give me a chance to talk.

Senzo: We'll talk when I've calmed down.

He walked away, and I sighed deeply in defeat. I hauled out my phone with my free hand and called Mthunzi. He answered on the third ring.

Kamva: What game are you playing at, Mthunzi? Didn't I tell you to stay away from me? I want you here tomorrow morning to fix this shit you started.

I hung up, and swallowed another bite of the chocolate, frustrated and questions flooding my

head.

Noxolo Ndebele

After putting away the dishes to their respective places, I dried my hands with a cloth and called Kaizer.

Kaizer: Grootman.

Noxolo: Kaizer, have you found Shakes and his father?

Kaizer: No, it's like they have disappeared from the face of earth. Your niece doing okay?

Noxolo: It's not even about her. That boy has something of mine, and I want it returned.

Kaizer: I hear you. I'll keep you updated. They don't

want to be found, so it's not going to be easy.

The line went dead, and I proceeded to make myself tea and stared out the kitchen window through the light curtains. Things were falling apart. In fact, they already have.

In my line of vision, I saw Anna and her friend Cindy outside - voices raised and gestures that indicated they were pissed.

Anna: Your mother had no right to do that, Cindy.

Cindy: You think that I don't know that? She wasn't supposed to talk to the school. I agree.

Anna: I'm glad to know that my life is a gossip column to you and your mother.

Cindy: Look, that night you asked to sleep over, my mother saw that you weren't okay. She asked and I told her everything. I didn't mean to, but I tell her everything. I didn't know things would turn out this

way.

I moved from the window, and poured the boiling water from the kettle into my cup along with 2 teaspoons of sugar and a spoonful of coffee. Anna entered through the kitchen door.

Noxolo: What's gotten you so worked up?

Anna: Cindy's mother told the school about my pregnancy.

I took a small sip of the steamy coffee.

Noxolo: She's part of the SGB, right?

Anna: Yes, and the principal wants to see mama in two days. There is a possibility that they're not going to allow me to finish the year.

Noxolo: They can't do that.

Anna: I don't know, aunty. We'll see, but the rules are clear. I'm approaching the fourth month, and nothing screams pregnancy. I'd have hidden it until I wrote my finals, but people with big mouths decided to ruin everything for me.

She sighed and retreated to her bedroom.

Thabile Mampane

I looked at the nursing uniform I wore, and exhaled deeply.

Thabi: Thank you for arranging the uniform for me.

Qaphela: I still don't like this, Thabile. What was the first rule I went through with you?

Thabi: Never involve innocent people.

Qaphela: You've already broke it.

Thabi: That's not true. I'm doing what needs to be done.

Qaphela: You do know that if he calls your bluff, you're done for. News travel fast, and no one in this business will ever take you seriously. You make threats. You follow through with them or else people will know your weaknesses. I don't see you killing a child.

Thabi: It won't get to that, and you know I'd never kill someone who's done nothing wrong to me. I'll convince him. Please don't worry.

Qaphela: I don't see him caring about his children. People did say that he's a deadbeat, and he's got children all over the place.

Thabi: Trust me, I know what I'm doing.

Qaphela: I'll wait for you.

I clambered down from the car, and slithered to the

hospital entrance. Luckily Qaphela had found out the ward where Jozi was kept so I wouldn't get lost and raise suspicions. I kept my head down all the time until I successfully found it. There was a police officer posted outside the ward.

Thabi: I'm here to check up on him.

He nodded, and let me through, closing the door.

The patient's hand was cuffed to the bed, and his eyes popped when he drank me in.

Thabi: Jozi. Jozi. Jozi. I wonder how you got that nickname. Is it because you have baby momma's all over Joburg, or it's something else? Your street cred? But anyway, I'm glad to see that you're alive. You did escape death, my man.

He held the panic button in his free hand, but didn't press.

Thabi: Relax, bra. I'm not here to kill you. I just want to talk.

He visibly relaxed, and I walked closer to him.

Thabi: I want to show you something.

I unlocked my cellphone and showed him a picture.

Thabi: I hope the near death experience didn't make you blind. You recognise your daughter, don't you?

He deciphered no emotions at all.

Thabi: What a nice, and bubbly child. I'd hate to finish

her.

I don't know if he could see that I was bluffing, but I had to do something.

Jozi: What do you want from me?

Thabi: I want you to forget everything that happened at the warehouse. You didn't see anything. You didn't hear anything. You basically don't remember a thing. That's the story you're going to tell the police.

Jozi: What makes you think that I haven't already given my statement?

Thabi: My source did tell that you've only been awake for a short while, and the police haven't come to take your statement.

Jozi: And if I don't do as you say?

Thabi: You'll be messing with the wrong people. Does Ace Mampane ring a bell? No? Q? Mzi? That's the people you'll be making enemies of, and dead people can't protect you. Bandile and his father won't

be able to help you. You fail to do as I ask. I'll make sure that your entire bloodline is wiped from existence.

He looked at me and I gave him a mocking smile.

Thabi: I wonder how you got mixed up with the likes of Bandile. Bandile didn't give a shit about anyone else but himself. Trust me when I say that he would have screwed you over. Ask his friends in jail, and they'll tell you. Where is he now? You'll be facing this shit alone.

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Simnikiwe Mkhize

Zenani: I still can't believe that Njabulo is dead.

She passed me the remote, after changing to the news channel that had since being broadcasting Njabulo and Bandile's deaths.

Nikiwe: I wonder how the wife is feeling. Imagine losing a son and husband in the same month.

I looked back at the screen where a photograph of a woman was shown in one corner with subtitles -
Suspect: Unathi Sithole.

Nikiwe: It seems that they have a suspect already, even though they say that the cause of death is still unclear.

Zenani: I'm not surprised. That man had enemies all over the place. I wonder why this Unathi killed him.

Nikiwe: Do you really think it's her?

Zenani: I don't care. I remember this day where he threatened me, and I ended up spilling the beans about Bandile being alive. Njabulo had an overinflated ego, and he pissed a lot of people in his life. It shouldn't come as a surprise.

Kamva walked in the lounge, and took a seat without a greeting.

Nikiwe: You should've told us that you're coming.

Zenani: You don't even greet. Is everything alright?

Kamva: And you would know, wouldn't you?

Her attitude had changed slightly. That meant everything played out well.

Zenani: You must have woken up on the wrong side of the bed.

Kamva: There is something I need to ask you.

Nikiwe: What is it?

Kamva: My husband received photos of me and Mthunzi kissing, and they were taken from here.

Zenani: Are you telling me that you're cheating on Sensokuhle? It hasn't been a year since you got married, but you're already looking outside, Kamva.

Kamva: I wanted to know who had the photos taken. It couldn't be Mthunzi.

Nikiwe: Is that your way of asking if it's us?

Kamva: I want to understand, because it's clear that someone set me up and it happened in your house.

Nikiwe: I don't understand how we could have taken these photos you talk of, because Zenani was out for the day, and you saw me leave with her car.

These questions you're asking us should be directed to Mthunzi.

Zenani: I can't believe you'd think so low of us. Have you forgotten that we're the ones who convinced to stay in your marriage when you wanted out?

Zenani needed to tune it down a little.

Kamva: I was just asking, and trying to make sense of things. That's all.

Zenani: Tell us what exactly happened, because I'm lost. I hear you talking about photos and a kiss, but I don't seem to comprehend.

Kamva: I'm leaving. I have a marriage to fix, because it seems that the devil is working overtime to ruin it. I'll see you.

She retreated, and we heard the door close.

Nikiwe: She's going to try and beat the truth out of Mthunzi. That boy better not slip up. We're so close to getting what we want.

Noxolo Ndebele

Anna handed me a cup of tea, and I thanked her before she plopped down on the individual sofa.

Anna: Mama, please don't forget that they want your presence at school tomorrow.

Khethiwe: I'm not going there.

Noxolo: What do you mean you're not going there?

Khethiwe: Did I stutter? You heard me loud and clear.

Noxolo: Anna is your child, and we must do all we can to fight for her future.

Khethiwe: She should've been the one doing the fighting. I wash my hands off this. The baby that she's carrying, I'll be there for her/him as the grandmother. Anna won't even have to worry about that. But other things, please don't involve me. This niece of yours has crossed the line. Imagine giving away millions to someone who didn't work for it.

Noxolo: Don't tell me you're still angry about that.

Khethiwe: Of course, I am. Our lives could have changed.

Noxolo: Look Khethiwe, even if she hadn't changed the diamonds, we were still going to go in the exchange blind.

She clicked her tongue.

Khethiwe: Like don't you get it, Noxolo? Anna is no different from a child who's addicted to nyaope, and everytime he wants a fix, he steals from you. It's not even about the diamonds. You do realise if that boyfriend of hers hadn't fled, we'd still be in the dark about all of this. She would've been glowing, and we would be thinking that it's the pregnancy, kante no, she's chowing stolen money. It's about ethics. I don't get it. Really, I don't. How do you steal from your family? I'm not talking about sweets from the kitchen, or my weave or your favorite dress, we're talking about millions here.

Noxolo: Can't we move on, Khethiwe? Yes, I agree that our lives could have changed for the better, but you know that we've been hustlers for a long time. We've never went to bed hungry. We don't struggle to pay the bills, even though we've never lasted in a 9 to 5 job. What's done is done. I want to move with life.

Khethiwe: Move on. I'm not stopping you. I don't even get why I'm arguing with you about my child. A child that came from my womb. You want to practice your soft parenting skills, make your own children. My child must know that with every action, there are consequences. Every mistake; her actions don't even fall under the list of mistakes. Your leniency is on another level, and few years down the line, you'll be surprised when the police knock on our door and tell us that Anna is a criminal.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I willed myself to calm down as me and Mthunzi have been breathing down each others' throats for the past 15 minutes. I was seeing red, truth be told. I hated people playing with me. I took a deep breath, and attempted to have a civilised conversation with him.

Kamva: Look Mthunzi, I know I messed up. I owed you an explanation after my wedding, I know, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. How I ended things wasn't right, because I realise I had left you with too many blanks. But you don't get to waltz back in my life, and ruin everything I have built.

He didn't say anything, and I couldn't fathom his expression.

Kamva: And for what, Mthunzi? Because if I remember well, our relationship wasn't based on

love, it was mere fun.

I let out a humorless laugh.

Kamva: And I never bought this story of me and my husband coincidentally bumping into you on our way to Mpumalanga. What are you planning to achieve with these games of yours? What do you want from me?

Mthunzi: You want the truth? Are you sure you're up for it?

Kamva: What do you think I called you here for?

Mthunzi: Check your relationship with your mother. I don't understand why a mother would do this to her own daughter, but this was her plan. She wanted to break your marriage with Senzo. I don't know the reason why she's doing this, but I played along.

To say I didn't expect that was an understatement. Mixed emotions clouded me.

Kamva: Are you sure you're not just shifting the blame?

Mthunzi: Believe what you want to believe, but this all started with a call from her. I was not willingly looking for trouble.

I heaved a sigh, and pure anger surged through my veins.

Kamva: Look, everything stays between us. Don't tell my mother that I know the truth. I want them to keep thinking that they have the upper hand.

My hands rolled into fists.

Kamva: I'm going to finish this stupid game they're playing, and according to my terms. This has actually opened up my eyes to a lot of things.

I heard someone clear their throat, and I whirled around to see Senzo in the threshold.

Kamva: Look Senzo, it's not what you think. I called Mthunzi to clear up things to me. I'll explain everything to you.

Senzo: You wanted to fuck your boyfriend in my house.

He sported a stoic expression, but it soon softened, easing my nerves and fear.

Senzo: I'm just joking. I forgot my file so I came back to get it and I happened to hear most of your conversation.

I sighed in relief.

Kamva: You had me there.

Narrated

Mthandeni: Sit down.

The detective had called for a prisoner, and they settled in the questioning room, and things were intensifying. Strike plopped down on the metal chair.

Strike: What is this about? I've told you everything I know.

Mthandeni: I take it you've heard about Njabulo's death.

Strike: News do reach prisons, you know. Is that all you called me here for?

Mthandeni: I want us to make a deal.

Strike: You've got my attention.

Mthandeni: I happened to go through the visitors' log, and I saw that Njabulo came to see you last week.

Strike: He was my boss. He heard about my arrest, and he came to check on me.

Mthandeni: I wondered what was so special about you but I know that Njabulo isn't the type to visit because he's concerned. I put 2 and 2 together and you can guess what it gave me.

Strike leaned back on the chair.

Mthandeni: I think that you and him were in cahoots to ensure that Mpilo stays in jail. I mean it makes sense.

Strike: I don't know what you're talking about.

Mthandeni: Please don't worry too much about it, because you and I want the same thing.

Strike quirked a brow.

Strike: What do you mean?

Mthandeni: I have an idea who Mpilo was working with on his rescue mission gone bad. I want them all, and the only way I get them is if you help me. You scratch my back, I scratch yours.

Strike: What do you have in mind?

Mthandeni: The rule of division never fails. So I can count on your co-operation?

Strike: Divide and conquer?

Mthandeni: You catch my drift.

Strike: I never took you for a corrupt official.

Mthandeni: Let's not take it too far. Corrupt is farfetched. Let's call it improvising and strategizing. I had gone to the hospital to take Jozi's statement, and he didn't tell me anything. I realised that they had gotten to him. Criminals always find a way to

escape prison, it's time I played their game against them.

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Kamvelihle Ngubane

My night had been filled with sorrow and hurt, but lovemaking with Senzo eased my pain and the betrayal of my mother. At first when Mthunzi told me about my mother involved, I didn't want to believe it but deep down I knew that my mother was capable of anything. I naively believed her when she told me that she didn't kill my father - denial had me fooled and my father's family didn't exactly like her so her story made sense. I easily forgave, but equally I could rain terror and Simnikiwe was pushing me.

Mthunzi had shown me his call log and indeed they were in contact. I recalled a conversation I had with her whereby she said that no matter what happened, be it that I'm served with a prenuptial agreement, I should not sign it. I wonder what game she was playing.

In actual fact, I didn't know what to believe anymore. I fought so hard, not only with myself - with the truth staring me right in the face but with Buhle, Senzo and my uncle too. I didn't know whether this discovery substituted for the murders she was accused of. I was so confused.

Somikazi snapped her fingers in my face.

Somi: Earth to Kamva.

Kamva: I'm sorry. I'm not in the best mood.

Somi: What are you thinking about?

I gave her a faint smile.

Kamva: Nothing I can't handle it.

Somi: It's been hectic this past few weeks.

Kamva: Tell me about it. How's Mpilo doing?

Somi: He tries to be strong, but I don't think he has any hope left. If he's found guilty, he's probably looking at life.

Kamva: That would be bad. We need to find a way to help.

Somi: Trust me. We're all trying.

Kamva: So bad news aside, how are things between you and Lwando?

I asked venturing to the less depressing events of our lives.

Somi: Well, we're going strong.

Kamva: Mzi is going to flip. Restart the divorce process, and this time, do not back out. It's better than doing all this sneaking around.

Somi: I know, but it's what makes things between me and Lwando fun. The sneaking around is thrilling and brings excitement.

I shook my head.

Kamva: Well, someone is going to get hurt here. You could have found someone else to play these games with, not Lwando. He's a good guy, and it seems that he loves you but you're stringing him along. This isn't going to end well.

Somi: I'm not playing with Lwando. I do love him. I'm just stuck in this marriage.

Kamva: That's not true. He granted you the divorce the first time. He can do it again.

Somi: You don't know Mzi the way I do. Everything is just so complicated.

Kamva: That's because you're making it complex.
There's nothing hard about this.

She rose from the sofa.

Somi: I'm craving wine. I'll be right back.

Kamva: Bring two bottles.

She chuckled and strode away. As the confusion filtered back into my head, an idea struck me. I picked up my cellphone beside me on the sofa, and called Buhle.

Buhle: Hello, Kamva. This is a surprise.

Kamva: Hey. I was hoping you could help me with something.

Buhle: Okay.

The atmosphere was awkward, and I was mainly to blame for that, but I was glad that I could have a civilised convo with her.

Kamva: It's going to sound weird, but I was hoping you could send me your friend's name. Thabile, is she.

Buhle: Okay. Am I allowed to ask why you want her numbers?

Kamva: There is a few things I need to address with her. Please get us in contact.

Buhle: Let me ask her first. I hope you understand that I can't hand out her number without permission.

Kamva: I understand, but please talk to her.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I dropped the call as I navigated through res to my room. I walked in to find Thabile, laid out on her bed with her books open.

Me: Is this really you?

Thabi: What's that supposed to mean?

I placed my bag on the floor, and dropped back on my bed.

Me: I mean the past couple of weeks, you've been doing strange things.

Thabi: A lot has happened, Buhle. Anyway, how did your first exam go?

Me: I think it might have actually went well because of Mpilo.

Thabi: What do you mean?

Me: I got a call from him to wish me luck before I started writing. He actually eased my nerves, and

here, I was thinking that he was pushing me away.

Thabi: Aren't you two just couple goals? I swear your relationship makes me reconsider men again.

Me: There are good men out there. I think you should consider playing for both teams again.

Thabi: Maybe, I sure am giving men a run for their money. If Mpilo's not careful, I might take you away from him.

Me: Never.

I chortled.

Thabi: Then I'll take Mpilo from you.

Me: We'll see about that.

Our laughter ceased.

Me: So Kamva asked me to send her your digits.

Thabi: So you two are back on speaking terms?
What does she want? I told you that I'm a catch.
Perhaps she's thinking of leaving her husband for
me. I've always thought that she's in the closet. The
way she's always bitter, you'd swear her husband is
not giving it to her right. Send her my numbers, and
tell her that Thabile is coming to the rescue.

She finished me this time.

Me: I'm glad to see that my friend is back to her
stupid self.

Thabi: Are you calling me stupid?

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Zenani passed me her cellphone, and a picture of a

sleek and beautiful car filled the screen.

Zenani: This is the first thing I'm buying when we get 50% of Senzokuhle's wealth.

Nikiwe: Haven't you learned anything, Zenani? You don't count your chickens before they hatch.

Zenani: We're close to getting what we want. Don't say I didn't tell you.

Nikiwe: You're too much, Zenani.

Zenani: Mfazi, on top of that, we should upgrade this house. I don't even want to mention the shoes I'm going to get. My collection is in dire need of a new pair.

I gave her cellphone back whilst mine vibrated. Kamva's name was displayed, and I answered it.

Nikiwe: Kamva?

I heard sobbing on the line, and looked at Zenani who eyed me curiously. I pressed the speaker.

Nikiwe: Are you okay, Kamva? What's wrong, my child?

Kamva: Mama, things are falling apart. I don't know what to do anymore.

You could hear the strain in her voice.

Nikiwe: Talk to me, nana.

Kamva: Sensokuhle wants a divorce... He doesn't want to listen to me.. Ma, I can't lose him.

Nikiwe: That can't be true, my child. You know that he loves you.

I glanced at Zenani and a smile had overtaken her face. An ounce of pain at hearing my daughter cry settled in my heart, but there was no turning back.

Kamva: Ma, I don't think I can be in this place. It's hell living in this house. He doesn't talk to me anymore. He sleeps out. I can't do this.

Nikiwe: I'm sorry, Kamva but you know that me and your aunt are always here for you.

She cleared her throat.

Kamva: Mama, I was thinking of going away for a while. I'm going to give Senzo the space he needs.

Nikiwe: You're always welcome here, Kamva.

Kamva: Ma, I'm thinking of taking a break from this city. I don't want to be in the same province as him, ma, where he can easily serve me divorce papers. I think I'm going to give him time to cool off, and I'm going to come back and fight for my marriage.

Nikiwe: I'm sorry, my baby. Everything will be fine.

Kamva: Ma, I don't think I can do this anymore. How

will I live my life without Senzo? He's become a huge part of my life, ma. I don't think there's anything to live for if Senzo is going to leave me.

Nikiwe: Kamva, I hope you're not thinking of suicide. My baby, there's more to life than relationships.

Kamva: Ma, you don't understand.

Nikiwe: I don't think you should be alone right now, my child.

Kamva: I'll be fine, ma. Somikazi is here for me.

Nikiwe: Don't even think of taking your life.

Kamva: I won't. My battery is low. I'll talk to you later.

Nikiwe: Okay.

The call ended.

Nikiwe: You don't really think she'd kill herself?

Zenani: I don't know. Maybe we should get her to move in with us or you should go with her to her

vacation destination. We can't let her out of our sight.

Nikiwe: I didn't think things would be this bad.

They've only been married for a few months, but she wants to kill herself already.

Zenani: Worst part, it was an arranged marriage.

Nikiwe: This is unlike Kamva.

Noxolo Ndebele

I looked at Cindy's mother and the principal, cooped up in his office. I came in Khethiwe's place. She was serious about not involving herself in this.

Noxolo: All I'm saying is that Anna only has a few months before she finishes school. You cannot not allow her to write. Prelims are coming up soon.

Principal: We hear you, Ms Ndebele but rules are rules. We can't change them for anyone.

Noxolo: Sir, this could have happened to anyone. It's our responsibility that we secure our children's future.

Cindy's mother: So you're saying we should allow her to prance around her peers pregnant. What message would we be sending across? That teenage pregnancy is okay? You need to understand that our children can't be exposed to that. Rules are implemented for a reason.

Principal: She's right. We don't want our students to start thinking we're promoting pregnancy in school. Soon the school will be filled with them.

Noxolo: But what about my niece's future? I agree that she made a mistake, but I don't think she deserves this.

Principal: She can always try again next year.

Cindy's mother: You need to understand that it's nothing personal against Anna. She's my daughter's friend and I feel for her. All I'm saying is that parents

will feel uneasy about their children schooling with Anna. On top of that, it's not going to be easy for your niece. You know how people treat pregnant teenagers. Yes, the school strives to ensure that school is a safe environment for learners, but I don't think it's the right place for her right now. We do know how intense pregnancy can get.

Principal: Look, we've talked about this enough. You have raised valid points, and I'll think about the way forward and let you know.

Noxolo: Okay, we'll hear from you.

I exhaled deeply. I didn't know what to say when things are like this. This seemed to be out of my hands now.

Mpilo Ngubane

I was going crazy staring at these walls most of my day. Everything had fallen apart, and I wasn't sure that I could mend things. I raked my hand over my face in frustration, looking at Mthandeni with the guy who set me up in the opposite cell to mine.

I gazed at them, as they talked and as each minute rolled by, their voices rose by octaves. I attempted my best to catch snippets of their conversation.

Strike: I've told you everything.

Mthandeni: Why the hell are you screaming? You want everyone to hear you. This is not your mother's house!

They lowered their voices again. I wanted my life back but I wasn't sure how much of it would be available when I do get out of here. I wanted to be with Buhle right now.

Mthandeni: Tell me the flipping truth! Is Mpilo really behind this?

The mention of my name caught my interest. A lot was suspicious these days, and I didn't know anymore.

Strike: I have no idea what you're talking about.

I attempted to make sense of their conversation. Minutes passed by with them whispering, until their voices rose again.

Strike: Fine, I'll tell you the truth! I'm not going to spend 10 years in here for a job that I didn't finish and I was sent to do.

His words piqued my curiosity more.

Strike: Mzi paid me. It wasn't Mpilo.

My eyes widened as bewilderment travelled through my whole body.

Mthandeni: You mean that Mzi paid you to set up Mpilo?

Shock paralysed me to the spot.

Mthandeni: Look, let's go somewhere private. There are too many ears here.

Emotions of different frequencies pulsed through me. What game was being played here? I racked my head for answers but to no avail.

One thing was for sure, there was someone

bullshitting and I prayed that it was not Mzi, but I heard it with my own ears. What did you believe in this situation? What did you classify as the truth and as a lie? There seemed to be too many snakes around me, and I didn't know which ones were waiting for me to turn my back so they could attack.

Mpilo: Dammit!

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Somikazi Nkosi

Somi: Yes, right there..

As the pleasure overwhelmed me, moans dispelled from my mouth, in sync with Lwando's very own groans.

I had assumed a position of being on my knees, my hands straightened out and my chest against the floor - warmth had long seeped into my body while Lwando thrust in from behind.

My pleasure kept building up as my vaginal walls was penetrated and I pushed my ass higher, meeting each thrust with so much fervor. His hands lingered on my hips, the speed he pounded me increasing; making me lose my mind - my eyes rolling to the back of my head.

Somi: Yess.. Keep going.... Ahhh.

Lwando removed one hand from my hip, and trailing it towards my groin with soft feathery touches, and with a flick of his finger, he stimulated my clitoris. My toes curled, as he juggled between thrusting in and out, and stimulating my clit, his finger picking up

the pace as he rubbed vigorously, with a change of techniques.

We kept going until an orgasmic release came, and we stopped, relaxing our muscles and panting.

Lwando rose to his feet, and picked me up bridal style and placed me on the bed before skipping to the bathroom to discard his condom and returned with a towel to clean up.

Somi: That was good. We should go for another round.

My groin was throbbing, but I couldn't get enough of Lwando's cock.

Lwando: The next stop is the shower.

Somi: Damn, I can't seem to get enough of you.

Lwando: I don't think your husband would approve of

your words.

My smile disappeared.

Somi: And you just had to ruin everything by mentioning Mzi.

Lwando: Isn't he your husband?

Somi: Not for long.

Lwando: You don't need to tell me the details. We're having fun, right? It's just a fuck.

His words stung.

Somi: Lwando, I thought you loved me. I know I do.

Lwando: I do, but I have learnt to separate my love from you from sex. Do you think this will continue for eternity while you still have a ring on your finger?

Somi: What do you want me to do? Things between

me and Mzi are complicated.

Lwando: Like I said, you don't have to explain. You just need to clear up your confusion with yourself. I've already told you how I feel, and until you start being straight with yourself, I'll keep indulging in free pussy.

Somi: I can't believe you right now.

Lwando: We've been going back and forth about this for weeks. So Somikazi, do you.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Everything just hit me when I was catching a taxi to visit Mpilo at the prison. Everything that happened the past year, and I questioned myself how was I still holding on. I tended to bury my emotions away and it never did me any good because unexpectedly it would hit me and I'd start crying.

I got to the police station and asked for Mpilo and was led to him. I smiled weakly.

Me: Hey.

Mpilo: How are you doing?

Me: I should be asking you that.

I sat down at the table across Mpilo in the room, and the guard closed the door.

Me: You sounded serious on the phone. Is everything okay?

Mpilo: What I'm going to discuss with you should not be repeated to another soul.

Me: You're scaring me now, Mpilo. What is going on?

Mpilo: I heard something shocking yesterday and I'd like your insight on it.

Me: Okay.

I didn't have a good feeling about this.

Mpilo: So you remember that the charges had been dropped, but I was arrested again because a guy claimed that I sent him to kill one of Bandile's friends in hospital?

Me: Yes, I do. Where are you going with this?

Mpilo: I overheard the same guy telling the police that Mzi paid him to lie about me. What do you think of that?

Me: I'm not surprised.

Mpilo furrowed his eyebrows in confusion.

Mpilo: What do you mean?

Me: I mean after Thabile told me that you had been

arrested, a lot of things didn't make sense to me. For starters, how did the police manage to track down Bandile? Because if I remember well, when I went to them about my suspicions of Bandile being alive; they told me straight up that I had to be admitted to a mental asylum, so it was safe to say that they didn't believe me and they were not going to look into it.

Mpilo: So you're saying Mzi called the police on us?

Me: Think about it. What are the chances of the police catching you at the crime scene alone whilst you stayed behind with Mzi?

I looked at him, digesting my words. I hoped I was not misleading him, but truly speaking, this had been on my mind for a while. Just that I was afraid to voice it out. I didn't trust Mzi.

Me: Or that night, the police had caught both you and Mzi but they let him go because he threw you under the bus. I mean why else would they be sure that you

killed Bandile and his friends. Locking you up was grasping at straws unless the police were working with someone.

Mzi: I don't know.

Me: Look, I'm just telling you what I think. You don't have to believe me. You know Mzi better than I do... Is there perhaps an old score he'd like to settle? Sometimes the worst betrayal comes from close friends and family.

He heaved a sigh.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

Senzokuhle interjected my thoughts as he threw himself beside me on the couch.

Senzo: What are you thinking about?

Kamva: You remember what we talked about. We're going to have to pretend we have problems in our marriage.

Senzo: I don't understand why you're allowing your evil mother to have control over your life.

Kamva: It's not like that, Senzo. This is the only language she understands. I'm going to have to beat her at her own game.

Senzo: We should confront her.

I shook my head.

Kamva: No, that's not going to work. My mother is very manipulative. She can make you believe that everything is in your head. You saw how I easily believed her when she told that she doesn't have a hand in my father's death. We go to her about this, she's going to spin a believable story, and trust me when I say that we'd be back here with more

confusion than answers. She's very good at playing mind games.

Senzo: But I don't understand why would she do this?

Kamva: I don't know. I'm hurt about this, but I'm never giving her the benefit of doubt again. I gave her another chance and she blew it. Worst part, she attacked my marriage. She came for her daughter. It shows that she has no heart, and I'm not going to take this lying down. She is going to pay.

Senzo: Are you going to let me in on your plan?

Kamva: It's better you don't know about it because you're going to try to talk me out of it.

Senzo: I don't have a good feeling about this, Kamva.

Kamva: She picked the wrong person this time. She forgets that I'm her daughter and I can play dirty. She raised me and I learned from the best. All that's left is for me to bulldoze the best. She will know me.

The wheels kept turning in my head while Senzo gave me an incredulous look.

Narrated

Strike: Has Mpilo taken the bait?

Mthandeni: Patience. It's only a matter of time. You saw his reaction yesterday.

Strike: How sure are you that Mzi was with Mpilo that night?

Mthandeni: That's the thing. I'm not sure, but I'm taking a gamble.

Strike: Doesn't sound promising.

Mthandeni: Don't worry, we have him right where we want him. In actual fact, I have nothing concrete tying Mpilo to these murders. What I'm trying to do is turn them against each other. If I can't bring down Mpilo for this, he's going to help me take down Qaphela and Mzi. That's the people I want.

Strike: So you're planting doubt in Mpilo's head so that he turns against them, and tells you everything he knows about them and you arrest them?

Mthandeni: You got it. Those two have been evading the law far too many times, and Mpilo helped them each time.

Strike: It sounds like there's more to you wanting them behind bars.

Mthandeni smiled, visualizing his plan coming right and the truth to Strike's last statement.

Mpilo Ngubane

I didn't know how to process everything Buhle had said.

Mpilo: Ay, you're confusing me, Buhle.

Buhle: There has to be some truth behind everything I've said.

Mpilo: I hear you, but you might be wrong.

Buhle: But I might be right.

That was enough to get me thinking. The door opened and the guard appeared with Mzi behind me. At his presence, mixed emotions brewed within me.

Buhle: See you. Remember to think about everything carefully.

I nodded, and retreated; her eyes lingering on Mzi before the door enclosed me and Mzi. He took a seat.

Mzi: You called for me, and I'm here. What's going on?

Mpilo: I should be asking you that. It seems that you're playing me.

Mzi: Is that so? What made you come to that conclusion? What's going on?

I carefully noted his facial expression as I talked.

Mpilo: I heard that you got Strike to send me back to jail.

Mzi: And why would I do that?

Mpilo: I don't know. You tell me.

Mzi: I see that your girlfriend is planting nonsense in your head.

Mpilo: I didn't hear this from her.

Mzi: And I can tell that she fueled the rumors.

Mpilo: Look, everything she said makes sense.

Mzi: You know this better than everyone that things can make sense, but it isn't necessarily the truth.

Mpilo: Mzi, you know I deal my cards openly. That's the reason I came to you about this...Maybe this is your way of getting back at me.

Mzi: For what?

Mpilo: Drafting Somi's divorce papers.

He threw his head back, and chortled.

Mzi: We need to do something about you being in here, because it seems that prison is depleting your brain cells. Are you hearing yourself? Do you think that I'm that pathetic to throw you under the bus because of my marriage with Somikazi? After everything we've been through with you? You're really losing it.

Mpilo: I'm losing it? You call my life coming to a halt and the prospect of spending years in jail losing it? My career is perishing while I sit in here. It's easy for you to say; you're not the one in my shoes. Moreover, let's talk. What have you done to get me out of this

mess? Please think about that before you tell me that I'm losing my mind.

Mzi: You know what? I can see that this whole situation is weighing heavily on you. Let's do this. Go to the police and tell them everything that happened that night at the warehouse. Tell them that you only shot down one guy. I did the same and Qaphela did too. Thabile killed Bandile. I understand that it's hard to take the fall for us, so I'm giving you the go ahead to tell the truth. That's fine, but wake up and see that there's someone playing you and it seems that they're winning. Whatever you do, don't make the mistake of singing about matters that don't have anything to do with that night, because trust me, you'll be starting a war that I'm afraid you're not going to finish.

Mpilo: Are you threatening me?

Mzi: This is simple, Mpilo. Tell the police everything. But the minute you think of involving business that have nothing to do with this case, we're going to have a problem.

I clicked my tongue as the tension wrapped around us like an invisible serpent. He rose to his feet, and fixed his suit.

Mzi: I think I'm going to have a problem with this girlfriend of yours. We risked our lives for her, and instead of thanking us, she talks about things that she has no idea about. She's making assumptions about me, and my character and she doesn't know me. She forgets that there was a video of her circulating months ago, and she thinks she has the right to judge me. I hate nonsense, Mpilo... I can see that our tempers are flaring so I'll leave and come back tomorrow so we can find a way forward. I'll ask Qaphela and Thabile to come see you soon because they have the answers about who set you up.

Mpilo: That's the flipping problem. You know of the person setting up me, but you kept me in the dark all this time. Lack of communication is going to be our doom, Mzi.

Mzi: I also don't know much. We talked about it in passing.

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Thabile Mampane

Thabi: We're sorry for not being upfront about everything. It's just that there's been a lot happening. Between the business, finding ways to get you out and my exams, it slipped our minds and Qaphela had to deal with a problem in the operation.

Mpilo: I hear you, but I need to get out of here soon. I'm losing my mind in here.

I could see the exhaustion in his appearance.

Qaphela: I've found out that there is someone in a high position influencing your arrest. It's making it hard for us to get you out of here.

Mpilo: It's that nuisance, Mthandeni. He's probably working with someone.

Qaphela: Right now, the best thing would be to push the trial forward. In a week or month's time and discredit Njabulo and Strike's statement. We manage to do that, the judge handling this case will see that there's no tangible evidence.

Mpilo: Please do that. In the meantime, I need to figure out Mthandeni's gameplan. I wonder what he wants.

Thabi: Tomorrow is Bandile and Njabulo's memorial. I was planning to go there.

Mpilo: Do you think that's a good idea?

Thabi: Well, I'm going there for closure. Seeking the apology I never got for my heart to finally be at peace. Moreover, I think it will give me an opportunity to talk to Bandile's mom, and perhaps ask her to hand over the footage of her house to the

police. Hopefully the police will see that you never went to see Njabulo that day.

Mpilo: That's a good idea.

Qaphela: Hopefully, they do have cameras and they haven't wiped off the footage.

Thabi: You can't have a mansion for a home without cameras. We're going to find what we're looking for. I heard Bandile's mother is a good person.

Qaphela: Do you think a week will be enough to prepare for your trial?

Mpilo: No, make it two or three. We don't want to rush things and end up messing everything. You've said it yourself that someone is working to keep me in here.

Qaphela: I'll talk to your lawyer and we'll fight to have the trial happen sooner.

Mpilo: Good. I'll deal with Strike and Mthandeni.

Things seemed to be falling in place, and that hope that had wilted within me was slowly returning. My

heart would finally be at ease when we do get him out of here, and our lives return to normal without the two dead devils.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I inhaled and exhaled deeply, deep in thought about everything. I dialled Kamva's number, and she answered on the third ring.

Kamva: Buhle.

Me: Hello, Kamva.

Kamva: What can I help you with? I'm a little busy.

We still had a long way to go to repair our relationship, but I was glad we were talking. And

coming to her mother, that was just a gigantic elephant in the way.

Me: I wanted to ask you something.

Kamva: I'm listening.

Me: What kind of a person is Mzi?

She paused.

Kamva: Is he hitting on you?

Me: You could say something like that.

Kamva: Do you want me to deal with him?

Me: No, no. I'm just trying to make sense of his character. What kind of person is he?

Kamva: I find this odd. Why are you asking about Mzi? I hope you don't have feelings for him. He is way older than you, and he's married.

Me: What do you take for?

Kamva: Mzi is the type to get in every girl's pants.

Me: So you could say that he isn't trustworthy?

Kamva: This is suspicious, Buhle. Why do you want to know about him?

Me: Kamva, remember when you called me asking for Thabile's numbers, I didn't interrogate you this much, so I ask for the same courtesy.

Kamva: This isn't the same, but fine. What do you want to know?

Me: His character. Does he come off as a person who thinks of himself only? Do you think he'd do anything to save his skin, even going against his allies?

Kamva: Well, he tends to be selfish. His wife is a living proof of that, but I can't tell you much about him. I don't know him to that extent.

My heart leaped out of my chest when I heard Thabile's voice.

Thabi: I thought we told you to let this go.

Me: Thank you, Kamva.

I hung up, and whirled around to face Thabile.

Thabi: Mzi isn't doing anything he isn't supposed to do.

Me: I took time to research him and I discovered that he is involved in drugs along with his brother. You're a partner in their hotel.

Thabi: Yes. Where is this going?

Me: Are you involved in any illegal activities, Thabile or rather let me rephrase, was your father dealing drugs?

Thabi: I guess I've been sheltered my whole life, because I've never come across that information.

Me: So you never googled your father? The internet has a lot to say about him.

Thabi: Okay, why would I need the internet to know

my father? I don't have time to play. I don't care it says about my father. I know the man who raised me.

Me: Okay. I was just telling you what I came across. I didn't mean to make you angry.

Thabi: Was there a need to involve my father in this conversation? You know that he's dead, and you know the pain that awakens within me when I talk about him. Why are you taking me back?

Me: I'm sorry. I was just asking.

Thabi: Well, you should think before you speak. You don't hear me talking about your parents. Some things are better left off in the past, Buhle.

Somikazi Nkosi

Mzi walked in the kitchen while I was chopping peppers on the board. He grabbed a cold bottle of

water from the fridge.

Somi: You didn't come home yesterday.

Mzi: I booked a room at the hotel. I needed time to think.

Somi: Okay.

Mzi: Have you gone to see your brother today?

Somi: No, is he alright?

Mzi: You know everything about this. He's not taking it well. I suggested he tells the truth to make things easier for himself.

Somi: But that won't work. How will you help yourselves get out of this when all of you are behind bars?

Mzi: I don't know. We've never struggled to get ourselves out of trouble in the past. Moreover this is supposed to be easy.

Somi: I'm afraid your money and influence isn't going to do anything this time. We should consult.

Mzi: As if the ancestors are going to let us get away with murder.

Somi: Maybe you should start praying. Moreover, this Bandile wasn't an angel. It shouldn't be hard. Dont worry, Mpilo will be fine.

Mzi: There is someone pulling the strings at the top.

A knock reverberated around the manor, and I wiped my hands with a cloth.

Mzi: I'll see who it is.

I followed behind him, and he opened the door. Confusion streaked me when I saw Kamva with suitcases behind her in the threshold of the door.

Somi: What are you doing here?

Kamva: I need a place to crash in for tonight. Is that okay with you guys?

Mzi and I looked at each other.

Mzi: Is everything okay?

Kamva: Problems with Sensokuhle, but nothing I can't handle.

Mzi: Okay, I'll leave you to it. I'll be in my study.

Mzi wheeled the suitcases in, and positioned them inside, huddling them in the corner.

Somi: Come in.

Mzi strode away, leaving me and Kamva.

Somi: What is going on, Kamva?

Kamva: I don't want to talk about it.

Somi: You know that you can tell me anything, right?

She nodded; she looked defeated.

Somi: What has Sensokuhle done?

Kamva: Things are not okay between us at the moment.

Somi: Okay, come help me with the cooking. It will help take your mind off things.

I so hoped that Senzo wasn't contagious to Mzi's cheating ways.

Noxolo Ndebele

I walked in the house, and threw myself on the sofa.

After the meeting I had with the principal, my wine called for me so bad.

Khethiwe: How did it go?

Noxolo: Where is Anna?

Khethiwe: She's gone to see Cindy.

Noxolo: Okay.

Khethiwe: And?

Noxolo: They talked about this sixth month period many schools have for pregnant teenagers. They can't allow her to school. They believe that it's better for her to be at home rather than at school where she'll constantly be stigmatized and discriminated against. You know how children are.

Khethiwe: This is ridiculous. She's in matric.

Noxolo: He suggested we opt for hospital schools.

Khethiwe: I know of one in Pretoria but I heard that it was closed because apparently it was promoting teenage pregnancy.

Noxolo: Well, the school is afraid of taking on a pregnant girl. They're afraid she might not even carry the baby to full term.

Khethiwe: I understand, but this is hard.

Noxolo: Well, I don't think this should stop Anna from writing her finals. She's registered, right?

Khethiwe: We'll hear from her. This will be a tough year for her. Honestly speaking, I'm still not happy about this.

She sighed deeply.

Khethiwe: Truly speaking, no mother would be happy to see her teenage daughter with no means of an income fall pregnant. Worst part, the father fled from his responsibilities. Now I understand how our mother felt when I fell pregnant with Bongwiwe.

Noxolo: Let's be real here, Khethiwe. Children of this generation can do so much better. The curriculum educates them about sex. Contraceptives and

condoms are available. Sometimes there's no excuse to falling pregnant unless of rape. Then, we're talking a different story.

Khethiwe: Noxolo, it's better that she's birthing the child. Some women out there happen to be grandmothers of dead children.

Noxolo: What a world we live in.

Mpilo Ngubane

The warden showed me to Mthandeni's office.

Warden: He kept nagging me to see you.

Mthandeni: It's fine. I'll take it from here.

The door closed, and I neared his desk, anger

simmering on surface level.

Mthandeni: What do you want?

Mpilo: I should be asking you that.

Mthandeni: What? I thought you came here to confess, not this nonsense.

Mpilo: When I make it out of here, expect a lawsuit for harassment and unlawful arrest. You forget that I'm a lawyer and I know the laws better than you do.

Mthandeni: For someone who knows the laws in depth, you suck at following them. What can I help you with?

Mpilo: I'll be going to your superiors. It's clear that you don't know your job.

Mthandeni: You're more than welcome to do that. We still have a witness willing to testify against you.

Mpilo: Strike will not last in court. You're talking about a guy who changes his statements like he's changing socks. No court will take him seriously.

Mthandeni: Well then, you will not be making it out of here until you give me what I want, and my father-in-law will make sure of it.

Mpilo: I'm glad we're getting somewhere. What do you want?

Mthandeni: I want you to hand me the Nkosi brothers on a silver platter. You're going to tell me everything about their drug operation, and I mean everything. It's them for your freedom.

I feigned a yawn.

Mpilo: Are you sure you didn't fall on your head while you were still young? I've never a more stupid cop than you.

Mthandeni: Qaphela and Mzi killed my wife and they're going to get what's coming to them.

I shook my head.

Mpilo: You're still on that? Blaming Qaphela and Mzi for your wife's overdose? You can do so much better than this. No one shoved the drugs down your wife's throat. You can't be blaming other people for your wife's actions.

Mthandeni: Cocaine is not a joke, Mpilo. You're destroying our country, and killing people with your drugs.

Mpilo: Look, I'm sorry about your wife but no one forced her to use drugs. Maybe if you had been a good husband to her, you'd have caught on to her addiction earlier.

Mthandeni: You know nothing about me and my wife.

Mpilo: I know that's what's driving you crazy, grasping at straws. Even if Qaphela and Mzi were dealing drugs, which I know nothing about, out of all the suppliers in the country, you picked two men who run a legit business? Sounds like madness to me.

Mthandeni: Wait until one of your loved ones die

from this poison you're distributing around the country.

That shut my mouth.

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Senzokuhle Ngubane

With Kamva having moved out, I wasn't in the greatest mood and seemed like my day was going from bad to worse, when the doorbell reverberated around, and I opened the door to come face to face with Zenani.

Zenani: Where is my niece?

Senzo: Do I look like her keeper?

An impassive expression masked my face.

Zenani: You don't want to make me angry, boy. Trust me, that's the last thing you want to do.

Senzo: This is my house, and there's the gate.

Zenani: I want to see Kamva.

Senzo: She doesn't stay here anymore.

Zenani: Where do you get the nerve to chase your wife out of her home?

Senzo: Isn't this my house? I paid for it with my own money. Who was supposed to leave?

Zenani: You're making a big mistake, boy.

Senzo: What are you going to do? Recruit Kamva to kill me like your sister killed her husband?

Zenani: Watch your words, because I'll rough you up so bad and you'll not believe it.

Senzo: You're getting on my last nerve. Take this up

with your cheating niece, and leave me alone.

Zenani: Clearly you don't know who I am.

Senzo: That's enough. You should leave.

Zenani: You'll know me.

She twirled around and trod away. I rolled my eyes, and closed the door opting to call Kamva.

Senzo: Your aunt was here breathing fire.

Kamva: Do you think she has taken the bait?

Senzo: Yes, I think so.

Kamva: Too predictable. She's out here pretending like she cares about me yet she's the one who wanted to ruin my marriage.

Senzo: Your mother and auntie are of a different kind of breed. No woman in her sane mind would do this to her child.

Kamva: You're fighting a lost battle. Don't drive

yourself crazy questioning their motives. Part of this is my fault, honestly speaking. I turned a blind eye to the evil deeds she inflicted on others, and now I'm surprised when she does what she does best. You know I hate people who play with me.

Senzo: You're something else. I remember that one time you pushed me into the pool.

Kamva: What's coming for Nikiwe is far worse than anything I can do to you. I want her to pay for everything. I'm tired.

Senzo: I like it when you're like this, but don't go and get yourself in trouble.

Kamva: Don't worry. It's going to be a clean job.

Senzo: You better implement your plan fast, because I'm missing my wife right now, and I hope it's nothing illegal.

Kamva: What do you take me for?

Anna Ndebele

In my slumber, a dream drifted into my unconscious state.

My mother and aunt with an echo were saying things of truth, but which stung pretty bad.

Khethiwe: You deserve everything that's happening to you.

Noxolo: Where did you think you'd end up?

Khethiwe: Where is this boy you chose over your family?

Noxolo: He sure did a number of on you. Desperation is not a good look on you, girl.

Khethiwe: What will you eat? What will your child eat because you've given away our bread to your dropout?

Noxolo: Where is he now? He left you with a child

just like your father did.

My eyes shot open as I awakened from my slumber, and exhaled deeply.

I read somewhere that emotions we felt during our conscious state could filter into our dreams, and right now that guilt and regret of my actions churned within me.

Seconds later, my mom walked in.

Khethiwe: Why are you still asleep at this time?

Anna: But ma, it's weekend.

Khethiwe: So does that mean you should sleep until kingdom comes? Wake up, and go have a bath.

A sudden urge to vomit dominated my being, and I

got up to go empty the contents of my stomach.

Thabile Mampane

I walked into the hall where people were in abundance at Njabulo and Bandile's memorial. They had already commenced. At the front, a man held the mic in his hand, and I listened to his speech, cringing until I couldn't take it anymore. All that anger came to show.

Man: We're talking about a man of integrity -

Thabi: Hold it right there.

Heads popped to my direction as silence engulfed the hall. Buhle whispered besides me.

Buhle: What are you doing?

I stalked past the rows of chairs until I got to the front, and grasped the microphone from the man.

Thabi: What man of integrity are you talking about? Did another Njabulo and Bandile die that we don't know of? This is what I hate about epilogues. People be spitting lies after someone's death as if all of us here didn't know what kind of men the Dubes were. We call a spade a spade, and the truth is that you're all mourning for a coward of a rapist and a rape apologist who condoned his son's evil deeds. You should be ashamed of yourselves. But I understand, the food must have been tempting. It's free food after all.

A hand clasped on my wrist, and I was suddenly pulled from the pulpit by Buhle, dropping the mic.

Buhle: What are you doing? We came to ask for help and you're ruining things. What you've done might cause Bandile's mom to refuse to help us.

Thabi: Oh, please. Was I supposed to listen to their lies? Bandile and Njabulo were dogs, and they'll forever be dogs. Their death ain't going to change that.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Zenani handed me a glass of wine, and took a seat beside me. I gulped down a fraction of the red liquid.

Nikiwe: Something is not right here.

Zenani: What are you talking about?

Nikiwe: All of this was way easy. I smell a rat.

Zenani: Come to think of it, Mthunzi is MIA. He's too quiet for my liking.

Nikiwe: Right. Something is fishy. Tell me, would you divorce someone you love over a kiss? A mere kiss? That's ridiculous. I thought we'd have to do more to break them apart.

Zenani: We should be happy that everything is coming along right. Men find it hard to forgive cheating.

Nikiwe: You have a point.

Zenani: Let's not forget that this is the same man who faked his paralysis. It seems to me that he likes running away from his problems. When the going gets tough, he looks for the easy way out. He did that with his throne, and now he's doing the exact same thing with his marriage to Kamva.

Nikiwe: I hear what you're saying, but it can't be this easy. When we pursued the throne, blood was shed. We almost died, and I sacrificed a lot for it, but we didn't end up sitting on the throne. I've lost a lot.

Nothing comes easy, Zenani.

Zenani: I guess you're used to fighting with everything you got for what you want. Sometimes things play out perfectly without any hardships. Look at Gogo Khanyisa. We didn't have to lift a finger.

Nikiwe: I get you, but still. Something tells me that things are not as they seem. I have a bad feeling.

Zenani: Do you think Mthunzi told her the truth? We know Kamva like the back of our hands. She'd have confronted us.

Nikiwe: I don't know.

Zenani: Or this bad feeling you have could be related to that sangoma we encountered at the shopping centre.

Nikiwe: Maybe.

Zenani: Okay, let's do this. Tomorrow when you go to see Kamva, try to go through her phone to clear up your suspicions and doubts. If indeed Mthunzi talked, you'll be able to pick that up from her chats with Senzokuhle or anything worth questioning that you

find.

Nikiwe: That's not such a bad idea.

Thabile Mampane

After the guests were scattering to the food section, Buhle and I approached Bandile's mom who looked utterly defeated and drained.

Buhle: Hello, ma.

Nokulunga: Hello, my children. How are you doing?

Buhle: We're fine, and how are you holding up?

Nokulunga: I'm still breathing. Before we get deeper into anything, I wanted to take the time to apologise to both of you for the pain my son and husband has caused both of you. I know nothing I say can ever

make things alright, but I do hope God fills your life with blessings and prosperous new beginnings.

Thabi: Thank you, ma. I also want to apologise for the way I behaved earlier on.

Nokulunga: It's okay. I understand.

Buhle: Ma, we were hoping for your assistance.

Thabi: Buhle is right. We were hoping you could give us access to your home's footage two weeks before your husband's death.

Nokulunga: That's not a problem. I'll look into it, but usually the footage is wiped out at the end of the month.

Buhle: Please try.

My phone beeped in my pocket, an indication of a message. I stepped away from the two, and read the message. *Meet me tomorrow at the hotel, 5pm sharp. Kamva.*

I wondered what she wanted.

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Simnikiwe Mkhize

Somi: Please come in.

She ushered me inside to the lounge.

Nikiwe: How's my daughter?

Somi: She's not sharing anything with me, but she's better than she was yesterday.

Nikiwe: Okay, I see. Thank you for taking her in. She could have come to me though.

Somi: I take her as a sister.

Nikiwe: That's good to hear.

Somi: Would you like anything to drink or eat?

Nikiwe: No, thank you. I had a full breakfast.

Somi: Okay. I'll leave you two to talk.

She walked away as I stalked towards a individual sofa, sitting across Kamva.

Nikiwe: How are you feeling?

Kamva: I'm fine.

Nikiwe: Are you sure? I know you love Senzokuhle.

Kamva: It isn't the end of the world.

Nikiwe: Why didn't you come to stay with me and Zenani? I don't think it's a good idea for you to stay with a married couple.

Kamva: I wasn't planning on staying long. You remember what we talked about? I spoke to you about going to Mozambique for a little while, and

you volunteered to go with me?

Nikiwe: Yes?

Kamva: I've booked flights for us. We leave in two days.

Nikiwe: Isn't that too soon?

Kamva: We do need a vacation, ma. I think you'll agree with me when I say a lot has happened the past few months. From you being accused of murder to miscarrying and my crumbling marriage, we need a break.

I fiddled with my cellphone, and pretended to Kamva.

Nikiwe: Oh, my phone is dead. Please borrow yours so I can inform Zenani about this.

Kamva: Okay, there it is.

She pointed to the glass table.

Kamva: I'm going to the toilet.

Nikiwe: Okay.

When she departed, I hastily reached for her cellphone scrolled through her apps and call log. Nothing seemed suspicious. It seemed that she hadn't been in contact with her husband in days and for Mthunzi, there was nothing. I called Zenani, my eyes skimming the area, alert as I spoke in whispers to my sister.

Nikiwe: I've found nothing suspicious.

Zenani: See? I told you.

Nikiwe: Okay, she's bought airplane tickets for us to Mozambique. We leave in two days.

Zenani: So she was serious about that? Take that time to convince her to take Senzo for everything he has.

Nikiwe: We need to be smart about this. Remember that Senzo can win this by proving the cheating allegations against Kamva.

Zenani: You're right. We didn't think this through. I'll see what I can do.

Nikiwe: Okay. We have to find a way to pin this all on Senzo.

Kamva came back.

Nikiwe: Oh. Please don't forget to buy me swimwear.

Zenani: We'll talk.

I hung up.

Kamva: So is everything in order?

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I hugged Mpilo's shirt to my chest, intoxicated by his fading scent on the clean shirt. I used a hanger to place the shirt into his wardrobe.

Ever since he was arrested, I would make occasional trips to his apartment to make sure everything was in order.

I walked out of his bedroom, and looked around the space - adjoined kitchen and sitting room with black and white furnishings. I picked up the keys, and my purse, preparing to leave when the door suddenly opened.

My eyes popped when in all her glory, Mpilo's mother walked through the door with a young beautiful girl behind her. I remembered the introductions of the

Ngubanes when I was supposed to marry Sensokuhle, but things didn't go accordingly. Mpilo and some lad he talked to here and there - if I remembered well, his name was Nqaba - were the only ones who didn't participate in the ceremonies before the traditional wedding so I had never met them. They wheeled in their suitcases.

Mpilo's mom: What are you waiting for? Show us to our rooms.

I didn't know what to do.

Me: Morning.

Mpilo's mom: You seem familiar. Anyway, what are you doing in my son's place?

Me: I came here to clean and check whether everything was in order.

"You might not remember me, but I'm Happy and this is Mpilo's mother."

I smiled, and nodded.

Mpilo's mom: This girl is slow. She hasn't even offered us something to drink.

Me: Please sit down. I'll see what I can prepare for you, but Mpilo hasn't gone for grocery shopping in weeks so we're not spoiled for choice.

Mpilo's mom: Where is this girl from? Why would Mpilo buy groceries himself? Aren't you the help? I don't even understand why you're calling your boss by his name.

I didn't correct her. I didn't know where Mpilo categorized me in his life so I didn't want to be forward by introducing myself as his girlfriend considering I was Senzo's ex-bride, but she didn't seem to recognise me.

Me: I wanted to extend my condolences for your husband's death.

Mpilo's mom: You're too late, sisi. That train has already left.

Happy: Ma, please.

They strode to the kitchen, and planted themselves on the high chairs tucked under a built-in table.

Mpilo's mom: This girl reminds me of a pornstar.

My eyes wrinkled in confusion.

Happy: Ma, what do you know about porn?

Mpilo's mom: I'm talking about that girl you showed me once in a video. It's her, isn't she?

Happy: Ma, we're here about Mpilo.

Mpilo's mom: I don't want such girls around my son. Next thing, Mpilo will also be trending for making a video. She'll be a bad influence.

Happy: Ma, you're making the poor girl uncomfortable.

Mpilo's mom: This doesn't even make sense. Why would a girl from royalty be the help? Maybe her family disowned her after that disgrace.

I shook my head and bit back a sigh, heading to the kitchen.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I walked into the hotel, and immediately a cool breeze hit me. My phone was pressed to my ear as I conversed with my husband. I snaked to the

reception. People bustled around me. In the other hand, I had a briefcase.

Kamva: Does she know Mpilo and Buhle are dating?

Senzo: I don't know, but I wanted her to stay back home. You know she's full of drama.

Kamva: Tell me about it. MaNdlovu is going to give Buhle a tough time, and right now the odds are against her. The minute she finds out that Buhle is dating her son, all hell will break loose. I'm telling you.

Senzo: What are you doing right now?

Kamva: Getting my plan into motion.

Senzo: I want to see you.

Kamva: Let me deal with what I have to do, and I'll check myself into a room.

Senzo: Okay, you'll let me know.

I ended the call, as Thabile patted my shoulder, startling me.

Kamva: You scared me.

Thabi: Follow me. Qaphela is out at the moment.

We navigated to the top floor where the penthouse apartment was located. She showed me in, and we occupied the couch.

Thabi: What is this about? It sounds serious.

I positioned the briefcase on the table.

Kamva: Open it.

Thabi: What is inside?

She reached for the briefcase, and opened it. Stacks of notes were packed in the case. She gasped in shock, and gave me a questioning look.

Thabi: Kamva, what is this for? What is all this money for?

Kamva: I want 5 kilos of cocaine. The money will be enough, right or you need more?

Thabi: Forget about the money. What is going on here? How do you even know we deal?

Kamva: I'm part of the family now, and Somi's tongue tends to loosen when heavily intoxicated.

I could see her hesitation.

Thabi: Why do you need so coke? I hope you're not using.

Kamva: That's none of your business. Are you going to help me or should I find another supplier?

Thabi: This is ridiculous. Why did you come to me instead of going to Mzi?

Kamva: This is something I don't want them involved

in, and I'd appreciate it if this stays between us.

Thabi: Fine, let me see what I can do. We usually don't order extra, but let's see.

She hauled out her cellphone, and called someone.

Thabi: Do we have any extra merchandise?

I listened involuntarily.

Thabi: Great. Mass... 15 kilos?... Okay, package 5 kilos for me please and send me the quotation... I'll talk to Q myself.

She looked at me after ending her call.

Thabi: I'll make the delivery to you tomorrow.

Kamva: Thank you. As soon as possible.

Thabi: What do you plan to do with it? You want to distribute? I never took you for a criminal.

Kamva: Makes the two of us. Some thing tells me that you're much worse than I could ever be.

Noxolo Ndebele

I awakened as soon as an excruciating pain hounded my lower abdomen. The pain stung so much that I couldn't hold in my groans and cries.

It felt like my insides were torn apart, and a knife pierced through me. Moisture gathered between my legs, and I lifted my blanket to see blood streaking my sheets and smeared on my skin.

This couldn't be period pains - the pain was too

intense. I felt like I was dying. I grunted in extreme pain, until I slipped into an unconscious state - the pain too much to bear.

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Thabile Mampane

After two hours being cooped up in the auditorium for my exam, I was finally glad to be out of the hall into the fresh air.

Dimpho: How did you write?

Thabi: I think I did well, but I don't want to get my hopes high.

There had been a lot of happenings that pulled my

attention from my books. Usually when unoccupied, I thought a lot about Bandile and Njabulo. I killed father and son, and no matter how much they deserved it and how justification I attempted to convince myself of, I took away the lives of people and that didn't sit well with me at all.

But I knew that in order to toughen up, I did what I had to do, and the world would be a better place without those two bastards.

Dimpho: I'll catch you later. Greet Buhle for me.

Thabi: Okay.

I hardly had time anymore to cement my friendships since I was falling deeper into crime and I was outgrowing a lot of things. Dimpho walked away to join another cluster of students.

I reached for my cellphone in my side bag, and

switched it on. Immediately notifications flooded my phone since it had been off since last night so I could cover the theory. There was a missed call from Qaphela from last night, and one this morning. I called him, and he answered on the fourth ring.

Thabi: I'm just seeing your missed calls. What's up?

Qaphela: Why would you give a batch away without talking to me?

Thabi: A client approached me in desperate need.

Qaphela: Who's this person? You know we can't work with just anyone.

Thabi: I know, but I trust them. Moreover it was a once-off thing.

Qaphela: I hear you. What happened to staying away from the business for the meanwhile?

Thabi: You're irritating me with your thousand questions now. Don't forget that you're the one who dragged me into this business. All of this has stripped away my conscience and my moral

standing. This is what you wanted and you've got it. Now leave me alone. As if I asked to be involved in all this shit.

I clicked my tongue, dropping the call and headed to my room. I wanted to cook something, but my heavy heart couldn't allow me to do anything at the moment. I laid back on my bed, dogged by indescribable emotions.

An incoming call from my mother displayed on the screen and I picked up.

Thabi: Hello, ma.

Kamogelo: How are you, my child?

Thabi: Not so well. All the changes that have happened in the past months are overwhelming me.

Kamogelo: Understandably, my child but keep pushing. You'll be fine. Have you thought about going back to therapy?

Thabi: I don't have time for that.

Kamogelo: You probably haven't healed from your father's death, and what those boys did to you.

Thabi: I thought their deaths would bring me satisfaction, but it's done nothing, ma. I wanted them to suffer so much more than I did, but at the same time, keeping them alive would've created more problems.

Kamogelo: You did what you had to do to keep them from causing any more harm in the future.

Thabi: I guess.

Kamogelo: Honestly, Thabile, this is not the life I want for you.

Thabi: I know, ma but I'm already in too deep.

Kamogelo: You live by the bullet, you'll die by it. It's not safe, and I'm not trying to scare you. Look what happened to your father.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I quickly locked my mother's bedroom door, and tossed the bag of coke on the bed. Thabi had delivered to me two 2.5 kilos of coke. I decided to put one batch in my mother's suitcase, because I didn't want them to catch onto my plan with the heaviness of this product. I wheeled her suitcase huddled in a corner to the bed, and laid it out on the bed.

I unzipped the suitcase, and I carefully took out the folded clothes, laying them on the bed. Underneath there was another zip to a fabric coating the inside of the suitcase, I opened it. After positioning the cocaine, I zipped it up, and placed the clothes in the order I found them. I pressed down on the clothes, and zipped the case before returning it where I found it.

My heart couldn't take it anymore, tears streamed down my cheeks. This was the same woman who raised me, and today I am thinking of framing her. So much anger brewed within me, but that didn't take away the love I had for my mother. Honestly, I never lacked for anything and that was because of her. I debated so much with myself; the pain pulling at my heartstrings.

Kamva: I'm sorry, ma but you can't go on hurting people anymore. I've forgiven you against all logic and despite the damning accusations, but you've fallen into your old tricks. I hope prison helps you rethink your past actions and how your wrongdoings have hurt other people. I know you'll have a lot of time on your hands for self reflection. I hope you'll come out a better person, because despite everything, I love you.

I breathed in and out.

Kamva: I loved dad too, and if you're truly responsible for his death, you'll understand why I needed to do this. You might never understand my reasoning behind this, but neither will I understand why you decided to play God and took away people's lives.

I wiped my cheeks vigorously of the tears, and went to unlock the door, retreating from the bedroom.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I rushed into the hospital where Auntie Nox was admitted. Fear of the unknown had consumed me. She was the closet person I had for a parent, and even in the past weeks, we didn't interact much but losing her would further shatter my heart. At the reception area, I mentioned her name and said I was

her niece, and they allowed me to go through to her ward. I passed by the waiting room first, and I went to greet Aunt's sister. She didn't look too well, and dark circles surrounded her eyes.

Me: Hello, ma.

I joined her on the bench.

Khethiwe: Hello, Buhle.

Me: I came as soon as I could. What happened to Aunty?

Khethiwe: Her screams woke us up last night. She was bleeding and passed out and I got a neighbor with a car to bring her to the hospital.

Me: Have they said anything?

Khethiwe: Well, at first I thought she was having a miscarriage, but the doctors said that it was anything but pregnancy.

Me: I don't think Aunty would be happy about carrying Kwanele's child. Will she be okay though?

Khethiwe: Hopefully. They're running tests on her to identify the cause.

Me: I'm hoping that she isn't suffering from a fatal illness.

Khethiwe: She'll be fine.

Me: She's all I got. I can't lose her too. Not after losing both my mother and father in the span of a year.

Khethiwe: Clearly you don't know Noxolo. My sister is a fighter. She'll pull through.

I prayed for her to recover.

Narrated

Mzi drove in the nightfall, headed to his home. His phone was on speaker as he conversed with his younger brother.

Qaphela: We've managed to get a date for Mpilo's trial. He is a high-profile person, and people want the verdict as soon as possible. That worked in our favour.

Mzi: Okay, that's good. Has Mpilo managed to alienate Strike?

Qaphela: I have no idea, but our problem is that cop. He wants us behind bars so badly that he's making things hard for Mpilo.

Mzi: We just kill him and his father-in-law.

Qaphela: No, it's going to make things worse. We need to think of something else.

Mzi: Let's find someone we can pin this whole thing on. Mthandeni will not be able to do anything. He's grasping at straws.

Qaphela: That might work, but the question is who. You know I hate involving innocent people in our dealings.

Mzi: We'll think of an enemy. Look, we'll talk later. I'm home.

Mzi pressed the remote for the gate to his home, and it slid open. He drove in.

Qaphela: I thought you were only coming back on Friday.

Mzi: We sealed the deal early. You'll be happy to know that another branch of the hotel will be built in Cape Town.

Qaphela: That's great news.

Mzi: We'll talk about this over a glass of whisky.

Qaphela: And some hot chicks.

A smile crept up on his face.

Mzi: Have you forgotten that I'm married?

Qaphela: That has never stopped you.

The call ended, and after parking the car, his eyes drank in Lwando's car in his yard. The man was spending too much time with his wife, and he was already suspicious about them. He paced to the house, and poured himself a glass of whisky, gulping down the bitter liquid before skipping up the stairs to his bedroom to rid his suit, and have a hot shower before retreating to sleep.

His suspicions were confirmed as he heard moans emerging from his bedroom. He peered inside the bedroom, discreetly and images of Lwando thrusting his wife filled his mind, arising anger.

It seemed that someone didn't take his warnings serious, and Mzi wasn't one not to follow through on

his threats.

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Simnikiwe Mkhize

I walked into my room with Zenani. Kamva had momentarily slid out. I walked to my suitcase and wheeled it to the sofa tucked against a wall in the room. I picked it up and laid it on the sofa.

Nikiwe: Shit, I swear this suitcase has gotten heavier.

Zenani: You packed like you're never returning.

Nikiwe: This holiday is exactly what I needed though.

Zenani: You must enjoy yourself but don't lose sight of what we're doing.

I took out the swimwear and toiletries from the shopping bags dangling in my hand, and placed them inside.

Zenani: I want us to take things a notch up. In fact, I have already done something that is going to get things heated up.

Nikiwe: What are you talking about?

Zenani: I don't want you to think too much about this.

I sealed the suitcase. I let out a deep sigh and looked at my sister, uneasiness overwhelming me.

Nikiwe: Am I the only one who gets this feeling that something is going to go wrong? I can feel it in my blood that something is brewing.

Zenani: Anything other than storm I'm going to rain on everyone, I'm good. What makes you feel uneasy?

Nikiwe: I don't know. It could perhaps be this all trip.

Zenani: So you want to cancel?

Nikiwe: No, my daughter needs me. After all, I'm the reason her life is in shambles.

Zenani: I know, but it will be worth it soon. We'll soon be buying everything cash without any worries.

Nikiwe: We'll see.

Zenani: But honestly, this should be the last scam we pull off. After acquiring Senzokuhle's assets, hopefully we'll be set for life. Given that he'll continue making money with his company. This thing of making enemies all over the world is going to cost us.

Nikiwe: I doubt Senzo is going to give half of his assets to someone he met a few months ago.

Zenani: I talked about taking things a notch up. We're not going to back down. We really didn't look at this at all angles. Senzo has a shark for a lawyer in his corner.

Nikiwe: You're talking about that brother of his who's getting blue balls in a prison cell?

Zenani chortled.

Zenani: You find humor in the most stupid things, Nikiwe.

Nikiwe: I'm just wondering whether they'll be able to convert him inside. Remember that he's a lawyer, and he probably has a lot of enemies. I don't see him getting out of this mess any time soon.

Zenani: We should actually investigate this matter, and find out what really went down that night. We might unravel a lot of secrets, and find something we can use against that squad.

Nikiwe: You're right. His story doesn't add up at all. It's flawed. I tell you.

Senzokuhle Ngubane

I relaxed in my office, my mind vacant of the mess Mpilo was entangled in, and my wife. My peace was disturbed by Amanda bursting through the door, and approached my desk.

Amanda: I'm sorry for not knocking, but this is urgent. We've been getting calls asking for your comment, and it's getting tiring.

She shoved her tablet to me and an article was displayed on the screen.

Royal troubles. The heading read.

There was a picture of Mpilo, and underneath it was the photograph of Mthunzi and Kamva kissing. Anger boiled within me. Questions roamed in my head. I hoped that Kamva's mom was not behind this.

Senzo: Bloody parasites. Don't they know where to draw the line?

I sighed and scrolled down the paragraphs, reading.

Senzo: The Ngubane name is in shambles. For a royal and respected clan, they have too much skeletons in their closet. I take we've all been following the case of the young, notorious lawyer Mpilo Ngubane who was recently arrested. I'm not the law and therefore I can't write much about the ongoing investigation as I do not have all the facts about the case, but I can say this much that where there is smoke, there is fire.

I shook my head, the boldness of this writer.

Senzo: To the next royal, you'll see that I have attached a photograph that proves that the wife of

Senzokuhle Ngubane has been cheating on her husband of 6 months. All I've discovered is that this particular man is known for never holding down anything in his life for long other than his company. One minute, talks of him being paralyzed circulated, and the next he makes a miraculous recovery.

I skipped a few paragraphs, anger brewing.

Senzo: From the Dube men's death to Mpilo's arrest and Senzokuhle's wife's infidelity, a lot of negativity has been surrounding this family.

I pushed the tablet aside.

Senzo: This is nonsense. Get me in contact with Mr Zulu. I'm going to sue this publication for defamation of character.

Amanda: I do feel that she could have constructed the article a little better, but if she stated facts and

provided proof, I'm afraid there's nothing you can do.

I clicked my tongue and my phone vibrated on the under a pile of papers.

Senzo: Leave me.

She collected her tablet, and glided away, closing the door behind her.

Senzo: Nhlakanipho.

Nhla: Senzokuhle, isn't it enough Mpilo's arrest is bringing bad publicity to our name? Your wife had to go and cheat on you within the first year of your marriage, and now it's splashed all over the news.

Senzo: So you've heard?

Nhla: I don't like involving myself in your affairs, but this is getting out of hand. How are people supposed to trust my leadership when my own family can't

keep their affairs in order? I'm not saying that you can't make mistakes, but this is reflecting badly on our father who spent years building this family. We lost him and suddenly all of you are spiralling out of control. From Somikazi being married to an allegedly drug dealer to Mpilo, is bad enough. Now you?

Senzo: What are you talking about, because it's the same father who got me married to Kamva. Wasn't it dad who arranged the marriage between Somikazi and Mzi? Please don't start with me. I'm already dealing with a crisis, and you want to add on to it. Because we're royalty, that doesn't mean we're perfect. We're humans like everyone else and we're bound to make mistakes.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Me: How are you feeling?

My hands engulfed Auntie's one. I was glad that she was awake. She shifted slightly in her hospital bed.

Me: You gave us quite a scare, Aunty.

Noxolo: When have you known me as a quitter? I'm a fighter, Buhle. You know this.

Me: That's why I'm glad you're still here. Losing you would break me. I don't say this a lot, but you've always been a mother figure to me from a young age. When mama was dealing with Kwanele's abuse, you were there to support us. You've always protected me. You risked your life to get justice for my mother. That says a lot about your good heart. You're a good woman who doesn't mind going to any lengths for her loved ones and that's what I love about you. You're selfless, and I want you to know that you're appreciated. I love you, and you cannot leave us until justice is served for my mother and father. Not until you get what your heart desires.

Noxolo: This is so adorable. You're going to make

me cry, and you know how much I hate that. Come give me a hug.

I shook my head at her silliness, lifting my butt from the chair and embraced her.

Noxolo: I love you too.

It felt good to be in her arms. That motherly love radiated off her. I was always grateful to have her in my life. Most of the time, she had been my pillar.

Noxolo: You know all of this has gotten me to rethink my stance in my life. You said something about fulfilling my heart's desires. I've always wanted to give birth, and have an opportunity at being a mother. But with me living on the edge, getting in and out of trouble over the years, I didn't think bringing a baby into this world would be ideal.

Me: You're moving at the speed of light. You don't

even have a man, or have I missed out on a lot the past few weeks?

Noxolo: Don't play me with me like that.

We laughed as we continued talking about everything and anything and her newfound enthusiasm about having a baby.

Me: Adoption could also be a good idea. I'm here, you know. You might just want to take me under your wing.

Noxolo: Please. What would I do with a 19 year old who has seen it all?

Simnikiwe Mkhize

We walked into the airport, and as usual people swarmed around, walking up and down with their own collection of bags. That bad feeling wormed its way into my heart again. Something was going to go wrong. I could feel it.

I called out to Kamva who was walking in front of me.

Nikiwe: Kamva, I don't think we should go.

She pivoted and came to me with puzzlement written on her face.

Kamva: Why, what's going on, ma?

Nikiwe: I don't have a good feeling about this. We might board that flight, and end up losing our lives.

Kamva: Maybe you're just nervous. We'll be fine, ma.

Nikiwe: Are you listening to me? We'll try another day, but for now, I can't keep ignoring this feeling and

regret it later.

Kamva: I hear you, ma.

Suddenly a police dog leashed started to circle around my huge suitcase. I gazed at the cop behind it.

Nikiwe: Please get away your dog away from us. It's scaring us.

The dog was persisted, poking its head at my suitcase.

Nikiwe: We were just about to leave, officer.

Cop: I'm afraid not. Have you gone through the check point?

Nikiwe: No, we were going home.

I felt like kicking this dog.

Cop: Mam, I'm going to need you to open your bag.

Nikiwe: What do I need to do that for? You expect me to do that in front of everyone?

Cop: Mam, you have nothing to hide, right? So please, let us do our job.

I rolled my eyes, and gave in with a sigh.

Nikiwe: Fine, only because I want to go home.

I unzipped the case. This dog still hadn't stopped barking and already heads were popping in my direction.

Nikiwe: Satisfied?

Cop: Animals have a sixth sense, and I believe that

you have something of suspicion in your bag. Take out the clothes.

Another cop approached us.

Nikiwe: This is harrasment. You have no right to humiliate me like this.

Cop: Search her. Doggie here is sensing something.

The cop who had just arrived started talking out my clothing and searched through my suitcase.

Nikiwe: Are you happy? You even got people taking a video of this. This is madness.

The cop rummaging through my belongings spoke up. "You've spoke too soon. I think I see something." She opened another zip, and seconds later a block of something wrapped in a kind of foil lingered in his

hand. I think I had a slight idea what it was, and I couldn't help but be shocked and puzzled.

Cop: What do we have here?

The other cop pierced the block with a small knife, and a white powder glistened on the knife. I was staring perplexed as he tasted the powder.

The cop straightened his back, and looked at me. "Mam, you're under arrest for being in possession of drugs." The one with the dog stepped back. My heart fell to the ground. Not this again. I couldn't be arrested again.

Nikiwe: You can't arrest me. Those drugs are not mine.

Cop: They all say that.

Nikiwe: Do you think I'd be as stupid as to carry

drugs into an security tight establishment? Those drugs are not mine. You have to listen to me.

Cop: Mam, you wouldn't be the first one. So please co-operate, and follow us.

Nikiwe: I'm not going anywhere. I've never touched drugs in my life. Kamva, please tell them.

She didn't say anything, and I narrowed my eyes, connecting the dots and rather the truth staring me right in the face.

Nikiwe: You did this, didn't you?

Kamva: Ma, I can't believe you right now. All these years. So this is where your money comes. I didn't expect this from you. Why did I never suspect anything?

Nikiwe: Officers, I'm being framed here.

Kamva: Officers, my mother is right. There must be another explanation for this.

Oh, seemed like someone grew some balls.

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Buhlenkosi Malinga

I passed by the police station to see Mpilo. I missed him so much, and the fact that my hope was wilting with each passing day bothered me. He had been arrested for weeks now, and it was unfair and unjust to him.

As my presence graced the police station, my jaw clenched when I saw Mpilo's mother make her way to the reception. She noticed me much to my dismay, and approached me. She didn't look happy. But then again, when did she ever?

She clasped her hand on my wrist, and pulled me outside into the sunshine.

Mpilo's mom: You have some nerve showing your face here.

Me: Ma, what's wrong?

Mpilo's mom: You're going to ask me that question knowing very well that you're the reason my son is in prison.

I didn't protest, because to a certain extent, there was truth in her statement.

Mpilo's mom: What do you want from my son?

Me: Ma, I love Mpilo and I'm here, offering him support.

Mpilo's mom: Well, none of this would have happened if you stayed away from my son. You had

to go and drag him in your mess with your boyfriend, and now he's paying the price.

Me: I know, ma, but all of us are trying our best to get Mpilo out of this mess.

Mpilo's mom: Focus on your books, and leave my son alone. You're too young for him.

Me: Love knows no age.

She rolled her eyes.

Mpilo's mom: Really? So that you can leave Mpilo at the altar like you did with his brother?

I'd probably never hear the end of it. I heaved a sigh.

Me: Ma, Mpilo understood my reasoning behind my actions. Everything that happened in the past, we've managed to move past it.

Mpilo's mom: You're really mad if you think I'm going to allow you to pursue a relationship with my son any further. No man wants a woman whose legs has been opened by another man in front of everyone. Everywhere he will go, he'll be reminded that everyone has seen his girlfriend's sacred treasure.

Moisture gathered in my eyes. Even in his death, Bandile's actions were still causing havoc in my life. I was still feeling the heat.

Mpilo's mom: I don't have anything against you, but I'm saving you from a lot of heartache. You may not see it now, but that video will follow you everywhere and I'm not going to allow you to make my son a rehabilitation centre. You've caused enough damage. You and your cheating sister. Now my sons have to pick up the pieces of the mess you created.

Me: I didn't choose to be violated by Bandile.

Mpilo's mom: But you chose to engage in premarital sex with him. Isn't that why your video was

circulating? That Bandile was a dog, I agree but Mpilo doesn't deserve all of this. His life was peaceful until you came into the picture.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I took the remainder of the cocaine to the bathroom, and poured the white powder into the basin. I opened the tap, and watched as the coke flowed away with the water. I closed the tap after making sure there was no residue, and went to toss the plastic and foil into the ignited fireplace since it was winter anyways.

My aunty walked in, temper flaring. I was expecting her.

Zenani: Are you happy? You got your mother arrested. Is that why you forgave her? So that you could bring her down?

Kamva: Aunty, I have no idea what you're talking about.

Zenani: Drop the act. You're not going to get away with this.

Kamva: Aunty, please. What would I gain from doing this?

Zenani: You've just started a war that you're not going to win.

Kamva: Aunty, I understand that you're angry, but you can't accuse me of getting my mother arrested.

Zenani: Don't you fucking patronise me, Kamvelihle! You planned this little trip so you could get Nikiwe arrested at the airport. I must give it to you. You played your cards well, and we didn't see this coming.

Kamva: I'll go make your a cup of tea. It will calm you down.

Zenani: I know that Mthunzi told you everything. You can drop the act.

Anger arose when she acknowledged her plot against my marriage. I couldn't control my rage anymore.

Kamva: Is that so? The same way you wanted to ruin my marriage is the same way I plotted your sister's downfall. My only mistake is not taking you down with her.

Zenani: You've just made a big mistake, and you're going to regret it. I'm going to make your life a living hell, and you'll come back to me begging for mercy.

Kamva: What kind of an aunt are you? What kind of a mother is your sister? Not even once did it cross your mind that you're ruining your daughter's happiness. You make me sick. You and your sister. Out here acting like victims, never acknowledging the evil that you plot against others. Always wanting to shift the blame.

Zenani: You have no idea what I'm capable of. I'm the one and only Zenani. Angbenywa mina. You even have the nerve to return to my house after getting my sister arrested.

Kamva: I'll happily leave your house. I hope you're happy with your yourselves. All this evil you keep doing, will come back to bite you. You'll only be left with loneliness and enemies. This is the beginning. You'll remember my words one day.

Zenani: You wanted to play, right? You've got it. You better pray that you're strong enough to withstand me. I'll collapse everything around you. You'll know me. Ngingu' Zenani kai one mina.

She clicked her tongue.

Zenani: You think you're match for me? You should have gotten me arrested along with your mother. I'll be your worst nightmare.

Kamva: I'm still your niece. What is your problem,

aunty?

Zenani: Don't you pull that card on me. You messed with the wrong duo.

I had to take her threats serious. My aunty was an unpredictable woman with a loose screw.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

The cop pushed me into his office, and went to his desk, pulling out the orange uniform, and gave it to me along with a box. I came to know that his name was Mthandeni. The investigating detective of Mpilo's case.

Mthandeni: You'll place all your belongings in that box.

Nikiwe: Don't you think you're moving too fast? I'll be

out soon.

Mthandeni: I love your confidence, but it isn't going to cut it this time. I have gotten a call from your previous residence. Does Xulu ring a bell?

Nikiwe: Where are you going with this?

Mthandeni: She heard about your arrest, and called to inform me that you're facing murder charges again. That case that had closed has been reopened. It seems that new evidence has surfaced.

Nikiwe: What?

My heart leaped out of my chest - increasing my heart rate. I attempted to downplay my emotions.

Nikiwe: What do you mean?

Mthandeni: You're in for a bumpy ride. It doesn't seem that you're going to get out of this one. You'll be transferred to a maximum security prison soon.

Nikiwe: I still stand with the fact that I had nothing to

do with those drugs, and whatever new evidence has surfaced, someone is framing me. They did that with the drugs, and now they want to use the deceased.

Mthandeni: Change. Take off everything. Your earrings, and that necklace.

Nikiwe: So are you going to stand there and watch me undress?

Mthandeni: I'm giving you only five minutes. I'll be standing outside.

He walked out, and closed the door. Fresh tears fell down my cheeks, as I made an effort to remove my clothes. I took off my pendant, and slid it into my underwear, and pulled on the overall. Immediately a wave of haunting images washed over me. I closed my eyes and willed myself not to give up. I'm a fighter and a conqueror. Nothing can bring me down. The sting of Kamva's betrayal was fresh in my heart.

Noxolo Ndebele

After using the restroom, I trod back to my ward, with slight pains in my abdomen, but I managed and my lips curved into a smile when my eyes landed on Kaizer. He rose to his full height from the chair, and neared me to help me to the bed.

Noxolo: Thank you.

He sat down.

Kaizer: How are you feeling?

Noxolo: Much better. Thank you for coming.

Kaizer: Your sister nagged me, saying it was of urgency.

Noxolo: You know how much she loves exaggerating.

Kaizer: I do. So what are the doctors saying? When will you be discharged?

Noxolo: Hopefully, soon.

Kaizer: Okay, what was so important that I had to drop everything and attend to you?

Noxolo: Please. You make it seem like you're not a good friend of mine. You should've been the first one to visit me.

Kaizer: You know how I feel about hospitals.

Noxolo: Anyway, please promise me that you're not going to flip, and you're going to keep an open mind.

Kaizer: You're making things awkward for me,

Noxolo. Stop beating around the bush.

Noxolo: Okay, so this whole occurrence has had me questioning my life. I've had time to think about my priorities, and I decided that I want to have a baby.

Kaizer: Not to sound rude, but why are you sharing this with me?

Noxolo: I was hoping that you could be my sperm donor.

His eyes popped. I don't think I've ever seen this man before me shocked. Most of the time, he was expressionless. After a minute or so, he chuckled and I furrowed my eyebrows in confusion.

Kaizer: Please tell me you're joking.

Noxolo: I'm dead serious.

Kaizer: What you're asking of me is ridiculous, Noxolo. You're blurring our brotherhood and professionalism.

Noxolo: I know, but I wouldn't be asking you if I wasn't desperate. You know how I feel about relationships. I don't like them. This will save me time. I don't have to meet a guy, get to know him and consider whether he'd make a good father.

He shook his head, skeptical.

Kaizer: What you're asking of me, Noxolo, I don't think I can do it. Rather talk to your doctor about the process. Perhaps they'll find you another donor. I mean think about it. It's better with someone you don't know.

Noxolo: I don't know about that.

Kaizer: Noxolo, look at it this way. Imagine we go on with this, and you give birth. When the child grows up, imagine how I'd be feeling to see my seed roaming the streets. I personally think it's going to complicate things.

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Kamvelihle Ngubane

I breathed in and out, and looked at my husband.

Senzo: Are you okay?

Kamva: My aunt's threat has been on my mind ever since. I know she's not playing.

Senzo: You really think she'd go as far as ruining you? Maybe she was angry and said things that she didn't mean.

Kamva: They tried with my marriage, and failed. You can't put it past them.

Senzo: I know, but maybe there was a good reason behind it. We don't know about that.

Kamva: Nothing justifies ruining your daughter's happiness, Senzo.

Senzo: I hear you.

Kamva: I don't know when all this drama will end. It's tiring, honestly. To find out that your mother whom you loved dearly is not the woman you thought she was.

Senzo: It will get better. Don't worry.

The elevator opened, and we stepped out, heading to the conference room on the ground floor.

Kamva: Do you think that this press conference was a good idea?

Senzo: Hopefully it will get the media off our backs. We can't even live our lives normally without them showing up everywhere.

We walked into a buzz of the paparazzi with flashing cameras. The guards appeared beside us, shielding us as we glided to the front. Questions were already being hurled at us.

Senzo: Good afternoon to all of you. Hopefully my wife and I will be given a chance to clear up things without any interruptions. After, we will answer your questions. So please work with us.

Some of the journalists plopped down on the chairs,

preparing for a scoop. Senzo gave me the platform.

Kamva: I take it everyone is curious about the photo of me kissing another man published in the media, and I'd like to address that.

I was interjected by a female asking a question. "So are you and your husband getting a divorce?"

"Do you perhaps have an open marriage with your wife, Mr Ngubane because you don't seem to be bothered?"

Senzo: We asked for cooperation. Please give us a chance to talk.

Kamva: The photograph was indeed real as I did have a relationship with the guy last year. The dates however stamped on it are edited, and this picture

was taken the previous year. So I'd like to shut down allegations that I'm cheating on my husband, because they are false. In fact, we were talking about having a wedding, but with the situation our family is in, we decided to postpone it.

Senzo: In addition to that, I'd like to make a plea to the justice system for something to be done. My brother is kept behind bars without any tangible evidence against him. He just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. We won't be commenting any further.

More questions were directed at us, and I wanted to leave. "So Kamva, your mother was arrested for being in possession of drugs. What do you have to say about that?"

Kamva: No comment.

"What about your sister? It has reached our ears that

she's in a relationship with your brother in law, and we'd like a sneak peek into that. With her sextape shot with the deceased, Bandile Dube, wasn't it too soon for another relationship? What about the trauma she went through at her ex-boyfriend's hand? What is the real story?"

Kamva: Unfortunately I can't talk for others.

"You were seen with your ex-boyfriend during the past few weeks, Mrs Ngubane. So tell us, who's fooling who here?"

Kamva: I see nothing wrong with interacting with my exes. As long they understand the boundaries, I will keep them around. Sometimes you learn that you're better off in a friendship with someone than a relationship, and that is my standing with my ex.

"There are rumors that your mother is being charged

again with the murder of your father. How true is this?"

I was transfixed in bewilderment.

Senzo: Thank you, but we've said all we wanted to say.

We departed.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I rose to my feet, and hugged my sister, feeling defeated and without a plan.

Zenani: You look like shit.

Nikiwe: I hope you didn't come here to rub salt in my wounds.

Zenani: You need to get yourself together, Nikiwe.

Nikiwe: Where do I start? My only daughter is the reason I am in here.

Zenani: Talk about ungrateful. You made her who she is, and she turned against you.

Nikiwe: Imagine. All this for a man who's going to leave her for the next skirt?

Zenani: You know how it is. She doesn't know shit. It's still early. She will learn.

Nikiwe: It just makes me angry.

Zenani: I hope you're not losing hope. You can't afford to.

Nikiwe: It's hard, Zenani. They got me backed in a corner. I don't think I'm going to walk this time.

Zenani: Nikiwe, please. Where is that confidence you had 2 months ago when you were exactly in this position you are in? You're the strongest person I know. You're ruthless, and we didn't get this far by

playing games. You can't leave me to handle things alone.

Nikiwe: What do you want me to do, Zenani?
Apparently they now have evidence against me. I don't know what it is, but it can't be good. Moreover, they want to have me transferred.

Zenani pursed her lips.

Zenani: This is bad, but nothing is too big for us. You'll walk again, and I'll personally make sure of it.

Nikiwe: This time, I can feel it in my bones that there's no way out for me.

For the first time, I was giving in. I didn't want to throw in the towel, but circumstances compelled me.

Nikiwe: I'll serve my time, but I'll definitely be out soon. The war has not yet been won. This is merely

a battle, and we've lost it. We must make sure we win the next one, and ultimately have the last laugh.

Zenani: It's going to be hard without you.

Nikiwe: This is what that sangoma was talking about, but one thing she didn't note about me is that I always have a trick up my sleeve. I make my own destiny. Just take care of my daughter for me.

Zenani: There is no way in hell I'm going to do that. I'm going to teach your daughter a lesson.

Nikiwe: Don't even go there, Zenani. We're in this mess because you wanted Senzokuhle's wealth. Don't make things worse.

Zenani: Maybe that's why everything you touched fell to pieces, Nikiwe. It's time I took on the reins and do the job for you. From Kamva to Mandlakhe, they're going to pay. With Buhle, it will depend on my mood.

Thabile Mampane

My eyes darted from Mzi to Qaphela. Mzi didn't look good. For the past few days, he always sported a stoic expression. Anyone with eyes could see that something was brewing with him. But then again, I didn't know him that well.

Thabi: Are you okay, Mzi?

Qaphela: Leave him. You can't do anything when he's like this.

Thabi: He looks ready to kill.

I chuckled briefly, before Mzi snapped.

Mzi: Are we here on business or to gossip about me?

Qaphela: Whatever is eating you up, you should get it sorted.

Mzi: Oh, trust me, I plan to.

I wonder what was going through his mind.

Qaphela: Back to business, I should have the design and floor plans from the architect soon. Thabile, we should bounce off ideas to each other, and make sure that the next hotel we build is more breathtaking and different. Perhaps any services you can think of that other hotels don't offer.

Thabi: You already have a brand, and everyone is happy with the hotel, but it wouldn't hurt to do something different. At this rate, I might leave the drug business for good.

Qaphela raised an eyebrow, and his words were swallowed as the elevator to his penthouse suddenly slid open. My eyes drank in a woman, perhaps in her mid-twenties strutting into the room. She was drop dead gorgeous, and I licked my lips.

Qaphela: Thabile, don't even think about that.

Thabi: Who is she?

Mzi went to meet her halfway.

Mzi: Mpumi, what are you doing here? You don't even let us know that you're popping by.

They hugged, and I could see that they shared a strong bond.

Qaphela: She's the last born. She's my sister.

Thabi: She's fly.

Qaphela: You're starting.

Thabi: Relax, I already have my eyes on someone.

I hinted at something, but he didn't quite catch that as they bomb

bombarded their sister with questions.

Qaphela: Nompumelelo, what brings you this side?

Mpumi: Dad deadass told me that he's found a groom for me.

Thabi: What's with your families arranging marriages for you? That trend has long passed.

Mpumi: I didn't see you there. Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Nompumelelo. Soon to be Mrs double N. Nompumelelo Ngubane.

My eyes popped.

Thabi: What? You don't say. Which Ngubane brother are you getting married to?

Mpumi: The one in jail.

I laughed so hard. I don't know why, but I couldn't

help it.

Thabi: I'm sorry, but this is funny.

Mzi: I need to have a talk with dad. When did he even think about tying you to Mpilo? First of all, he's in jail and he has a girlfriend. Why did you even agree to this?

Mpumi: The man is a catch, I won't lie. Moreover Mpilo's mom is the one who came up with this idea and you know I have mad respect for the old hag.

Qaphela: You seriously need to get ypur head checked. You're losing it.

Thabi: Buhle definitely needs to hear this.

I shook my head with laughter and reached for my phone and called Buhle.

Buhle: Hey, Thabile.

Thabi: Girl, how's your studying going?

Buhle: I'm slowly but surely grasping the content.

Thabi: You need to hear this.

Buhle: What is it?

Qaphela tugged at my arm, and shook his head.

Thabi: I'm here with your sister wife.

Buhle: What are you saying, Thabile?

I couldn't help but burst into laughter again. It was bound to get interesting.

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Sorry for the delay.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

My tears fell as I watched the video of my mother. Suspecting and seeing were two different things, and now my heart was shattered at the video before me.

As each second rolled by of the video, I saw my mother in a different light or should I rather say darkness. She was drilling in the soil back at the village in the nightfall. I watched in anticipation. Apprehension, and eeriness surrounded me. I couldn't believe my eyes.

She kept digging, and it seemed that her pregnancy at the time didn't slow down her digging. For the first time, I didn't see my mother. I merely saw a ruthless killer who'd stop at nothing to get what she wanted.

My heart further sunk when she single handedly

dragged a dead body out of the shallow grave. My tears didn't stop flowing. Uncle Qhawe didn't deserve to die at my mother's hand.

Mthandeni: From this, there's a possibility that your mother will never make it out of prison.

Kamva: What happens now?

Mthandeni: Your mother is going away for a very long time.

Kamva: Okay. Thank you for your time. What about my father?

Mthandeni: I think that confession they have on her will solidify everything.

I bid the detective goodbye and skipped to my car outside the police station in tears. I dialled Senzokuhle's number. A heartwrenching sob escaped my mouth.

Senzo: What's wrong, my love? Why are you crying?

Kamva: The police have actual proof that indeed my mother was behind my father's death.

Senzo: I'm sorry, my love. I can understand how hard this is for you.

Kamva: You don't know a thing, Senzo. You don't understand a thing because your mother never killed your father and came for your marriage.

There was a brief silence. I closed my eyes momentarily with guilt.

Kamva: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you. It has nothing to do with you. It's just that I don't know where to direct my anger.

Senzo: It's okay. I understand. It's not going to be easy, but everything will work out. Your mother will get what's due to her.

Kamva: It's sad that she'll be facing the music alone while her sister who was probably the mastermind

behind everything will roam the streets free. I should have also gotten her arrested.

Senzo: I still don't like what you did with regards to framing your mother.

Kamva: It doesn't make a difference. She was going to find herself behind bars anyway. I made things easier for the police.

Senzo: Come to the office. I'm taking you out.

I faintly smiled.

Kamva: I'd like that.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

The guard led me to a room, and my smile faded

when I saw the dejected look on my sister. I sat down.

Nikiwe: What's wrong?

Zenani: We're in deep shit. They have concrete evidence against you.

Nikiwe: What do they have?

Zenani: They have a video of you digging out Qhawe's body.

I gritted my teeth, and ran my hand over my face in frustration; the events of that night playing through my mind like a film.

Nikiwe: You can't be serious. Where is it coming from? This is ridiculous.

Zenani: I don't know, Nikiwe but it's not looking good for you.

Nikiwe: Can't you do something?

Zenani: What can I possibly do, Nikiwe? The police are out for your head. They asked me to talk to you about pleading guilty.

Nikiwe: You don't really think I'd do that? Who submitted this video to the police in the first place? What's going on because I'm confused? Why did they take so long to give the police the video? This doesn't make sense.

Zenani: You're asking the wrong person.

Nikiwe: You're useless right now. I don't even know what you're doing here.

Zenani: I'm your only ally here, Nikiwe. Please don't forget that.

I leaned forward on the table.

Nikiwe: Is this alliance going to get me out of here? Let's not forget how all of this shit is your fault, yet you're sitting on the other side of the table.

Zenani: Please don't pretend that you didn't enjoy all

that we were doing. It was all fun and games, now you want to place the blame on me. You're crazy.

I clicked my tongue, anger intensifying within me.

Nikiwe: Look at me very carefully. Do I look like prison material? I'm not going to spend my life in this hellhole. So you better do something and fast.

Zenani: Nikiwe, you know I always have your back. I'm trying.

I cocked a brow with a lopsided grin.

Nikiwe: I must give it to you. You played everything well. You influenced me to do the dirty work, and that's why I'm in this place instead of you, but don't forget who I am and what I am capable of. Don't forget the lives I've taken.

Zenani: You're threading on thin ice. You have no one

else but me, so stop with your tantrums. We're in this together, and I have your back. I'll do everything in my power to get you out.

Nikiwe: If all else fails, you know what to do. All hell must break loose. I want everyone who is responsible for me being in here to pay.

Zenani: I won't disappoint you this time.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I was back in Mpilo's apartment and Thabile had tugged along. When she broke the news to me, I swear my heart shattered. I hadn't gone to see Mpilo recently and I wondered if he was informed about this.

Happy: Please don't worry. Everything will be fine,

Buhle.

Me: How can you be so sure? Everytime I attempt to mend things, something else falls apart. I don't know what to do anymore.

Happy: I'm very sure Mpilo had no idea about this. Even if he went along with his mother's plan, I don't think he'd have hid it from you.

Me: I don't know anymore, Happy. This is weighing heavily on me. I can't deal with Mpilo being in jail on one hand, and on the other, a possibility of a relationship of polygamy. I don't even know how to put it.

Happy: I hear you.

Thabi: But honestly, there was no need for her to do this. Mpilo is an adult and parents can't keep wanting to control our lives.

Happy: You haven't seen a thing. This family strives on drama. I tell you. Well, I'm also a main contributor to this drama but I can't have people double my age doing the same things.

Thabi: You're right. She should do stuff her age.
Perhaps knitting, and leave drama to the youngsters.

I cracked up.

Me: You're starting. Thabile, you should filter your mouth, please. The things you say. I can't believe you were laughing at my pain yesterday.

Thabi: It's not like that. The news were announced in the most unexpected and humorous way. I couldn't hold myself.

The door opened, and Mpilo's mom walked in. Our heads popped to her direction.

She clicked her tongue.

Happy: Ma, may we please have a word?

Mpilo's mom: What is it?

Happy: Buhle tells me that you went and arranged a marriage for Mpilo.

Mpilo's mom: I don't see how any of this is her business. This is a family matter.

Happy: Is Mpilo aware about this, or you're making plans behind his back?

Mpilo's mom: Where does it bother you, because this is none of your business?

Happy: Ma, all of us can see that you're doing this because you don't like the woman Mpilo has chosen for himself?

Mpilo's mom: You mean this small girl? Please, Mpilo will understand.

Happy: Couldn't you have waited until Mpilo got out of jail before you did this? You seriously can't be stressing your son any further.

Mpilo's mom: What wrong have I done? Please tell me, Happy because it seems like I'm missing something. Isn't this our family tradition? What is

special about Mpilo that we must allow him to break our traditions? Senzokuhle didn't marry the girl he loved, the same is for Somikazi.

Happy: And look where that has gotten us. Somikazi's marriage is falling apart. Let's not even go to Senzokuhle's one.

Mpilo's mom: Mpilo will marry the girl I have chosen for him, and if this girl really loves him, she'll be the second wife. It's that simple. Haibo.

I gasped.

Happy: This is becoming a joke. When Mpilo told you months back that he had taken a liking to a certain girl, you didn't object. Now that you know what it is, you're breathing fire and changing tunes.

Mpilo's mom: I'll slap you so hard. I'm not your friend.

Happy: We'll see what Mpilo has to say about this.

I was literally out of words. I was honestly going to step back from this. When this reaches Mpilo, he'll do what he deems right. This was honestly beyond me, and truly speaking I didn't want to give Mpilo's mom a reason to hate me further. It would be a miracle if I pass my exams with everything going on.

Noxolo Ndebele

The doctor walked in, and checked my vitals.

Doctor: How are you feeling?

Noxolo: Better. Thank you.

Doctor: It's our job.

Noxolo: Have you managed to find out what was the cause of my abdominal pain and bleeding?

Doctor: When your sister had brought you here, we had thought that you were having a miscarriage.

Noxolo: And?

Doctor: Have you underwent a surgery for the removal of your womb? Perhaps it didn't go well, or maybe a backdoor abortion?

I stared at her with confusion.

Noxolo: You're losing me now, Doctor.

Doctor: You came to inquire with me yesterday about sperm donors and how they work. Are you perhaps experiencing amnesia or memory loss?

Noxolo: What do you mean?

Doctor: It seems that the removal of your womb wasn't done properly, and you weren't recovering well. So I'm asking you whether you've forgotten some things because you can't have kids of your own since you removed your womb.

Shock. I was beyond shocked.

Noxolo: Doctor, please backtrack a bit. What are you talking about? What did you do to me? Did you remove my womb without my permission?

Doctor: We can't do that without your permission. I think you're experiencing amnesia.

A curveball had hit me hard, and I was left perplexed until fear consumed me when a set of words echoed in my head. "I want your womb."

My eyes widened.

Doctor: Are you okay?

I went down memory lane. "You better be ready to

face my wrath. You'll give me what I want." One way or another.

It couldn't be. She was dead. It was confirmed. At some point, I had gone to see her and even though her skin was burnt - her face was recognisable. This was witchcraft at its best. Evilness from the grave by the dead. I hoped that I was wrong.

Noxolo: Doctor, please check again.

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Thabile Mampane

Like a horror film, my past played through my mind. The violation that scarred me for eternity lurked in my head, evoking fear. Forcefully, my trousers were

pulled down, and with coercion and without my consent, I had to bear three cocks into my groin. My pleas fell on deaf ears. My tears flooded my face and I stared in the eyes of my ex-boyfriend.

Walking into a horrific scene, gun prepared; another violation was inflicted on Buhle. Mpilo gunned down one man behind me as I remained rooted in one spot due to shock, disgust and hatred. My eyes changed and in a blur, I remembered raining down bullets on Bandile.

Far away, I heard Buhle's voice calling out to me. I shot up from my bed, streaked in sweat. I exhaled, and composed myself.

Buhle: Are you alright?

Concern was drawled on her face.

Thabi: Everything was coming back to me.

Buhle: Were you having a nightmare?

Thabi: I don't know. Everything that happened was replaying itself. Even in death, Bandile is still taking away my peace.

Buhle: What happened?

Thabi: I killed Bandile. For the longest time, I felt sick to the core after I had registered and processed that I took a life.

Buhle: I think it's natural to feel this way especially after the first kill. If it didn't move you, I'd have thought that you have no conscience and you go around killing people.

I thought about Bandile's father. I killed father and son, and some days I didn't feel anything about it, and others, I remembered and immediately felt sick.

Buhle: You should definitely go back to therapy, Thabile. You've been through a lot, and you're still

standing but sometimes we can't get through trauma without seeking help. You can't keep pretending that you're okay while in fact, you're far from being alright.

Thabi: I know. I was actually reconsidering it.

Buhle: See, that wasn't so hard. The first step to healing is admittance to an underlying problem. You can't run from this anymore.

Thabi: I know. I'm going to do my best. What about you?

Buhle: It's not so bad anymore, but one thing I'll never do is go back to therapy again. Not after what happened with the previous one.

Thabi: You can't paint every psychologist and therapist with the same brush as Ms Madonsela. Some of them are committed to their job, and it spans to more than just a job title. It's within them. They actively look to help people find healing and that's what you're studying, right?

Buhle: I know, but after this exam period, I should make plans to go home. Hopefully everything will be

fine and I'm only writing again next week.

Thabi: Yeah, let's hope everything will work out.

Mpilo has been inside for too long now. I'm sure he's losing his mind.

Buhle: I would too. With a mother like his.

Thabi: Some family members take toxicity to a whole new level. Imagine, your son is in jail, but you have time to practice pettiness.

Buhle: Downsides of being a royal. Your whole life is practically planned out for you and you have no say.

Noxolo Ndebele

I was finally discharged and the doctor assured me that I'd be perfectly alright, but that didn't stop my mind from going into turmoil. I couldn't stop thinking about the revelation, and I shared everything with my

sister.

Khethiwe: What were you thinking, Noxolo?

Noxolo: You think I don't know that I messed up?

Khethiwe: You were really willing to do anything for this friend of yours?

Noxolo: Something I'd do for you too without thinking twice.

Khethiwe: The problem is that you created a mess for yourself, Noxolo and for what? Because your friend is never coming back. You should have thought about this carefully.

Noxolo: I know, but what's done is done. I can't turn back the hands of time.

Khethiwe: This is bad, but we're not sure what's happening here.

Noxolo: There is no other explanation for this, Khethiwe. How do you explain this?

Khethiwe: I hear you. This is messed up. I won't lie to

you, but we need to find out what happened.

Noxolo: And how do we do that? That woman died. I saw her. I saw her burnt body. This doesn't make sense.

Khethiwe: The physical body died, but not the spirit, it seems. Maybe she has carried her witching ways into the spiritual world. That's what makes sense right now.

Noxolo: So what do you think I should do?

Khethiwe: When was the last time you prayed? You should have never gone this route, Noxolo. I hope you've learnt your lesson. You don't get involved in things that you have no idea about.

Noxolo: I'm learning. You don't have to worry, but I need to get my womb back. If that's even possible. Who knows what more she's going to take from me?

Khethiwe: I think we should go seek help from a prophet or a traditional healer. I don't know, but they may be able to provide us with answers.

Noxolo: That's an idea.

Khethiwe: I'll ask around for genuine prophets. You know that we're surrounded with fakes and scams everywhere we go.

Noxolo: You do that.

What had I gotten myself into? Definitely something not even a woman of my calibre can deal with.

Mpilo Ngubane

The guard ushered me to the visiting station, and I wanted to turn back after seeing my mother. I pushed myself forward, dreading this conversation. I didn't have any energy, and I was certain that after this meeting, the last ounce of my energy would be depleted. I went to take a seat, across my mother on the table.

Her: Hello, how are you?

Mpilo: As you can see, I'm alive.

Her: I know Happy told you about what I did.

Mpilo: So what are you doing here? You're here to see your son, or to get me to agree to what you're doing?

Her: I know that this comes as a shock to you, but it's in your best interest.

Mpilo: Nothing this family does shocks me, but it's appalling that you're more worried about my love life than your son rotting in prison.

Her: That's not how it is. I was looking out for you, and securing your future. I have faith that you're going to make it out.

Mpilo: So in all these plans you're making, you've managed to overlook my girlfriend?

Her face slightly changed.

Her: Mpilo, a mother knows best and I know she's not the one for you. She'll only be coming into your life with problems. You're in here because she dragged you into her problems.

Mpilo: Ma, a quick question?

Her: I'm listening.

Mpilo: Did she create those problems herself?

Her: Mpilo, you're not listening to me.

Mpilo: Now I see why Senzo didn't want to be King. You got him married to a woman he didn't know, and you expected him to drop his company for the throne. You all expect too much from us and it's tiring. Have you ever thought that what we want and what you want doesn't align with each other?

Her: I never said you should discard Buhle. She'll be there for you as a second wife.

Mpilo: You had the chance to live your life, so you should allow the rest of us to do the same.

Her: So you are really going to choose a random girl

over your family?

I fought the urge to roll my eyes.

Mpilo: Ma, I love my family and I love Buhle. You can't expect me to pick. Unless she's done something wrong, I'm going to stand with her. I know that everything with you women is a competition, but please don't involve me. I have bigger things to worry about.

She shook her head, and clapped her hands.

Her: Oh, shame. You're really gone. I wonder what strong love potion she has used on you to make you turn against your family. Your father must be turning in his grave.

Mpilo: Ma, you forget that I'm a lawyer. Your emotional blackmail is not going to work on me.

Her: So what about Somikazi and Senzokuhle? You think it's fair to them that you get to choose your partner whilst they didn't?

Mpilo: Ma, perhaps if you had raised this issue last year, I might have agreed but I've found someone special and I want to make it work. I don't get what the fuss is about. Buhle is from a royal family-

She interjected me and scoffed.

Her: More like a family of criminals.

Mpilo: Weird coming from a mother whose son is in prison. Our family could easily also be passed off as a family of criminals.

Her: Fine, I'll back off for now, but we're definitely going to talk about this in the future.

Mpilo: Not a chance, and couldn't you have chosen a better candidate? You had to go for Nompumelelo out of all people, ma.

Her: She's a good girl.

Mpilo: No, ma, she's a loudmouth and half the things she says never make sense.

Her: Mzi should never hear you say that.

We laughed.

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Thabile Mampane

Qaphela passed me an opened cider, and my eyes darted between the two brothers. Mzi nursed a glass of whisky in his hand, and Q blew smoke from the cigarette he was holding. We were hard at work, brainstorming ideas and we decided to venture away from business.

Qaphela: So rumor has it that Mthandeni's uncle is going to head Mpilo's case.

Thabi: That's ridiculous.

Qaphela: I'm not certain, but that's the word.

Mzi: It's clear that Mthandeni had this planned properly. It doesn't help that most of his family members are law officials. It's going to be hard to throw money at this. We need to move to the next plan.

Thabi: And what is that? It isn't going to make things worse, right? Remember that we only have one shot at this, and we can't go wrong. We owe it to Mpilo.

Mzi: Certainly, we're not failures. In two weeks time, Mpilo will be out and that's a promise.

I looked at him with skepticism.

Thabi: What did you have in mind?

Mzi: We need to find someone who's going to take the fall for this.

Thabi: Anyone in particular?

Mzi: I might have someone in mind, but I'll have to get back to you.

Wheels were turning in my mind, and an idea came to mind.

Thabi: Qaphela, a minute, please.

Mzi: Where are you running off? Secrets are not going to help us in any way.

Thabi: I just want to discuss something with him, and we'll bring you on board.

Mzi: Okay.

Me and Qaphela stepped aside, away from Mzi's earshot.

Qaphela: What are you thinking?

Thabi: I think I might know someone we can pin this

whole thing on.

Qaphela: I'm listening.

Thabi: Unathi Sithole. Think about it.

Qaphela: Explain more.

Thabi: Okay, so we plant evidence against Unathi like we did with Njabulo's death. She's already the main suspect in his death, and we use this to bury her further.

He seemed to be contemplating my idea.

Thabi: We make up a story that she killed those three guys, and since one of them was Njabulo's son, Njabulo found out and confronted her and it didn't end well. She ended up killing him too.

His lips formed a smile.

Qaphela: You're smart, you know that.

Thabi: So I've been told.

Qaphela: Now I understand why your father wanted you to take over after him. You're an asset.

Thabi: But the question is how do we go about that?

Qaphela: We'll think of something.

Thabi: Please don't tell your brother that I killed Njabulo. The less people who know about this, the better.

Qaphela: You do know that he already suspected that you had something to do with it.

Thabi: I know, but we can't confirm this to anyone else. It's only the two of us who know about this.

Qaphela: No problem, we'll find a way around this.

We returned back to the table we were occupying. Mzi was oblivious of our presence behind him.

Mzi: Make sure he doesn't die. I'm going to do the honours myself.

I looked at Qaphela, and he shook his head, clearing his throat. Mzi cut his call, and I was piqued with curiosity. I knew better than to ask. All of us had our own secrets to handle.

Mzi: And?

Qaphela: We have a plan, but we need to make sure that it is going to work before we let you in on it.

Mzi: Very well. What's next on the agenda?

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I pounded my fist on the door, and Happy was the

one to open the door to Mpilo's apartment. She gave me a hug, and stepped aside so I could enter.

Happy: Is there anything you want? I could make you a snack.

Me: No, I'm fine. I'll be waiting.

Happy: Okay, let me go and freshen up. I'll be back now now.

I nodded, and glided to the kitchen and settled on the high chair, and became engrossed to my cellphone, until someone cleared their throat. I looked up to see Mpilo's mom. Man, she loved to rub me up the wrong way, but I didn't like to entertain her. I just hope she wouldn't hurl unnecessary comments towards me.

Me: Good morning, mam.

I gave her a smile, and she returned my gesture by clicking her tongue. She took out a bottle of water from the fridge and turned towards me.

Mpilo's mom: You may have everyone fooled, but not me. I can see right through you. You're nothing but a gold digger and a troublemaker.

Me: My father has left me plenty of money, so I don't need to dig gold from anyone.

Mpilo's mom: You have another thing coming if you think that this is over. You may have Mpilo wrapped around your little finger, but I'm watching you.

Me: Mpilo is your son, and I understand you want the best for him. I don't have a problem with that.

Mpilo's mom: You can forget about marrying my son. Not if I can help it am I going to allow you to go another day with my son. He'll see you for what you are.

Me: And what am I exactly?

Mpilo's mom: You think you've won, right?

Me: I wasn't playing any games in the first place...
Ma, you're an elder to me and I have utmost respect for you so it would be better we stopped this fighting for Mpilo's sakes. I'm certain he wouldn't like to get back from jail to find me and his mother quarrelling. I have accepted that you'll never like me, but I'd like us to be civilised since I'll be in this family for a long time as my sister is married into this family and I'm dating Mpilo.

She broke out in a smile, leaving me in confusion.

Mpilo's mom: You handled this far better than I thought. I'm impressed.

Me: What do you mean?

Mpilo's mom: Let's make a deal. I'll stop judging you based on your past and we'll get to know each better. My son loves you and it seems that you're here to stay. How does that sound?

Me: I'd like that.

Mpilo's mom: But don't get too comfortable. I'm still going to keep a close eye on you.

I smiled sincerely this time, and Happy made her presence known.

Happy: I see you two are bonding. I like. I like.

Mpilo's mom: Where are you two going?

Happy: I've found a new friend in Buhle, and we're going to paint the town red.

Mpilo's mom: I don't want party animals in my house.

She walked away, and I popped my eyes, looking at Happy.

Me: Did I hear right?

Happy: Don't worry. You'll get used to her. She's a pain in the ass, but she's a good woman. That is her

love language. Take it from someone who has spent years with her.

Noxolo Ndebele

Khethiwe handed me a cup of tea to soothe my nerves as I have been anxious.

Khethiwe: You need to calm down, dade.

Noxolo: I can't help it. This worries me so much. I don't know what to do.

Khethiwe: You need to keep calm. Everything will work out. We'll find answers.

My phone rang beside me on the couch and I reached for it to see Kaizer's name on the screen. I

answered it after positioning my cup on the table.

Noxolo: Hello, Kaizer.

Kaizer: You doing good? I heard you were discharged.

Noxolo: Yes, that's true. I'm still on bed rest though.

Kaizer: Okay, it's good to hear that you're recovering well. I called to talk about what you asked me the other day. I'm sorry, but I can't do it. Like I said, it's too close to home and I will not bare to know that I have a child out there, and he doesn't know of me.

Noxolo: That's not a problem, because there has been some changes on my side.

Kaizer: We're cool though?

Noxolo: Don't worry about it. It's not a train smash, and you should forget I even asked.

Kaizer: Sure.

Narrated

Mzi walked into the warehouse where he had Lwando enclosed in. He had set someone on his tail, and finally called for the order for him to be abducted the previous day. He discarded his jacket on a rusted metal table, and rolled up the sleeves of his shirt, trailing to a battered Lwando, with bruises and dried blood on the visible parts of his body. He was settled on a chair; ropes around his legs and hands. He didn't look good at all and Mzi had a merciless nature, so it was expected.

Mzi: You know I wouldn't have done this shit if I didn't know you.

Lwando coughed out blood, and attempted to open his sealed eye. He winced in pain at the ropes digging into his flesh, and his fresh wounds as he

shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

Lwando: So knowing me warrants you to being a dog?

Mzi: The problem is that for the past four years, you and Somi have been making a fool out of me. Whilst everyone thought you were good friends, me included; you were fucking each other.

Lwando: How many times should I tell you that it started recently after Somi had the divorce papers drafted? I'm getting tired of singing the same tune.

Mzi: Had Somi been busy with a random man, I wouldn't give a fuck because I've been doing the same thing to her. I've even lost count of how many times I cheated on her, and I'm not proud of that. I acknowledge my wrong. But it cuts deep to find out that a man you welcomed into your house, ate your food, had a few laughs with him is the one who's fucking your wife, riled me up the wrong way. I hated being taking for a ride, and you pissed me so fucking much, Lwando.

Lwando: Why are we even talking about this? If you

plan to kill me, what are you waiting for?

Mzi: I have a better idea.

Mzi smiled slyly.

Lwando: Oh, enlighten me.

Mockery dripped from his words, but Mzi simply grinned.

Mzi: You have two options, my dear friend. Now you should think carefully and choose wisely.

He paused.

Mzi: The first option is take the fall for a crime I want you to and I spare your life.

Lwando: Kill me.

Mzi: And the second is that I kill your lovely cousin, and after that, I end you.

Lwando's face morphed into one of rage.

Lwando: It would do you good to stay away from my family, Mzi!

Mzi: I'll give you time to think about it, but don't take too long. Time is of the essence here. I thought I'd have round two with you today, but I'll preserve your energy. You'll need it to activate your brain cells, and make the right choice. Have a good night.

Lwando: Mzi! Fuck you!

Mzi: Preserve your energy, man. Breathe in and out, or you'll end up giving yourself a heart attack. I swear I dreamt of prison demanding for your presence. Don't you think an orange uniform will suit you better than those hideous suits you wear?

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Buhlenkosi Malinga

I decided to go and see Kamvelihle. With everything that had been going on, I just wanted to check up on her. Senzokuhle was the one to open the door, and let me in.

Senzo: How are you doing?

Me: I'm good and you?

Senzo: I'm good too. She's in the lounge, but I'll have to warn you. She's not in a good mood, so don't take it to heart when she bites your head off.

Me: Understandable. Her mother is in jail after all.

Senzo: I'll give you guys some space. I'll ask Dora to bring you some refreshments.

Me: No, that's not necessary.

Senzo: Okay. Go on then.

Senzokuhle ascended the stairs, and I strode to the lounge where I found Kamva perched on the sofa, an ice cream tub on her lap, and her attention on the television. I took my seat.

Me: Hey, how are you doing?

Kamva: As you can see for yourself.

Me: I heard about your mother's arrest. I hope you're okay.

Kamva: Why wouldn't I be? Did anyone die? I hope you're not here to boast. You were right, and you don't need to rub it in my face.

Me: That's not what brings me here. I wanted to check on you.

Kamva: You've seen me. You can leave now.

Me: I understand that you're tore about your mother's arrest, but it will get better. She was your

mother and I don't blame you for believing in the woman who birthed and raised you. I'm only glad that the truth is out, and you realised how evil your mother is.

Kamva: Yes, my mother is evil. Everyone knows that, but don't come here pretending that you're not happy she's in jail.

Me: Of course, I'm very happy. I'm not going to hide it from you. I'm over the moon in fact. The sooner you get it through your thick skull that your mother is the devil's incarnate, the better things will be for you. You're sitting here moping over a woman who killed your father.

Kamva: I don't expect you to understand. This doesn't cancel out all the good memories I had with my mother. You have no idea how I did something out of character, and it's the very reason that brought you here to boast.

Me: I'm not here to boast about anything. The thing is you've been in the news for the affair, and your mother's shenanigans. I can understand how hard it

is for you.

Kamva: So you came here to fish for gossip? Let's get one thing straight. My mother may be in prison, but you have nothing to do with me. I don't appreciate you coming here to show me what a fool I have been. I know, and I don't need you to tell me.

Narrated

Mzi had returned back to the warehouse where he kept Lwando. His anger had not subsided, and it seemed that it never will. He was going to kill Lwando, so he might as well not let his death be in vain. He pushed a table closer to his prisoner, and tucked him underneath, untying his hands.

Mzi's boy came with a plate of appetizing food, and a glass of water and placed it on the table.

Mzi: Have you thought about my proposal?

Lwando: Will my family be safe?

Mzi: You have my word. I never go back on my word.

Lwando: You're a cruel man, Mzi. You want to use me as a scapegoat for your crimes.

Mzi: Are we going to have a problem? I don't like repeating myself.

Lwando: I don't know what Somikazi saw in you, because you're just a piece of shit who cares about nobody else except himself.

Mzi: Whatever makes you sleep at night, buddy.

Lwando: You didn't bring me here because you were livid about my affair with Somikazi. You did this because you saw an opportunity to discredit and defame me and in the process, saving your arse. You're not going to succeed.

Mzi: Stop whining. You're doing this for the greater good, or else I can easily make your cousin relapse and overdose in the process. You wouldn't like that,

would you?

Lwando's face completely changed, and his battered hands rolled into fists.

Lwando: I'm going to kill you with my own bare hands!

Mzi: I'll be waiting.

Lwando: The God I pray to is powerful, and he'll never allow you to succeed with your sinister plans.

Mzi: You can do so much better. God helps those who help themselves. Now eat up. I don't want you dying of starvation.

Lwando: Maybe that will be better than what you want me to do.

Mzi: You'll be helping me a great deal. The sooner you accept that whatever you decide will benefit me, the better.

Mzi pulled his guy, and they moved a few feet away from Lwando, who resorted to munching on his food, greedily.

Fana: Boss, what's your plan?

Mzi: Initially, I thought of making him take Mpilo's place, but there would be too many loose ends and a story that wouldn't make sense.

Fana: So what are you planning now?

Mzi: We're going to plant drugs in his house, kill him and cover our tracks. While the police are investigating his murder, they're going to come across a black book which we will also plant that records his drug dealings and his clients. In that book, they will discover that Lwando was Mthandeni's wife's supplier of cocaine. That annoying cop wants someone to blame, and that's exactly what we're going to give him.

Fana: Must I make up the rest of the clients?

Mzi: It doesn't matter, as long as they can't trace

anything to other clients, Mthandeni's wife is the focal point. And print it out because with hand written work, the police will be able to make out that it was inked recently.

Mzi looked at Lwando momentarily before darting his eyes back to Fana.

Mzi: Getting Mpilo out of prison is not enough, that cop will still come for us. We need to make him trail off lane, and stop pursuing us because of his dead wife.

Fana: We can use his teaching profession as a cover up for the man he really was after school hours.

Mzi: Plant a huge stash of money, perhaps in his yard, but make sure that the paper trail doesn't lead back to us.

Fana: Okay, boss.

Mzi: And please, be careful. Make sure you rid everything you touch of your fingerprints, even his

body.

Fana: Sure, boss.

Mzi: I'll let you know when you can implement the plan.

Thabile Mampane

I called a warden from the prison. I kept pacing up and down in the room.

Thabi: Be on the lookout.

He handed the phone over.

Thabi: Jozi.

Jozi: What can I do for you?

Thabi: I need your help.

Jozi: What is this help you want from me after threatening to kill my daughter?

Thabi: The very same daughter I will eliminate if you don't cooperate.

Jozi: What's cooking? What is this favour you need from me?

Thabi: I'm going to need you to tell the cops a version of what happened that night.

Jozi: Oh, about how you and your friends killed my gents and almost killed me.

Thabi: You're going to tell the police that Unathi was behind the hit on Bandile. You saw her, but all this time, you kept quiet because you were scared she was going to finish you off.

Jozi: What would her motive be? Come on, Thabile.

Thabi: Do I fucking have to do the thinking for everyone?

Jozi: You can't give me a half baked story, and expect the police to buy it.

Thabi: Apparently the body that was buried in Bandile's place was exhumed, and it turns out that he was Unathi's half brother and a warden at the prison you're now in. After he disappeared into thin air charged with human trafficking, Unathi smelled a rat. Obviously Bandile had something to do with her brother's death since he was buried in that rapist's place. With having acquired this information, Unathi's motive was to avenge her half brother, and she couldn't involve the police because she wanted Bandile dead. That's the theory you will provide to the cops. Since the body was exhumed a week ago, you'll say you managed to connect the dots and understood why Unathi came after Bandile and his friends.

Jozi: Then Njabulo found out, confronted her and she ended up killing him. You're a dangerous and smart motherfucker. But I don't want to make that woman an enemy either.

Thabi: And you don't want to be our enemies. I'll

ensure that you're protected. You already know a lot about this, I plan to keep you around. Don't make the mistake of double crossing me, Jozi. I don't take kindly to betrayal.

Jozi: Unathi will deny the allegations.

Thabi: Obviously, she will. No criminal admits their crimes, but as long as you're convincing, Mpilo will be out and your sentence will be reduced greatly. So everyone wins.

Jozi: Remind me to never mess with you, but you do realise that Unathi is not stupid. Sooner or later, she'll find out you're behind everything, and she'll be out for blood.

Thabi: I'll be ready for her. Jozi, I believe you're a smart man. Think of crossing me, I will not kill you. I will start by making your life a living hell. I'll cut off your balls. Burn you, and keep you alive to feel my maximum wrath. I'm not to be messed with.

I disconnected the call, and my lips carved into a smile. It felt good to be in a position of power. That

adrenaline rush pumping through your blood became everything.

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Kamvelihle Ngubane

Somikazi passed me the bottle of red wine, and I poured myself another glass. Things were pretty bad, and I was drowning in misery. I used liquor to will myself to forget everything, momentarily atleast.

Kamva: Seeing the evilness that pushed my mother to dig out a body was the last straw, Somikazi. It put everything in place but at the same time, collapsed everything I had known from my childhood. I still can't believe that my own mother killed my father and the seer, and she doesn't even seem regretful and remorseful about her actions. Makes you

wonder how many more people has she killed that haven't yet been discovered.

My sister in law listened attentively, and gave me the platform to vent. I was truly appreciative for that.

Kamva: I know that it shouldn't have come as a surprise to me because she confessed back at my uncle's inauguration, but I wanted to believe that the woman who raised me wouldn't do all the things she was accused of. I held on to the hope that there was no way the allegations could be true so much that I was blinded, and ended up believing my mother over everyone and everything.

Somi: I understand perfectly, Kamva. Sometimes we hold on to people because we believe that they will change. You believed your mother because not once did she ever act evil against you. I understand why it was so easy for you to take her word for it. There's nothing to feel bad about. She's finally in prison where she belongs, and your father will get justice.

Kamva: Yah.

Somi: Just forgive yourself for whatever is weighing heavily on you, and you'll be fine. Don't beat yourself about the past anymore.

Kamva: I was thinking I should go to see her for the last time before she's transferred.

Somi: As long as you're sure. Seek closure. She is your mother. You can't switch off your love in a matter of days, but don't allow her to get through your head anymore. You said it yourself that she's very good at manipulating people.

Kamva: I've learnt my lesson.

Somikazi's ringtone resounded around, and she stood up, moving away to answer her cell.

Somi: I'll be back.

I just indulged in my liquor, until she returned to the

couch minutes later. Her face had paled, and immediately concern overcame me.

Kamva: Is everything okay?

Somi: I don't know, but I've just gotten off the phone with Lwando's cousin. She says that Lwando hasn't been answering his phone the past three nights, and hasn't reported to work in two days. I thought he was busy. That's why I didn't think much of his absence.

Kamva: She should perhaps open a missing person's report.

Somi: She's very worried, and it scares me.

I cleared my throat, sipped my wine and kept quiet.

Somi: I can see that something is on your mind. You should just spit it out.

Kamva: Isn't it obvious? Lwando's absence has Mzi written all over it. I told you that you're playing with

fire, and someone is going to get hurt. You didn't want to listen to me.

Somi: Mzi knows nothing about me and Lwando. I've been careful.

Kamva: Keep telling yourself that. You might want to start looking for Lwando in hospitals and mortuaries.

Somi: You're not helping the situation, Kamva.

Kamva: If anything happens to Lwando, just know that his blood is on your hands. You stopped your divorce, and dragged him into your mess.

Somi: I'll keep an eye on Mzi.

She heaved a sigh.

Kamva: I don't mean to make you feel guilty, but look into it. Let's hope he doesn't have anything to do with Lwando's disappearance.

Thabile Mampane

Our order had been served. Me, Buhle and Happy munched on the cheesecake bolstered on the table. I relished in the taste.

Thabi: It's been a while since we set foot here.

Buhle: True. Now that I think of it, this is the same place I became acquainted with Bandile.

Thabi: I remember him threatening to release your sextape.

Buhle: We've come a long way. Atleast we're still standing and the bastard is dead.

Thabi: Of course, but he deserved something worse than death... Yoo, that guy was so cruel and evil. Even Satan is better than him. Far better.

Happy: I heard he's a cat with nine lives. Don't rejoice too soon.

Buhle: You're starting. That dog is dead, and he's never coming back.

Thabi: I concur.

We shook our heads in laughter, engrossed in the deliciousness of the cake.

Thabi: So Happy, not in a bad way but I've noticed that the women in your family have nothing going on for them. Do you guys enjoy staying at home and doing nothing?

Happy: Now you're insulting us.

She said that with a smile so I knew that she was not offended.

Thabi: That was not my intention.

Happy: My mother is a nurse, and well, the rest just sit at home and chow the money that the men bring

in. But don't include me in that, because I'm an influencer. My Instagram is popping. Now that you reminded me, I should actually snap some content and be sunkissed.

Buhle: I'm thinking of Kamva. Last time I checked, she had a degree but I don't know in what field. It seems like she has no intentions of using it.

Happy: Generational wealth does that to families. Why work when your future has already been secured? Even your great great grandchildren are secured, sis.

Buhle: What will happen when the wealth disappears? What then, but let me tool.

We chuckled.

Buhle: Anyway guys, I was thinking of planning a surprise for Mpilo.

Happy: And you saw it fit to discuss your love life with Mpilo's sister?

Buhle: Where's the problem there? We're basically peers. I'm looking for advice.

My phone rang in my pocket, and I hauled it out, and moved away from the Happy and Buhle in their chatter.

Thabi: Hello, ma.

Her: How are you, my child?

Thabi: I'm good and you?

Her: I'm worried about you, Thabile. Have you done what I asked you to do? You need to leave that line of work.

Thabi: There you go again, ma.

Her: Thabile, please get out before you're far too gone. I can't constantly be worried about you and your safety. You're running with the big dogs now, and it's only a matter of time before you get bitten. I have already lost my husband. I can't lose you too.

Thabi: Ma, dad was killed by Njabulo because he was forward, and didn't even look into the matter. He had concluded that dad had something to do with Bandile's first death. It had nothing to do with the business.

Kamogelo: It may seem like it's nice at the start. I know of the excitement and thrill, but what about the enemies you're creating along the way, my child?

Thabi: Ma. Good or bad, problems and trouble will befall you. I had no knowledge about this business. I was a good person, but where has that gotten me? I was raped and my father was killed like he was a dog. So good or bad, there will never be a smooth sailing in this life, but it's better to be in a position of power because nobody will take advantage of you and play on top of your head. We live in a world that isn't pleasant. It's survival of the fittest; other than that, you're doomed.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

A silence had befallen me and my daughter. My heart was tore to see the hatred and anger she harboured in her eyes for me.

Nikiwe: Thank you for coming to see me. I thought you would want nothing to do with me.

Kamva: I still want nothing to do with you. I wanted to look my father's killer in the eyes for the last time.

Nikiwe: I'm sorry, my child. I know no matter what I say, no amount of apologies can erase what I've done.

Kamva: What exactly are you sorry for? For killing your husband? Are you sorry for killing uncle Qhawe, or are you sorry because you've been caught and there is no way out for you? Your partner in crime can't even do a thing for you. It's over for you.

Nikiwe: I know, my child and I've accepted it. I just hope that one day you find it in your heart to forgive

me. I won't be able to live with myself knowing that my only child hates me.

Kamva: You're evil, ma. I can't even describe your evilness in words. I was always behind you. I supported you when everyone had turned their backs on you, but you still went ahead and attempted to ruin my marriage. Are you even my mother?

Nikiwe: I'm sorry.

Kamva: Please stop apologizing. We both know that you don't mean it. I don't even know why I come here. You're a trash of a woman, and I despise you. I despise you so much that I want you to suffer tenfold than the suffering you caused on other people. You make me sick.

Her words were piercing through my heart. I attempted to hold back my tears.

She rose to her feet. Truth be told, I had never seen her this angry and I knew that she meant every word

she was uttering.

Kamva: You're dead to me.

Nikiwe: I'll always love you. You deserve better than me. I'm sorry that I couldn't be the mother you needed.

Her back was to me, and my tears fell down my cheeks.

Nikiwe: Before you go, please do one last thing for me. Please tell Buhle to come see me.

Noxolo Ndebele

My eyes roamed around the room. I was seated on

the floor with a woman, her head was wrapped in a white cloth. The smoke from the lit incense wafted into the atmosphere. A candle was also blazing.

I listened to her call out her clan names, along with mine. I waited patiently.

Her: You remember that most times when you were thinking of doing something detrimental, a voice came to you?

I nodded.

Her: That was your mother. She was looking out for you.

I weakly smiled, reminiscing the memories of my deceased mother.

Noxolo: Is the woman I went to about my friend still alive?

Her: No, but your debt to her was still outstanding. Through her daughter, you paid it off.

Noxolo: Isn't there a way I could get my womb back? Have you been shown who her daughter is?

Her: You'll be going against very evil forces. Some things are irreversible, and this is one of those things. I know you were seeking justice for your friend, but you went about it the wrong way and got yourself involved in something bigger and beyond your understanding.

I closed my eyes and sighed.

Her: I'll perform a cleansing for you to wash away the darkness surrounding you and protect you from any more dark forces that may come your way.

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Anna Ndebele

Cindy: I'm so glad that you're going back to school after the holidays. I missed you a lot. At least yesterday was the last day of school. Soon we'll be writing the prelims.

Anna: I'm so relieved, bra. Imagine my future delayed because a guy nutted in me, planted his seed and ran away. I'm just glad they're willing to have me back.

Cindy: I see you've made baggy clothing your friends.

Anna: I'm not in the mood for people's judgement looks and comments. It's better I hide this from everyone as long as I can.

Cindy: I hear you. On that note, you won't believe who I saw.

We stopped at the spaza, and there was one individual in line in front of us.

Anna: I doubt it's anyone important.

Cindy: Well, I saw your baby daddy. Or at least someone who looks like him.

I gazed at Cindy with raised brows. I was lost on how I should react.

Anna: Where did you see him?

Cindy: I went to see Jozi in prison, and I think I may have seen him.

Anna: You and your criminal boyfriend. What were you doing there?

Cindy: Please don't start with me. You're the last person to be judging me.

Anna: I'm not judging you, but the last time I checked, you were done with him.

Cindy: Bra, I was merely going to check up on him. It's nothing hectic. I'd never take him back.

Anna: It just baffles me that he was involved in my aunt's adoptive niece's abduction.

Cindy: And well, he's paying for his crimes.

We were next in line, and Cindy asked for two packets of fried chips, and we were told we'd have to wait for them. We nodded, and stepped aside for the next customer.

Anna: Let's go back to the matter of Shakes. You say that you saw him? You think he's still around, but he's hiding?

Cindy: Isn't it that his father owes that loanshark a hefty amount? Maybe that's why they're gone, and well, your pregnancy.

Anna: Interesting.

Cindy: You know you disappointed me with how you handed Shakes.

Anna: What do you mean?

Cindy: Girl, with so many deadbeat and runaway fathers, you took Shakes' word and trusted him? Girl, you should've come to me for advice. No man will leave me with his child. Never!

Anna: I don't think there's much you can do to stop him.

Cindy: Girl, you should've made Shakes sign a contract. I feel like that's what most girls should do these days, because I swear men are like the most inconsistent species on earth. One minute he tells that he'll be there for you and the baby and the next, nigga has disappeared from the face of earth. Had you made Shakes sign an agreement that he's to bare the responsibility of the baby with you, surely things would be different. And if he fails to fulfill his responsibilities, you throw in a clause that says he'll be liable to a fee of a million. Girl, no guy will leave me with his seed. Unless from the onset he stated that he wants nothing to do with the baby, you make him sign a contract that says he should never come back in the child's life. These niggas are way too

smart. They be leaving you to raise your child alone, and decide to make a comeback when the child's 18 or about to get married with their fake apologies. Ngeke. Nobody will do that shit with me. It's either we do this together, or you voetsek for eternity.

Buhlenkosi Malinga: 18 SN

I loosened my trenchcoat a little, as my nerves skyrocketed, however at the same time my excitement was on heroine. I looked around the small, private room; awaiting Mpilo's presence.

Moments later, the door opened and he was ushered in before we were left alone. I didn't miss the look of confusion on his handsome face.

Mpilo: What is going on here?

Me: Shhhhh... I thought I should surprise you.

His eyes raked over my body, and he licked his lips at my exposed lingerie underneath the coat.

Mpilo: I don't think prison is the best place to do what you've in mind.

Me: Shhhhh. Just follow my lead.

Mpilo: Buhle-

Me: Mpilo, I swear I'll end things between us if you don't listen to me right now.

Mpilo: Fine.

He playfully rolled his eye with a smile.

Me: Strip.

Mpilo: What?

Me: I'm not going to repeat myself.

Mpilo: I don't know where you found this courage, but let's see where it leads us.

He discarded his overall, and remained in his boxers. His cock was already erected and looked ready to do its designated function.

Me: Looks like I'm going to walk out of here paralysed by your equipment.

He chortled.

Mpilo: I can't wait to fuck you over and over again. How long do we have?

Me: Three hours. Now to the bed onto your belly.

Mpilo: Can't we skip all that, and come to daddy.

Me: Nice try, but get it moving. Time is ticking.

He laid on the bed on his stomach, and I poured oil on his back, wetting my hands in the process.

Mpilo: Now this is the highest form of torture.

His voice was becoming raspy. I smoothed the oil on his back, my hands working on the tense muscles and massaging them.

Me: You've been in here for too long. I can literally see the stress.

I focused on getting him to relax. With light touches, my hand settled on the waistband of his underwear. He slightly jumped.

Mpilo: Now you're making me uncomfortable.

Me: Relax, Mpilo.

He sighed, and I pulled down his boxers, getting them off. Laughter rumbled out of me.

Mpilo: What's so funny?

Me: You have a cute butt.

Mpilo: I'll leave.

I continued massaging him until he had gotten into the zone, before teasingly I circled my index finger on his anal hole.

Mpilo: You'll play very far away from that area if you know what's good for you, because I'll go back to my cell faster than you can say dick.

Me: What's with you? We're playing according to my rules here, or else I'll plunge more than a finger in that hole of yours.

Mpilo: And risk losing the ability to walk for days? I don't think so.

Soon enough, I had him sit up straight facing me as I slowly took off my coat, and watched it pool on the floor. Teasing him with my slow movements, I couldn't get fathom his big size entering my groin. I hoped that this room was soundproofed otherwise they would have to take my screams like the grown adults they are.

Mpilo: Condoms?

I noticed his self restraint was breaking, and I smiled seductively at that.

Me: Don't worry about that. I have pills at my disposal.

Mpilo's eyes were darkened in lust, and he pulled me closer attacking me with a wet kiss, and tearing my lingerie in the process. The contact of our bodies evoked jolts of electricity through my entire body.

Mpilo was now hovering above me, and I waited with bated breath as he guided his cock to my hole. I was already wet, but that didn't make the pain of his full dick sliding into my groin any less. He waited a bit for me to adjust to his size before he started slow thrusting in me, raining kisses on my bare chest and breasts. His slow strokes rapidly evoked moans of pleasure from me before he started picking up the pace. He was hitting the right spots, and I found myself moving my hips upwards to meet his thrusts. My toes curled as my nails dug into Mpilo's skin as the pleasure burst through each of us full force.

Mpilo: Fuck...

My eyes closed as our bodies continued grinding

together until I felt the sudden urge to pee. My squirt wetted us, and I swear the pleasure was as if it was bestowed upon me straight from heaven.

Noxolo Ndebele

Anna walked in through the door, and clapped once before addressing me and her mother.

Anna: Some people have the liver and the gut all in one.

Khethiwe: What are you on about, Bongwiwe?

Anna: Shakes may still be in his town. A friend of mine said that she saw him or someone like him.

Noxolo: What are we supposed to do with that information?

Anna: What do you mean? All I'm saying is that he has a death wish to be lurking around people that he owes.

Noxolo: Bongwiwe, we're turning over a new leaf. I have no interest in talking and stressing about things of the past. I've put my life of crime behind me, and unless you saw him with your own eyes; I'd advise you to stop thinking about him.

Khethiwe: Moreover Kaizer was looking for them everywhere. He couldn't have missed them.

Noxolo: Bongwiwe, start by getting Shakes out of your system. He was not good for you, and I don't think he ever will.

Khethiwe: Go start with the pots. I'll join you soon.

Anna paced to the kitchen, and Khethiwe turned towards me.

Khethiwe: Are you sure you don't want to look into the matter?

Noxolo: I'm trying to move past everything, and I don't want to find myself inviting unnecessary trouble by pursuing this. Moreover Shakes and his father probably have already blown the money. I've accepted this, because they weren't my diamonds to begin with.

She nodded.

Khethiwe: What about the baby issue?

Noxolo: What about it?

Khethiwe: I think you should talk to Bongiwe about raising her child as your own. As it is, she's still a child carrying a child and I think it's time we help you live your dreams. You've always been selfless, and you deserve this. This will help Bongiwe a great deal, and you will get what you want.

Noxolo: I don't know, Khethiwe. Will he or she grow up to call me mother or aunt? We can't make decisions for your daughter.

Bongiwe: I know, but I think they are terms you should discuss with Anna. Moreover she should focus on her life without the responsibilities of a newborn baby. Whatever you guys decide in the end, remember that you'll both be in the child's life so it doesn't really matter what titles you hold, but it was merely a suggestion.

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Buhlenkosi Malinga

I pressed my cellphone to my ear, and laid back on the bed with a huge smile at hearing Mpilo's voice. You should see me blushing right now.

Mpilo: How are you doing?

Me: I'm missing you a lot right now. I wish you had

your freedom. I crave to be in your arms right now.

Mpilo: Thank you for yesterday. I needed the relief, and I'm glad we have something solid. Promise me that we're going to keep going strong for as long as we can.

Me: You're a good man, Mpilo. You're in jail for something you didn't do alone. You wanted to rescue me, and I dragged you into a whole mess.

My smile fell, and over the line, Mpilo let out a sigh.

Mpilo: Let's not ruin things by talking about the past. What's done is done, and it wasn't yours or Thabile's fault that Bandile was a psychopath. Let's have hope that in the end, everything will work out.

Me: You'll be out soon. I'm speaking it into existence. Just wait and watch.

Mpilo: You still have to go home. It's time you start heeding the warnings. The cleansing is worth a try, perhaps things will start falling into place for you.

Me: Truly speaking, I've been dreading going back there. I have been living an ordinary life for a long time now. Discovering that I'm royalty came as a surprise... I didn't expect my life to turn out this way in a short period of time. Moreover from the royals, the only faces I'm familiarized with are Kamva and her mother.

Mpilo: I hear you, but you'll probably only be there for a few days. This resentment you have towards your father's family is not healthy. They didn't know about you until a few months ago. You grew up in that place, Buhle. I don't think it should be hard to return. Your mother is buried there. The visit should give you an opportunity to visit your mother's grave, and catch up with the life you lived back at the village before you moved here. Surely you have friends you'd like to see.

Me: I get your point, and I will go there after I write my last exam.

Mpilo: Good. That's what I want to hear.

Me: Did I tell you about the message I woke up to

this morning?

Mpilo: Make it quick. I don't want to be caught with a cellphone.

Me: I received a message from Kamva. She says that her mother wants me to visit her in prison.

Mpilo: Are you going to go see her?

Me: I don't know.

Mpilo: The way I see it, you have nothing to lose.

Me: Okay, I love you. Have a great day.

Mpilo: Where I will be sitting and staring at the walls all day, that's wishful thinking. I miss my days in the courtroom.

Me: You will get your life back.

Mpilo: I love you too.

Noxolo Ndebele

I walked into Anna's bedroom with a heap of folded clothing, and placed them in her wardrobe. I turned towards her bed, and she was busy tapping her cellphone. I sighed, and went to sit on the bed.

Noxolo: Are you okay?

Anna: Yes, why are you asking?

Noxolo: Can't I ask? You're my favourite niece in the whole wide world.

Anna: More like I'm your only niece... Ma told me about her suggestion.

Noxolo: What do you think about it?

Anna: I think it's a good idea because you'll be a better candidate at offering the child a good upbringing than I would, but at the same time, I don't want to burden you. This is my mistake for falling pregnant at my age, and I really want to break the cycle of teenage moms throwing the responsibilities of their babies to their family members.

Noxolo: I hear you, and I'm glad that you acknowledge your mistakes.

Anna: I'm up for whatever you decide. I think this would be good because I get to pursue my dreams sooner, and without the stress of a child. We both know how most of the times unplanned children delay dreams.

Noxolo: Do you still love Shakes? I mean you sold out your family for him.

She heaved a sigh.

Anna: I don't know about that, but one thing I'm certain of is that I don't ever want to see him again in my life.

Noxolo: There must be something you learned from this experience.

Anna: Never trust anyone in this world, and most importantly, family comes first. You can't choose outsiders over your family. What I also realised is

that it's important for one to maintain healthy family relations. So that when one spreads their wings, and it doesn't work out, you do have a support system to fall back on. Blood is thicker than water, but in some instances, family can be toxic. I'm just glad that toxicity doesn't exist in our family dynamic, and I'm thankful that you forgave me for a mistake that costed you a lot. I love you, aunty.

Noxolo: I love you too, baby.

I gave her a closed lipped smile, and pulled her in for a embrace.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I fidgeted with my hands as mixed emotions surged through me. Nervousness, anger and frustration. Honestly, I didn't know how to feel about coming to

see Nikiwe. Moments later, a guard ushered her into the bare room with only two chairs and a table.

She sat across me, and my emotions intensified. The guard turned to leave, but I stopped him.

Me: Where are you going?

Him: I'll be standing outside.

Me: Please don't go. I don't feel safe around this woman. You might just find me dead.

I didn't really feel threatened by her; I was merely mocking her. She discreetly rolled her eyes but I noticed and she murmured something under her breath and that too, I heard.

Nikiwe: Exaggeration.

There was an uncomfortable silence between us, and I decided to break it.

Me: Ivili liya jika. Do you see your life now? Did you really think that you'd continue ruining people's lives for eternity? You even seem different. You have that glow. Prison is really treating you well.

Nikiwe: Thank you for coming.

Me: What do you want?

Nikiwe: Firstly I want to apologise for everything I've put you through, but it isn't my fault that you were weak.

Me: Is that supposed to be an apology? An apology that basically ends with an insult? You should take some effort into lacing your performance with sincerity. You disappoint me. I thought you got this.

Nikiwe: I'm sorry. I realise that my actions were wrong, and I didn't do right by you.

Me: Nikiwe, please cut the bullshit. Why have you called me here?

Nikiwe: I was hoping you could help me with something.

Me: I don't see any reason why I would help you. The same woman who killed my father after I had just discovered him and deprived me of a father's love.

Nikiwe: Tough luck, but such is life. I didn't mean to.

I rolled my eyes, irritation seeping into me. The arrogance of this woman.

Me: You'll never change. You wanted to ruin my life by getting me married to a man I don't love, and who was way older than me in a wheelchair.

Nikiwe: Oh really now, you're going to tell me that Senzokuhle was old for you. Do you hear the nonsense you're uttering? You're dating his brother and if I'm not mistaken, they are 1 or 2 years apart. So technically Mpilo is also way older than you. You can do so much better with your reasoning.

Me: I really wasted my time by coming here. Nothing will ever cleanse that heart of yours of evilness.

Nikiwe: Look, since you're the bigger person between

us. I need your help with something.

Me: You can go ahead and tell me, not that I'm going to help you though.

Nikiwe: Please speak to my daughter for me. Please ask her to soften her heart. I'm still her mother, and I love her very much. I think you'll be able to get through to her.

I let out a humorless laugh.

Me: You're really delusional if you think I'm going to help you with anything. Kamva should just stay away from you, and I'm glad she finally sees you for the witch you are. She doesn't need you contaminating her any further.

Nikiwe: You're really your mother's daughter. I'm sure you must miss that homewrecker who wanted my life.

I was beginning to boil with anger. I needed to leave

before I did something I would regret.

Me: Guard, I'm ready to leave.

Thabile Mampane

Anger was quietly worming into me as I checked every room in Qaphela's penthouse for the man himself. News of Jozi's death reached me, and something in me told me that Q was behind it. I stopped dead in my tracks when I heard Mzi's voice from the balcony. The sliding door was ajar, and I pinned myself against the wall beside it. Something was happening with Mzi, and I was curious to know.

Mzi: The plan should be implemented soon. People are asking questions about his disappearance.

I narrowed my eyes, wondering what Mzi was brewing.

Mzi: I should have a perfect alibi before you do it. The last thing we want is for everything to trace back to us.

More questions flooded my mind.

Mzi: My wife? I can't use my wife as an alibi. In fact in her eyes, I'll be the first suspect. She's unpredictable... Okay, we'll talk.

I moved away from there, and headed to the kitchen; hurrying to pour myself a glass of whisky. I downed the hot liquid as it scorched my throat. A voice interjected my chaotic thoughts.

Qaphela: And then, what's eating you up?

Thabi: Finally you grace me with your presence.

Qaphela: Looks like you woke up on the wrong side of the bed.

A counter separated me from him.

Thabi: You killed Jozi before we implemented the plan, Q. I know you had something to do with his sudden death.

Qaphela: Of course I did, because you were a fool to trust him.

Thabi: Don't you get tired? We've been trying to get Mpilo out of prison for over a month now, but you went and ruined the only chance we had at achieving that. I'm sick and tired of this case. I want it to come to an end already.

Qaphela: Sisi, you should've given me a chance to say something before you started attacking me.

Thabi: Fine, but just remember that Mpilo is inside for all of us. We owe it to him to get him out.

Qaphela: Thabile, your problem is that you want to do things alone. You did that with Njabulo. Why the fuck didn't you talk to me before you went to Jozi? The sooner you understand that this is not a John Wick movie, the better. Had you had all your bases covered, you would know that one of Jozi's baby mamas was seen lurking around Unathi. Then and there, I knew that he was using his baby mama to communicate with Unathi, and you being your impulsive self, you gave him everything he needed to bury you. All on your secrets on a silver platter. How long did you think you'd keep threatening him with his daughter? All I know is that hatred for a common enemy creates alliances.

Thabi: I'm sorry. So does this mean that we're back at square one?

Qaphela: No, we forced him to write a letter implicating Unathi before we killed him. So the plan is still on track, just that the witness is dead.

Thabi: Do you trust the person you're working with inside?

Qaphela: You have nothing to worry about.

My gaze shifted to Mzi quietly observing us.

Thabi: Mzi, don't you think it's time you tell us what you're cooking?

Mzi: Not today.

He grabbed his jacket from the couch.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I was in the back of a van with other inmates, our hands cuffed and two wardens guarding us.

Everything had spiralled out of control the day my daughter got me arrested. I didn't know what to do anymore.

I needed to be strong, and regain my power. Prison can't be enough to break me. I'm a rock. I attempted to convince myself, but I knew no matter the status you had on the outside, in the inside world it doesn't count.

The van came to a halt outside a building. I looked at the security around the prison. Guards were posted everywhere. I heaved a sigh, and I soldiered on. Orders were already been barked at us.

Narrated

A man in uniform handed Mthandeni a folded letter.

Constable: We discovered this in the dead inmate's cell.

Mthandeni: Thank you. I'll take it from here. Before you leave, has anyone read the letter?

Constable: No, I brought it straight to you. Maybe it's a suicide note, but I doubt because he died from a stab wound.

Mthandeni: Okay, inform his family about the death.

The constable departed, closing the door behind him as Mthandeni unfolded the paper and started reading.

Mthandeni: I'm writing this with fear of how my life will unfold. I've been getting death threats and I'm writing this with the hope that even if the person who has been threatening to kill me succeeds, the truth will finally be out. Unathi Sithole is-

The more he read, the more Mthandeni's anger rose.

Mthandeni: Blah, blah, blah.

He clicked his tongue, and crumpled the note into a small ball and aimed perfectly toward the bin in his office. He rose from his chair, and with his fist banged the desk.

Mthandeni: Madness.

A smile overtook his face when an idea clicked into his head. He went to haul out the crumpled paper, and got to work. He tore out another page from his notebook, and with a pen imitated the handwriting but replacing Unathi's name with Mpilo, Mzi and Qaphela. It took him a while to perfect the handwriting. He was interrupted by his cellphone ringing, and he answered it.

Mthandeni: Father-in-law.

Him: Are things coming along?

Mthandeni: We've been trying to get a witness to crack for a while now. He was discovered dead this morning.

Him: So we have nothing. Sooner or later, we're going to have to let Mpilo go.

Mthandeni: No, I already have a plan in motion. A letter was discovered with the dead body. It stated that Unathi, the half sister of the man who was buried in Bandile's place was behind the killings. My guess is that someone got to Jozi, forced him to write the letter and afterwards killed him. But what they don't realise is that they have given me an opportunity to win against them.

Him: Do what you have to do. All I want is my daughter's killers to pay.

Mthandeni: It's game over for them. Possibly tomorrow, I will have a warrant of arrest for Mzi and

Qaphela Nkosi.

Him: What about Mpilo? Are you going to let him go?

Mthandeni: No, I gave him a chance to save himself and give us the people we wanted, but he didn't take it. Moreover he's not innocent in any of this. He will just have to sink with the ship.

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72

Anna Ndebele

I stroked Cindy's back, her eyes filled with tears.

Anna: It will be fine.

Cindy: I didn't expect him to die so soon.

Anna: Death is unexpected and inevitable. I know there are somethings you would have wanted to

share with him before he died, but it seems God had other plans.

Cindy: I wanted him to change, and convert his life. He was still young. He didn't deserve to leave the world so soon without redeeming himself.

Her voice cracked, and I smiled faintly; attempting to comfort her. I sucked at consolation to be honest.

Anna: I'm sure he's in a better place now.

Cindy: He died in prison because of the choices he made. It's true when they say that crime does not pay.

Anna: I'll be back. Let me go make you something to indulge in. Food can take away any amount of sadness.

I laid back her head on the pillow, and got out of my bedroom, stalking towards the kitchen. I found my mother peeling a pack of carrots.

Khethiwe: Is she going to be okay?

Anna: She'll be fine. It's just the shock of his sudden death that got to her, and they did have something special even though it didn't last for long.

She shook her head as I thought of what to make.

Khethiwe: I'll never understand children of this generation. Instead of focusing on your studies, you're chasing love. You seem to love getting your hearts broken.

Anna: Ma, love has no age.

Khethiwe: Keep telling yourself that. Your friend is in there crying for a good for nothing criminal, and you're carrying the child of a boy who is nowhere to be found. What bugs me is your ages. You and Cindy are not even a day over 18. You just like stressing yourselves. Umjolo is not worth it, sisi. Take it from me and Noxolo. Yoh, I miss my youth days with my

sister.

I cleared my throat, and took out a few ingredients to make sandwiches to the table.

Khethiwe: I know there's something you want to say, and I know very well that I also fell pregnant at a young age, but I didn't bring this much drama into my family's lives. Your boyfriend must just bring back the money. While you're at that, the land must come back.

Anna: That's not funny.

Khethiwe: I wasn't making a joke.

Somikazi Nkosi

Somi: You say that Mzi has ventured off into a secluded area?

Him: Yes.

Somi: Okay, send me the coordinates and I'll take it from there. Thank you.

I collected my car keys, and disconnected the call, and hurried to my car. I had this strong feeling that Mzi knew about Lwando's whereabouts. My cellphone rang as I ignited the engine.

Kamva: Do you want to go out with me?

Somi: Now is not a good time. I have something urgent to attend to.

Kamva: Okay, what is the latest on your boyfriend?

Somi: I don't know. Look, I'll catch you later. I'm driving.

Kamva: Okay.

Noxolo Ndebele

Surprise was evident on my face when Buhle walked through the door with a smile on her face after she had knocked and I shouted enter.

Noxolo: What a surprise.

Buhle: I thought I should come and see you.

Noxolo: You should have said something.

I muted the television, and Buhle initiated a hug before settling on the couch with me.

Buhle: How are you feeling?

Noxolo: I'm recovering well. Just pains here and there, but nothing hectic.

Buhle: I'm glad.

Noxolo: How are you holding up?

Buhle: Just worried about Mpilo's future, and my exams. Other than that, I'm tops.

Noxolo: Okay. There's a lot I want to say, but let me keep quiet.

Buhle: Auntie, just speak your mind. Most of time, I know it's coming from a good place.

Noxolo: So Buhlenkosi, not in a bad way, but don't you think you moved too fast into this relationship? You jumped from one relationship into another.

Buhle: I don't think it's a bad thing, because I love him. I've liked him from the first day I saw him.

Noxolo: All I'm just saying is that you probably haven't given yourself time to heal properly. Bandile did a number on you.

Buhle: I know, but you know this better than everyone that I don't like living in the past. I've moved on with my life. Sometimes one can never fully heal, and the wounds will always be there. But

does that mean we should miss out on finding love and happiness? You will seek healing your whole life, and realize that you wasted many opportunities because of that. I'm not saying that healing is not necessary. All I'm saying is that there is a time for happiness, just as there is for sadness. You can't let that bring you down for long. You must pick up the pieces and move on. Time waits for no one.

Noxolo: Makes sense.

Buhle: Where is your niece?

Noxolo: She's in her bedroom with her friend.

Buhle: Let me go greet her.

Noxolo: Do that, and you should stay for lunch.

Buhle: I plan to.

She stood up and trod away; simultaneously Khethiwe appeared and they greeted each other before my sister approached me.

Khethiwe: Lunch will be ready in a few.

Noxolo: From the smell, I can tell that it will be tasty.

Khethiwe: I do know my way around the kitchen, but anyways did you tell Buhle what landed you in hospital?

Noxolo: No, I don't see the need to.

Khethiwe: She needs to know about how you were seeking justice for HER mother, while she was here making a mess out of her life.

Noxolo: You seriously need to get laid. You have no inner peace, Khethiwe. What will telling her change? Nothing.

Thabile Mampane

Qaphela: So Mpilo has managed to get Strike to tell the police the truth.

Thabi: And they just believed him? I mean the guy's statements always change. I'm sure the police think he's not a credible and reliable witness. First he pointed to Mpilo, then to Mzi and now Njabulo.

Qaphela: Well, he showed the police a huge, questionable amount of money that Njabulo transferred into his account.

Thabi: Okay. How did Mpilo get him to talk?

Qaphela: They made a deal. Strike tells the truth, and we help him escape.

Thabi: Okay. Anyway, why is Mpilo still in jail if there's nothing against him anymore?

Qaphela: One person. Mthandeni.

I rolled my eyes, clicking my tongue.

Thabi: That man is an irritating fly. We need to squash him like the cockroach he is. I'm tired of this game he's playing.

Qaphela: We need to get in touch with his Station Commander or Commissioner, and get them to look into this case and investigate Mthandeni's professionalism. Killing him must be the last option.

Thabi: Noted. Killing him would bring in more cops, and that's the last thing we need.

His cellphone's ringtone echoed around us.

Thabi: I'll be back.

I left him to answer his cellphone, and paced to the kitchen to pour myself a glass of cold water. Damn, Mthandeni was seriously getting on my last nerve, but we had to be careful on how we dealt with him, and who we involved in this, because we had a pile of secrets that with one mistake could overflow and cost us all.

I heard a bang that startled me, and it seemed to be

coming from Qaphela's study. I hurried back there, and he was fuming.

Thabi: Are you okay?

Qaphela: I've just gotten off the phone with the receptionist. The police are on their way up. They have a warrant of arrest for me and Mzi.

Thabi: What? That can't be. What are they arresting you for? Jozi's death?

Qaphela: I have no idea, but what I'm sure of is that Mthandeni is not doing things by the book. He's playing dirty. Whatever we do, he finds a way to counterattack it.

Thabi: This is bad. Have they gotten Mzi?

Qaphela: I don't know.

Thabi: They can't find you here. Find another hotel room to hide in. Surely they won't search the whole place.

Qaphela: I'll go with them.

A beep from the lounge reverberated around the penthouse.

Qaphela: Let me go.

He strode to the lounge with me following behind him, and the cops were given access into his place and they filed in with Mthandeni the lead.

Mthandeni: Qaphela Nkosi, you're going to have to come with us. You're under arrest for-

I interjected him, seething with anger.

Thabi: Has anyone ever told you what a annoyance you are? Top dog of nuisances. You're like acne that never wants to clear. That one pimple that you pop, but another one always appears. You're like diarrhea.

He maneuvered to handcuff Qaphela, but Q moved back.

Qaphela: What are you doing? Don't come in my place to be disrespectful.

Mthandeni: You're under arrest, sir so you need to be handcuffed.

Thabi: Who do you think you are? You think you can practice your corruption on us? You have another thing coming.

Mthandeni: Do I sense a threat, Ms Mampane?

Somikazi Nkosi

I powered off my car, and rushed to my husband's

one in front of a warehouse in the middle of nowhere.

My heart kept on pounded in worry and fear I harboured when I thought of Lwando.

I admit I messed up pretty bad, but I hoped that I wasn't too late to stop Mzi. I opened the car doors, and scanned the interior. Truth be told, I don't know what I was looking for. I went to open the trunk, and with hesitation grasped the pistol in the boot.

I ran inside the warehouse, navigating through it until my eyes drank in Mzi's hand wrapped around Lwando's neck, and a bucket probably filled with water in front of a crouched Lwando. My heart was experiencing extreme palpitations.

Somi: Mzi, you need to stop what you're doing.

A string of coughs emitted from Lwando's mouth.

Mzi: Oh, Cinderella is finally here for her prince charming.

Somi: Mzi, I think you have done enough. Stop this nonsense you're doing.

He tipped Lwando's head into the water again, my heart hammering in my chest and fear consuming every inch of me. Mzi released Lwando's head.

Somi: Mzi, why are you doing this? You have been hurting me for so long in our marriage, and now that you know the pain I've been feeling for months, you flip and involve Lwando into this. He has nothing to do with this. This must only be between the two of us. Please stop what you're doing, and let him go.

Mzi: Not a chance. He's the solution to my problems.

Somi: What are you talking about? Just stop this nonsense. I'm warning you, Mzi.

Mzi: There's nothing you can do to stop me.

Somi: The police are on their way.

Mzi: Okay. The more the merrier. Isn't it?

Somi: You're pushing me.

I cocked the gun towards him.

Somi: Don't make me shoot you. I'll kill you, Mzi.

Mzi: When you bury me, be sure to bury me in Gucci.

Somi: You think this is a joke?

In close proximity to him and Lwando, I fired two warning bullets, or at least I thought so when I closed my eyes and my finger pulled the trigger.

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Somikazi Nkosi

I shook my husband's body with tears streaming down my face. I looked at the red oozing from the bullets I embedded into his abdomen.

For years, I carried a love that was toxic and addictive to me. Mzi at his sweetest gave me everything I needed. He made me feel things I never felt before. My throat clogged with emotion.

Somi: Mzi, please hold on for me. You can't leave me. I still need you.

My hand was on his faint pulse.

Mzi: I love you, Somikazi, and I never once thought that I'd die at your hands.

His sentence came out in a whisper.

Somi: No, please. You can't die. I'm going to call the ambulance.

Mzi: Take care of yourself, and I'm sorry for everything I did to you.

I checked my pockets for my cellphone, preparing to call the ambulance, but that would take a while. We were in a secluded area so I would have to drive him to the hospital myself. My hope died when I thought of the low survival rate he had. We were completely off the radar, and an hour to get to the hospital.

Somi: Work with me here, love. I'm going to take you to the hospital. You need to stay alive. Do it for me. Hold on.

I looked back at Mzi, and my heart stopped beating for a moment when his lifeless orbs stared at me. His body was gradually losing heat.

Somi: No, baby. Please don't do this to me.

Everything in me broke when I attempted to wake up him, but he didn't budge.

Somi: I'm so sorry, my love.. Please... Don't scare me like that. I know you're still alive. Stop with your sick jokes.

Lwando: He's gone, Somikazi.

Somi: Shut the fuck up.

I rocked Mzi's lifeless body in my arms, my sobs subsiding but the hole in my heart widening and widening.

Somi: I love you, Mzi. Please don't do this to me.
Don't do this to us. You have a lot to live for, love.
Your siblings will be shattered without you. I will be...
Please come back to me, Mziwoxolo Nkosi.

Lwando: Somikazi, there's nothing more you can do.

With heightened speed, I grabbed the pistol beside me, rising to my feet and pointed it towards Lwando. I snapped at him.

Somi: What will it take for you to shut your mouth?
This is your fucking fault.

Lwando: My fault?

I looked at his battered face, acting against reason and with emotion. A voice rendered past us. "What the hell?" Suddenly I got a fright, and whirled around and released a third bullet. With that bullet, my anger and sadness came to the surface. I became a whole different person and I pulled the trigger again

without looking at who would be on the receiving end. I ran my hand over my face when I saw Fana cough out blood and collapse to the ground.

Lwando: You need to put that down. Seems like whenever it is your hand, all senses leave you and the gun induces its own mind. You need to put that down before you kill me too.

Somi: What have I done?

I dropped the gun, and weeped.

Lwando: Somi, you need to get yourself together and call the police. Untie me, please.

I looked at my handsome husband again, tears blurring my vision and pecked him on the forehead. Things had rapidly taken a 360 degree turn tonight, and what was meant to be just another day turned out to be a night filled with sorrow and anguish.

Lwando: Somi, please call the police.

I snapped out of it.

Somi: We can't.

I shook my head.

Lwando: Are you mad?

Somi: Just work with me here and let me think.

Lwando: You're not going to go to jail if that's what you're afraid of. We'll tell the cops it was self-defense.

Somi: I don't care about that. The last thing you should be worried about are the cops. If you thought that Mzi was dangerous, wait until you meet his father.

Lwando: What's that got to do with this?

Somi: If Qaphela and his father find out that we're the reason Mzi is dead, they're going to decapitate our heads and hang them for everyone to see. They'll not care what family relations I have with them. I need to think.

I strode to Fana's body, and I picked up the bag lying beside his body. I touched his neck for a pulse, but nothing. I opened the bag, and rummaged through it.

Somi: Great, this makes our job easier. We'll use this to wipe off our fingerprints on anything we could have touched.

Lwando: Are you listening to yourself? You just killed your husband, and you want to cover it up?

Somi: Get your head out of the gutters and realise that this is what would've happened to you if I didn't save you. I'm sorry that I dragged you into this world of crime, but survival is a dirty game that you're

going to need to master. I'm going to untie you, and you're going to drive Mzi's car and discard it along with his cellphone far away from here. I'll see what I can do here.

Lwando: I'm weak, Somikazi. Your husband has been torturing me for days.

Somi: We'll sleep on it tonight. But if you still value yours and your family's lives, you'll do exactly as I say.

Lwando: How will I explain my disappearance to my family?

Somi: Think of something...You can say that you were hijacked, and they roughed you up pretty badly. Luckily a good samaritan found you, and gave you refuge until you were strong enough to go back home.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I walked into the room, frustrated and flaring. I noticed Thabile on her bed.

Me: It's good that you're here. What is this I see all over the news that Qaphela has been arrested, and Mzi is a wanted man?

Thabi: What do you want me to say?

Me: I thought you had this handled.

Thabi: We did too, but life doesn't always go the way we want.

Me: You and your friends told me that you had everything under control, and I should step back because I was going to ruin everything. Seems like you did that all on your own.

Thabi: Buhle, you're making a noise. It's late. I want to sleep.

Me: What's your plan out of this one?

Thabi: I'm thinking, okay?

Me: You don't realise that you're digging an even deeper hole for all of us here?

Thabi: What do you suggest we do?

Me: We tell the truth. That will set us free. We should've done that from the beginning.

Thabi: Talk to your boyfriend about that. If all of us agree to it, then we'll go ahead and tell the truth. But I'll tell you one thing, it's not going to work. We've already gotten rid of the weapons. So whatever way we choose to go about this, we're still in deep shit. So it's better we finish what we started.

Me: This is flipping frustrating, Thabile. I don't think you understand how hard it is to see someone you love rot behind bars.

I landed with a thud on my bed, and a tear escaped.

Thabi: I'm sorry.

Me: Will anything ever go right in my life?

Thabi: I've been asking myself the same question.
Seems like we're in the same boat.

Me: I love you, Thabile and I want my friend back. I
want my lover back.

Thabi: We'll win this, and Mpilo will be back to sweep
you off your feet again. I love you too. Get some
sleep.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

I was next in line for the telephone. I pressed in
Zenani's number and listened to it ring. An inmate
behind me poked me. "Hey, hurry up. We don't have
all day. You think this is Sandton?" I subtly rolled my
eyes, and shut her out.

Zenani: Hello, who am I speaking to?

Nikiwe: This is Nikiwe.

Zenani: Oh sis, how are you?

Nikiwe: I'm tired of running around in circles with you. You were supposed to find a way to get me out.

Zenani: I know. I'm working on it.

Nikiwe: We had a perfect opportunity to pull this off, and that was when I was being transferred here.

Listen, I don't have much time. You're going to pull some strings, and get me a private cell. Can you believe that I was welcomed into this place with a beating? They have roughed me up black and blue. My face is swollen, and my whole body aches.

Zenani: Nikiwe, I'm still held up right now-

Nikiwe: Listen here, if you still value your freedom, you'll give me what I want. You seem to have forgotten who I am, and I'll not rest until you find yourself inside. I can't suffer alone for things we did together.

Somikazi Nkosi

I sported a tracksuit, and a pair of sneakers. For the longest time, I had my husband's frame in my hand, looking at his dimpled smile in the photograph.

Nothing could be done to ever fill the gaping hole in my heart, but I had to do what I had to do to protect myself and Lwando after dragging him in my mess. Tears welled in my eyes.

I paced to the kitchen and poured myself cereal into a bowl along with milk and heated it up and ate while watching television.

Shock travelled through me and I almost choked on my breakfast when Qaphela and Mzi appeared on national television. Qaphela was dragged out of his hotel by the police, and the news reported that Mzi hadn't yet been found. I reached for my cellphone in

my pocket and dialed Lwando's cousin number. She answered on the fourth ring.

Somi: Please pass the phone to Lwando.

Her: Okay.

I waited for a few moments before he came on line.

Lwando: I'm watching the news. This is bad for us, Somikazi. It's not too late to come out with the truth.

Somi: It's a good thing we discarded everything that could've led the police to the warehouse.

Lwando: This is not going to end well.

Somi: Listen here, get yourself ready. We're going to finish this today.

Lwando: I'm still weak.

Somi: Stop with your excuses. I'm going to come and get you. We have a mission.

Lwando: What mission?

Somi: Prepare yourself. We're going to kidnap someone.

Lwando: What? I thought we were going to burn down the place.

Somi: Change of plans.

Lwando: You seem to be a mastermind at this.

Somi: That's what happens when you're surrounded by criminals.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

The warden ushered into the Governor's office, and I greeted him. I came to this decision with careful consideration.

Nikiwe: Thank you for seeing me.

Him: What can I do for you?

Nikiwe: I'm going to need you to connect me with the police station that was handling my case.

Him: For what reason?

Nikiwe: I have a crime to report.

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Happy Women's Day to the beautiful ladies in the house. Soon this crime drama will come to an end. Preferably on insert 90 or 100.

Have a good evening.

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Mpilo Ngubane

I watched Qaphela queued up in the line for food,

and after he was done with his tray, he approached my table and took the seat. I scanned the area. Truthfully speaking, I was pissed about his presence here.

Qaphela: These people feed us nonsense. What is this?

Mpilo: Think about me who's been eating these crumbs for a month plus now. Moreover you've been here before. I don't get what you're crying about.

Qaphela: It sounds like there is something you want to say.

Mpilo: I thought you were working on a plan to get me out, and not find yourself inside with me.

Qaphela: There's no use crying over split milk. Mzi is supposed to be here with us. I think he might have heard about the warrant and decided to go into hiding. We can't all be inside.

Mpilo: We need to change direction. Leave this to me, and I'll handle it.

Qaphela: What are you thinking? We should just eliminate Mthandeni.

Mpilo: That could make things worse. He's out to get us. Think about this. He's going up against powerful people, and if he suddenly turns up dead, people are going to be swarming around us like bees.

Qaphela: As long as there is no proof, I'm good with anything.

Mpilo: I think we've had too many killings to last us a lifetime.

Qaphela: We have to do what we need to do. I'm certain you don't want to spend another minute in this place.

Mpilo: The thing is that you've been doing things with a criminal mind. I heard about that boy's death. See that's the problem, Mthandeni seems to always be a step ahead of us.

Qaphela: What do you suppose we do?

Mpilo: Perhaps it's time we do things the legal way. I'll get in contact with my lawyer and have him file a

complaint against Mthandeni of unprofessionalism, corruption, harrassment and making arrests without any substantial evidence. I'm getting sick and tired of that cop. He's getting on my last nerves.

Qaphela: So we just sit and hope that this complaint lands in the hands of someone who isn't on their payroll? This could take weeks and months to be processed and investigated.

Mpilo: It's worth a try. Killing a cop is way messy, and taking part in killing people isn't my thing.

Qaphela: I hear you.

Mpilo: We stand to lose a lot, Q. I'm lucky that Zulu didn't attempt to buy me out of the firm. I'll be lucky if clients even glance at my way when I make it out.

Qaphela: We'll get out.

Mpilo: But the damage has already been done. My reputation has been tarnished.

Qaphela: Give it a few months. People will be talking about something else.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

My eyes darted around the Governor's office, plopped on a chair awaiting to be connected on the cellphone. The Governor had his hands intertwined, and his attention was on me. I was finally connected, and Mthandeni's voice resounded around us. Getting the greetings out of the way, we jumped straight to the issue.

Mthandeni: I hope you don't mind if I record our conversation.

Nikiwe: Not at all, detective.

Mthandeni: Please state your full names for me.

Nikiwe: Simnikiwe Mbhele Mkhize.

Mthandeni: Okay, let's proceed. What is this crime you want to report? Did you commit the crime?

Nikiwe: This is with regards to my sister, Zenani Mbhele. I suppose that you've been asking yourselves questions about how Bandile pulled off his escape and you've had your own theories about that, but I want to clarify everything for you.

Mthandeni: From what you've just said, I suppose your sister helped Bandile with his escape?

Nikiwe: She was the mastermind behind everything.

Mthandeni: We've questioned the guards who were on duty that day and they're not saying anything.

Nikiwe: That's because you have nothing on them. Threaten them with Zenani, and they'll probably start singing like birds. Check the footages of that day carefully, and I'm certain you'll find suspicious movements. Attempt to track all the movements those guards and my sister did around the time frame of Bandile's 'death'. I'm sure there's something you will find. I'll have a detailed written statement of how everything went down. I hope the Governor here will allow me.

I gazed at him.

Him: Not a problem.

Nikiwe: I hope you're already onto the laboratory that faked the DNA test. Follow that, and it will probably trace back to Zenani. My sister is the type of person who gets things done by herself. She doesn't send anyone.

Mthandeni: Okay. Who else knew about Bandile's escape besides you and your sister?

Nikiwe: My sister formulated the whole plan behind everyone's back. Myself and Bandile's dad, we found out at a later stage. Officer, I hope you do something about this. You need to understand that Zenani is a dangerous woman, and she orchestrated a murder and the abduction of Buhlenkosi Malinga along with Bandile Dube... I'm willing to be a witness.

Mthandeni: Okay, give me time to look into this. I'll dig as best as I can, and I'll get in contact if there's something I need to ask from you. Is there anything else?

Nikiwe: No, that's all.

For now atleast, I wanted to turn up the heat on Zenani. For a sister that I have been through hell and back with, it doesn't look like she got my back and I don't respond to betrayals well. She better budge because soon I might just spill all the beans and put the entire blame on my sister. That might even get me a lighter sentence. I needed to think of something.

Thabile Mampane

One step forward, and three steps backwards. This didn't sit well with me, and at times, I just sit and look back at the choices I took. The life I led before I got entangled into this world. I didn't like that day by day, my conscience was slowly slipping away, and

my problems and enemies multiplied with each day that rolled by. My train of thoughts was interjected by Qaphela clearing his thought and plopping down on the chair and I blinked away my tears and gave him a smile.

Thabi: Are you okay?

Qaphela: I should be asking you that.

Thabi: I'm good, and Mpilo?

Qaphela: We'll be fine. Has my brother gotten into contact with you?

Thabi: No, my calls aren't going through. Maybe he is indeed laying low.

Qaphela: But that shouldn't stop him from getting into contact with you through a burner phone. I think there's more to this. Something isn't right.

Thabi: Maybe you're just being paranoid. He knows that the police are watching us closely. Give him time; he'll reach out.

Qaphela: I hear you. Right now, it seems that we're

out of options.

Thabi: This is bad. We need to brainstorm ideas.

Qaphela: Let's give Mpilo a week. He's thinking of filing a complaint against this police station and it's incompetent counterparts. That doesn't work out. We'll have to come up with a new plan.

Thabi: Okay. Look, there is something I wanted to talk to you about.

Qaphela: I'm listening.

Thabi: After this, I'm done with this life.

I awaited his reaction.

Thabi: I mean we do know how television glamorizes crime, but it's a different story in reality. Sure, it's exciting and all, but I don't think I can live my life like this.

Qaphela: I'm not going to stop you from doing what's best for yourself.

Thabi: This world brings danger, and I don't think that's the kind of life I want to lead forever. After we close this chapter, I'll probably focus on my journalism and the hotel.

Qaphela: I understand. You're doing the right thing. I don't think you want to live your life always looking over your shoulder. As for me, this is all I've known, and I'm not going to change that any time soon.

I nodded. Addiction comes in many different forms.

Qaphela: Another thing, I'm sorry for dragging you into this. We shouldn't have forced this business down your throat.

Thabi: It's nothing, really. I mean I got to know you. It was good while it lasted, and you're someone I want to always have in my corner. Moreover I got the opportunity to avenge my father's death, and also kill the bastard's son.

Qaphela: You're young. You should've never set foot

into this empire, but we got to keep moving.

This man was having me rethinking a lot of things.

Somikazi Nkosi

In disguise, we waited for the target. It was a good thing that he didn't stay in a busy place. Along the path leading to his suburb, we patiently waited.

Somi: Remember that he's a cop, and he has a gun. This must be swift and smooth. We can't flop.

Lwando: I've heard you loud and clear. I just don't like what you're making me do.

Somi: I'm sorry, but this is not me being a criminal. It's me looking to protect the both of us, and find a

way to help my family. We've all done our share of wrongdoings, but it doesn't make us bad people. Think of it like a jungle. It's either you eat up, or you get eaten.

Lwando: Survival.

Somi: I'm not a criminal, and I didn't mean to kill my husband. I loved him, and I don't think I'll ever be able to live with myself knowing what I did. Trust me, Mzi would have done the same. Used my death to his advantage. You can't always let your emotions rule you. If there's one thing he taught me is to look for opportunities in any situation, good or bad. You have to make it work for you.

I looked around our surroundings.

Somi: Let's get it moving. Cover your face.

Lwando went to lay down on the tar on his back while I pinned myself against a wall, concealing

myself from the incoming vehicle. The car halted, and the driver fell right into our trap by clambering down from his car and nearing Lwando.

I covered my face, and made myself known.

Somi: Don't move or else I'll shoot you dead. Hands up where I can see them.

I attempted to change my voice. Lwando with precision and speed (could never make out that he was injured) removed Mthandeni's gun from his body.

Somi: Don't try anything funny, or it will be the last thing you do...

We pushed him back to the car, and with Lwando behind the wheel, Mthandeni in the passenger seat

and me in the backseat, my gun cocked towards him; we hit the road. Lwando had made sure that there was no electronic near us that he could use.

From the pocket of my hoodie, I slid out a bottle of water.

Mthandeni: You really think I'm going to allow you to poison me that easier? What is the meaning of this? Did the Nkosis and the Ngubanes put you up to this? We can work it out.

Somi: There are many creative ways to kill someone, and poison isn't one of them. I just don't want you to die on us. Water is very important.

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We arrived at the warehouse. After ensuring that Mthandeni was unconscious(a small dosage of sleeping pills in the water we gave him), we branded his fingerprints on the gun I used to kill Mziwoxolo and Fana. Our hands were gloved.

I placed the sleeping pills in a container of painkillers, so that it looked like he thought he was taking painkillers but he wasn't aware that it was sleeping pills. This was to make sure that if his bloodstream was tested, the sleeping tablets in the painkillers container would make for a perfect explanation. I couldn't let this plan flop.

I took out Mzi's phone, and placed back the sim card and all that and powered it on, leaving it there besides the bodies.

We drove back home with my own car, and along the way, I called the police.

Him: What can I do for you?

Somi: Please do everything in your power to find my husband. Track him down, I'm really worried about him.

Him: Who are you talking about?

Somi: Mziwoxolo Nkosi. You need to find him. It makes me worried that he's out there hiding from the police, and making things worse for himself. Please do your best to find him before tomorrow. We're really worried about him, and he isn't returning any of our calls.

Him: Unless his phone hasn't been destroyed, and we can track his car; we'll find your husband. Contact us if he attempts to get in touch with you.

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Somikazi Nkosi

Sadness settled into my heart once more as the events of the past couple of days played through my

mind. Tears spilled over.

I sinned against my husband. I killed him. Guilt churned in my gut. I was lost without Mzi. He complimented me so well, yet in a toxic marriage we had. None of my justifications eased the pain.

That quietness of the house would soon equate to emptiness within me. I'd be lying if I said I knew what came over when I pulled the trigger. A gun isn't a toy, and I would live with this regret for the rest of life, and I don't know for long I'd be able to hold on. A voice sliced through my thoughts, and I looked up to see Lwando. I wiped my tears, and snuggled in my blanket.

Somi: When did you get here?

Lwando: We need to talk.

He seemed so cold, and I didn't blame him. I looked

at his visible bruises and they were healing. He took a seat at the far end of the couch I occupied.

Somi: Is there anything you'd like for me to make you?

Lwando: No, I'm not staying long. My cousin is waiting for me outside.

Somi: I'll have your car replaced. It's the least I can do.

Lwando: No, I don't want yours or your husband's money. I'm waiting for my insurance company.

Somi: Okay.

Lwando: Your plan worked out perfectly. It's all people talk about ever since Mthandeni's arrest was broadcasted this morning. The media doesn't waste time.

Somi: Thank you for helping out with this.

Lwando: You're going to get away with murder, but worry not, I'll take your secret to the grave.

Somi: I suppose this has changed the way you look

at me?

Lwando: The police may have discovered Mthandeni at the crime scene but when they dig further, they will come across loopholes. For starters, the postmortems will reveal that your husband and his skivvy died way before Mthandeni travelled to the warehouse. A report obviously will be printed by the tracking company for all the places Mthandeni has been in the past week, and the police might start believing him when he says that he has been framed.

Somi: It doesn't matter. As long as there is nothing linking us to the murders, it doesn't matter what the police conclude.

Lwando: When things fall apart for you, don't involve me. I'm done with you.

Somi: Please don't do this, Lwando. You're the only person who knows about this, and will understand better than anyone else.

Lwando: I'm thankful to you for saving my life, but I can't continue this friendship. Anyway the lines had already been blurred, and this affair almost costed

me my life.

Somi: Are you going to leave me when I need you the most?

Lwando: I'm sorry, but I can't look at you the same way anymore. I can't help but think this is something you've always wanted to do. You just never had the opportunity to.

Somi: Lwando, that's not true. I didn't mean to kill him.

Lwando: Yes, you didn't but everything after that wasn't a mistake. It doesn't sit well with me that one day you might do the same to me and cover it up too.

Somi: So you're going to throw away 15 years of friendship just like that?

Lwando: It's for the best. Nothing can ever happen between us. Your husband's memory will always haunt me, and it won't sit well with me that in order for us to pursue something, someone had to die.

He rose to his feet.

Somi: Yes, leave. I don't need you and I never did. I regret saving you. Atleast my husband was not a weak, spineless coward. He'll always be twice the man you are.

He didn't respond, instead he walked off. I regretted my words immediately, and cried until sleep came over me.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I looked at the black polish stains on the tiles, and frowned with my hands on my hips at my husband.

Kamva: You really don't want to listen. How many times must I tell you not to polish your shoes inside

the house?

Senzo: I wanted to wear them for my meeting this evening.

Kamva: Is that the only pair of shoes you have? You just love making a mess of everything.

Senzo: I can't believe we're fighting about my shoes while my brother-in-law is no more.

Kamva: It's sad. I can't even begin to imagine what Somikazi is going through. This must be hard on her.

Senzo: On the other hand, Mpilo and Qaphela are in prison.

Kamva: This has honestly been a bad year. People keep dying and nothing seems to ever go right.

Senzo: I still can't wrap my head around the fact that Mzi is gone.

Kamva: You know I was not a huge fan of his, but I'd never wish death on him. Things just don't make sense.

Senzo: Mzi was Mzi. I don't think there's any other way to describe it. I took him as a brother, and even

though, most of the time he messed up; he did do good things.

Kamva: Life is very short. Who would have ever thought that one of us would die so soon?

Senzo: We should actually get Somikazi to move in with us. I don't think it's a good idea for her to stay alone in that big house.

Kamva: That's a good idea. She'll need people who love her to support. She needs us now more than ever.

Senzo: Then it's settled. We'll get her to move in with us.

Kamva: But life never ceases to amaze me. They should've taken my mother in Mzi's place, because I fail to comprehend this injustice. Evil people always live longer, and that is not fair.

Senzo: You really want your mother die.

I rolled my eyes.

Kamva: But analysing things, something doesn't sit well with me.

Senzo: What do you mean?

Kamva: Things aren't as they seem. I tell you.

Thabile Mampane

Somikazi didn't look good. Her eyes were swollen and bloodshot. You could see that things were weighing heavily on her.

Thabi: Our deepest condolences.

Buhle: The early days are the hardest. It will get better.

Somi: Thank you.

Thabi: Losing a loved one is probably the hardest

thing someone can go through.

Buhle: We'll keep you in our prayers.

Thabi: Who would have thought that Mthandeni would take his personal vendetta this far? That cop makes me sick.

Buhle and I walked away from her. We thought she might need space from us. Not to mention that her home was filled with her family to comfort her during this hard times. Most of all, I was worried about Q.

Thabi: This reminds me of my father's death.

Buhle: I lost both my parents in the span of a year. It pains that all these deaths we've experienced are not natural. People were just forward and wanted to play God.

Thabi: It's frustrating. Anyway, how was your last exam?

Buhle: It was writable. I think I did good. Let's talk

about you. You rarely opened a book this semester.

Thabi: I know. So are you still going home tomorrow?

Buhle: No, not when things are bad like this. It wouldn't sit well with me if I didn't pay my last respects to someone who aided in saving my life. It would be selfish of me to leave at a time like this, and I don't want to give Mpilo's mom a reason to complain.

Thabi: I hear you.

Buhle: Let me go and greet them.

I nodded, and she walked away. I approached Kamva who seemed to be engrossed in her own thoughts.

Thabi: If it isn't the woman who got her mother arrested.

Kamva: Sorry?

Thabi: No, I just wanted you to know that I see you. I didn't think you had it in you to frame your mother.

Kamva: Please. I don't know what you're talking about.

Thabi: It can't be a coincidence that you bought a batch from me, and the same week, your mother gets arrested for being in possession of coke.

Kamva: Where are you going with this? Someone just passed away, and you want to bring up the past?

Thabi: I just wanted to remind you that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Be careful.

Buhle appeared besides us.

Buhle: Now all of this is new to me. Kamva, you planted drugs on your mother? She must have done something extremely bad for you to turn against her. The way you were defending her, you'd swear you were getting paid for it.

Thabi: It's rude to eavesdrop on people's conversations.

Buhle: I knew it that you were lying to me about your

drug business.

Thabi: You're so nosy.

Kamva: I can't stand this. You figure this is the time to be childish? Grow up, man.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Zenani answered almost immediately when I called her on the communal telephone.

Nikiwe: My dear sister.

Zenani: You must be the one who pointed the police in my direction. They called me in for questioning.

Nikiwe: I did tell you that I'm not going to play games with you.

Zenani: So you figured that you must get your only

ally arrested? That was a bad move.

Nikiwe: We'll suffer together then, because we committed the crimes together.

Zenani: Not a problem, but one thing, that wasn't a very wise move. We can't both be in prison. Otherwise we're done for.

Nikiwe: You should've taken me serious the first time I talked to you. There's no going back from here.

Zenani: It's always been us against the world. So what you're telling me now is that you're declaring war on me? I can make you life hell on the inside.

Nikiwe: You'll be joining me very soon. Don't forget that I know most of your secrets.

Zenani: Don't force my hand.

Nikiwe: I know you like the back of my hand. I can tell you're thinking of ways to kill me.

Zenani: I can never think of killing my only sister. We fight, but we always make up.

Somikazi Nkosi

I attacked Qaphela with a hug the minute he was brought in. Tears streamed down my cheeks.

We sat down, and I looked at his stoic face, giving nothing away. He had always been a champion at not deciphering his emotions.

Qaphela: I don't understand why you're crying.

Somi: What do you mean? Didn't you hear about Mzi's death? That detective took things too far and killed the love of my life.

Qaphela: Mzi isn't dead. I know he's somewhere out there.

Somi: Qaphela, please listen to me. I know it is hard, but this isn't the time to be in denial.

Qaphela: My brother is not dead. I'm not going to jump to conclusions until I see it for myself. You know how Mzi is. He's full of tricks. He's probably doing the same thing that Dube boy did. He doesn't want the police to come looking for him.

Somi: I know that this probably isn't the best time, but you need to think of yourself and Mpilo right now. Please don't get mad but this is the only way we'll close off this chapter, and mourn Mziwoxolo properly.

Qaphela: You're getting on my last nerves.

Somi: I know how this is going to sound, but I need you to keep an open mind.

Qaphela: Stop beating around the bush and get straight to the point.

Somi: The only way you and Mpilo will be able to go free is if you pin the blame on Mzi.

His eyes were suddenly filled with anger, his jaw clenched.

Qaphela: It hasn't even been a day since we discovered that Mzi might be dead, but you already want to capitalize on his death.

Somi: It's not like that, Q. I'm just thinking of what's best for all of us here. Mzi is gone, and he's never coming back. He's left us in this world. That forged letter from Jozi may be enough to bury you.

Qaphela: Are you listening to yourself?

Somi: Look, Mthandeni might be arrested but that doesn't mean you'll suddenly be free. It could go either way.

Qaphela: Let me leave before I do something I will regret.

Somi: Qaphela, a dead man can't be charged with murder.

Qaphela: So you're saying I must throw my brother under the bus to save myself? What about the dignity he'll be buried with? So people must remember him for multiple murders? What about his

name? What about his legacy?

I didn't want to push too much, but I was thinking of him and Mpilo. It hurt me too that I'd suggest something like this.

Somi: What use will you be to him when you're inside? You have a hotel to run. You have a business to get back to. You have a family that needs you in these hard times. How will you pay your last respects to your brother when you're locked up in here? Don't forget that Mthandeni is backed by powerful people. Prison will not stop him from coming for you too.

Qaphela: I want his head. I'll keep it as a monument. He killed the wrong man.

Somi: Qaphela, please don't let anger blind you. You'll obviously be the first suspect. Just think about everything I've said. Your family needs you. This is hard on all of us. I'll never forgive Mthandeni for taking away Mzi from all of us.

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Two weeks later

Buhlenkosi Malinga

The guards at the royal house escorted me and Kamva inside, our bags trailing behind them. I looked around the manor. Nothing had really changed around here.

Me: I can't believe I haven't been here since the beginning of the year.

Kamva: Where you ran away, and I was forced into a marriage.

Me: I'm still waiting for my gift, because hadn't I

taken off, I'd be devouring your man.

She rolled her eyes, and I chuckled at her frown.

Me: Admit it or not, deep down you know that I did you a favour.

Kamva: Well, had you did what you were supposed to do, everything that happened in Joburg wouldn't have happened. You wouldn't be jumping from man to man.

Me: That's a low blow. Don't forget that you were caught on camera kissing your ex.

Kamva: Nothing happened between me and Mthunzi. I'm very much in love with my husband.

Me: The same way I love Mpilo.

She rolled her eyes again.

Kamva: Just focus on your studies. It will end in tears.

Me: What are you doing with your life? You sit and do nothing the entire day. You twiddle your fingers the whole day, and wait for your husband to come home with the paycheck. Atleast I'm schooling. You do nothing.

Kamva: Now why are you insulting me? I just meant you shouldn't lose focus on your studies. I still think you're too young to fully give yourself to a man.

Me: I'm not that much younger than you.

Kamva: Let's drop it. Things can escalate very quickly where we're involved.

Me: I'm still not happy about that piece of meat you threw to my face.

Two men descended the stairs with huge smiles, and came to stand besides us.

Kamva: Buhle, this is uncle Mandlakhe, and uncle

Khulekani.

She pointed them out. I smiled, and extended my hand for a handshake.

Me: It's nice to meet you formally.

Mandlakhe: Likewise. You're even more beautiful in person. My brother birthed a queen.

Kamva: What about me, uncle?

She playfully sulked.

Kamva: Looks like she's taking my place as the favourite niece.

Mandlakhe: That was before I knew about this beauty here. Now I have two beautiful children.

Kamva: There you go again. You'll never change, uncle. None of us are children anymore.

Me: You remind me a lot of your brother. You resemble him so much.

Mandlakhe: No, you're wrong. I'm even more handsome than him.

Laughter rumbled out of all of us.

Khulekani: Don't mind him. We'll be having lunch in an hour so go up to your rooms, freshen up and come and join us. You still know where your rooms are located, right?

Kamva: Of course.

Kamva and I ascended the stairs.

Me: I'm impressed with the warm welcome.

Kamva: What were you expecting?

Me: Makes sense. I mean your mother's presence

suffocated the whole palace. Now that she's gone, the warmth is back and out with the coldness and darkness.

Kamva: You know what? I don't have time for this.

She trod in the direction of her bedroom when we reached the top of the stairs.

Me: I'm kidding, Kamva.

Kamva: You play too much.

Me: Just don't plant drugs on me too. Your anger is dangerous.

Kamva: Fuck you, Buhle.

I laughed, and strolled to my own bedroom. I reached for my cellphone in my jeans, and called Mpilo.

Mpilo: Have you arrived safely?

Me: I'm good. I just hate that we haven't had time to ourselves ever since you made it out of jail.

Mpilo: I know, but we're focusing on getting our lives back on track, and on the other hand Somikazi is still torn about Mzi's death.

Me: But it's a good thing that the funeral went well yesterday. Just be there for her.

Thabile Mampane

I flagged down a waiter, and he came by take mine and Qaphela's orders. You could see that his brother's death weighed heavily on him, but the show had to go on.

Thabi: I'm glad you finally agreed to dine with me.

This thing of yours of always buried in work is not healthy.

Qaphela: It keeps me busy, and Mthandeni alive. I'm going to let him think that he has won, and move in for the kill when he least expects it.

Thabi: I mean sure the guy made things personal, but to go as far as killing? The way I understood it, he wanted you two behind bars, not dead. What if he's telling the truth when he says that someone is framing him?

Qaphela: Does it matter? He'll say anything to save himself.

Thabi: Remember that what makes sense isn't always the truth. I mean we framed Unathi. What's stopping someone from doing the exact same thing with Mthandeni?

Qaphela: You have a point but I can't think of anyone who'd do this.

Thabi: Don't let the fact that Mthandeni is a cop slip your mind. I mean he knows what the police look for in crime scenes and murders, if he really was behind

this, he'd have done a clean job.

Qaphela: What happened is that he got a warrant of arrest for me and Mzi. My brother went into hiding, and that cop probably managed to track him down, and they battled. He ended up killing them.

Thabi: Bullshit. So he killed them with your brother's gun and then he passes out so the cops can catch him? Shit doesn't make sense. Don't tell me that you believe Mthandeni would overpower two criminals alone. If Mzi knew that the police were onto him, he'd have been more careful with his movements. It can either be one of the two; an unexpected murder or an enemy that we don't know of.

Qaphela: So you reckon I hear out Mthandeni?

Thabi: You have nothing to lose. It's better than killing someone who might be innocent after all. He's not my favourite person, but someone else is behind this. I can feel it.

He looked to be pondering upon my words. Something was off about this entire thing. I smiled

when our drinks were served.

Waiter: Your food will be here shortly.

Thabi: Thank you.

He walked away to another table.

Qaphela: I keep attempting to make sense of this entire thing and one person I can think of is Unathi.

Thabi: I doubt it, but let's hear what Mthandeni has to say and we'll take it from there.

Qaphela: It can't be her, but when I think of it, a frame for a frame. She's sending a message.

Thabi: Let's not jump to conclusions. That habit was reserved strictly for Njabulo. Going in for the kill without proof is deadly. We're not going to poke a snake in its nest.

Noxolo Ndebele

I glanced up from the television to Anna who handed me my phone. I looked at her small bump, thanking her before she walked away and I brought my phone to my ear.

Noxolo: Hello, Buhle.

Buhle: How are you doing, auntie?

Noxolo: I'm good and you?

Buhle: It's good to finally see the light. No more problems. Just happiness. Nikiwe and her sister are in prison. Mpilo is free. I don't have any complaints.

Noxolo: I'm glad to hear that.

Buhle: Moreover I have news for you, and I think you're going to like what I have to say.

Noxolo: Are you pregnant? I don't think that's something I'd like to hear.

Buhle: You're not even giving me a chance to explain. You're jumping the gun.

Noxolo: I'm kidding. I'm listening.

Buhle: So I've just discovered that Kwanele is inside for murder.

My eyes popped and I gasped. I couldn't believe what Buhle was telling me.

Noxolo: You better not be playing with me.

Buhle: I'm dead serious. I was shocked too when I heard the news, but I don't have the full details.

Noxolo: Nomthandazo has finally gotten her justice.

Buhle: I did tell you to leave it all to God. Seems like karma has finally located him.

Noxolo: And everyone knows what a savage bitch it is.

Happiness spread through me. I loved to see evil people pay for their sins.

Noxolo: I'm definitely coming down there. I want to look him in the eye.

Buhle: He may not be inside for mama's death, but this is something. I just hope it sticks.

Noxolo: I can't wait to see him.

Buhle: I'll find out what really happened, and let you know.

Noxolo: Do that.

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Somikazi Nkosi

I reminisced Mzi's funeral with my eyes unblinking and tears burning my eyes. Gunshots repeatedly echoed in my head.

The sun shone on my skin, and Qaphela opened his umbrella and brought it over us, shielding us from the intense heat. My tears kept gushing out when I looked at the coffin alongside the pastor and Mzi's father who was giving a speech.

I gazed at the familiar faces seated under the tent dressed mostly in black and white attires.

Qaphela: We should go back into the tent.

He whispered in my ear.

Somi: No, I'm fine. You can leave the umbrella with me.

Qaphela: I'll stand with you.

I could see that he was attempting to be strong, but everyone had their breaking points and so would Q soon.

Mzi's father: No parent wants to bury their child. Not after years of nurturing and making sure that they grow up to be the best version of themselves.

Mziwoxolo was my first child, and you could imagine the excitement I shared with my late wife when we were expecting him. In more ways than one, he resembled me. I saw myself in him, and it breaks my heart that a piece of me has died. He was not a man of many words, but his actions spoke volumes. I loved that he lived his life according to his terms, and always put himself and his family first. Like everyone else, he had his flaws but past those, you'd find a man filled with so much love to give. Past the sleepless nights he and his siblings gave me, I'm proud of the man he was. I'm proud to announce

that he was my seed. Sprouted into his own man. This is not a day to look into his mistakes, but rather one to acknowledge the good he did and the mark he has left in the hearts of the people who loved him. My son, go well.

He started reciting his clan names, and sobs escaped my mouth. I attempted to muffle them with my mouth, and Qaphela pulled me in for a side hug.

Nompumelelo went on to honour the man his brother was.

Mpumi: Words are not enough to express my emotions. When the news of Mziwoxolo's death hit me, something in me went away with the last breath he took. Gone was the man who was always there for me. He played the protective brother role very well, and sometimes I wished he'd ease down on the protectiveness. But as I grew up, I knew that he was merely shielding me from the cruelty of this world. The same cruelty that snatched him away from his

family. He was my go to man when I found myself in trouble, and everytime he'd make things right until I had to spread my wings and learn to fly solo. No one is saying that he was a saint, because he was far from it but the little good he did, he made sure that the effects were felt for a long time. Just like he loved to said: you live by the gun, you die by it, we'll give him the send off that a man of his cailbre deserves.

Gunshots started flying into the sky until the men in black who fired them stopped.

Mpumi: With the bullets, brother, they signify your bravery. He was indeed a protector, but could also be the worst nightmare to anything and anyone that threatened his family's wellbeing and livelihood and a man who got things done no matter the cost. Rest in peace, my dear brother. The red on his hands is beyond what he was.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I sat beside my mother's gravestone; a bittersweet feeling pumping through my heart.

Me: It's me, mama. Your daughter... I don't even know where to begin, but this year has been a difficult one. Going to the city, I lost sight of the promises I made to you and it was never part of my plans to be attracted to a rapist that ended up making my life a living hell. I became an easy target for him to prey on without any efforts. We didn't even get to know each better before I gave my purity, and that is one of my biggest regrets. I was naive and little did I know that I invited a psychopath into my life. But on the brighter side of things, I found a good friend, Thabile... I fell in love with this guy, and I'm sure you would have liked him too if you were still here...He did so much to make sure that Thabile got

her justice. Sure it was his occupation, but he did so much more and we ended up growing closer. The sacrifices he made for the people he loved made me adore him more. He was patient, and risked his freedom, career and reputation for the lot of us... That surely was a great test of loyalty and sacrifice for his associates and family. I'll surely bring him to meet you one day.

A weak smile was plastered on my face.

Me: It makes me happy that your killer is finally where he belongs. Prison is a small punishment for the pain he was caused the both of us, but at least it gives me the comfort that my mother's abuser and murderer is paying for his sins. It gives me comfort that he'll not do this to another woman and I hope that he rots inside. With that being said, I want the past and the darkness that has been following us for the past couple of years to be washed away. I will always be thankful for the friend you left behind who

never fails to support me and you even in your grave. I hope that you're still resting in peace. I love you so much, mama.

Mpilo Ngubane

God knows how much I missed the little things I took granted of before I stepped foot into prison. Damn, I had missed a comfortable bed so much, and the beers I was relishing in right now, and well of course, Buhle. Things had just been sad recently for all of us with Mzi's death, and we all attempted to pick up the pieces of our scattered lives.

Nompumelelo came back from the bathroom.

Mpilo: Are you okay? I hope these trips of yours to

the bathroom are not for shedding tears every now and then.

Mpumi: Imprisoned in my mind. You were captured in the actual prison.

She took her seat on the camp chair positioned across mine with a cooler box between us outside on the balcony.

Mpilo: I'm glad I'm out of that place.

Mpumi: It's good to catch up with you right now. It's been a while.

Mpilo: It's not my fault that you're always traveling. You missed Sensokuhle's wedding.

Mpumi: I'm aware, but isn't that at the end of the year, they'll be having another wedding. I'll definitely be there.

Mpilo: Isn't it too soon after all the deaths that have taken place this year?

Mpumi: No, it will give us an opportunity to gather together as a family. Moreover December is in five months time. We can't grieve forever.

Mpilo: True.

Mpumi: It could've been us.

Mpilo: What do you mean?

Mpumi: The marriage.

She came to sat on my lap, and captured my lips in a kiss. I moved back slightly.

Mpilo: You're starting. Marriage for us was out of the question from the beginning. You know this.

Mpumi: I know, but I'm craving for some intimacy between us before I leave for my gig in Caribbean.

Mpilo: That can't happen.

Mpumi: It will mean nothing. We've always been doing this, and nothing has to change.

Buhle's face filtered in my mind.

Mpilo: I'm not that kind of man. We've only been fucking for the mutual lack of partners.

Mpumi: And now things have changed. I get it.

She didn't seem fazed as she responded in a nonchalant manner.

Mpumi: Let me get off you, before your sister walks in here and gives me a death stare. That girl can kill you with a mere look.

She went back to her seat.

Mpilo: You've just crossed a boundary. You need to stay in your lane.

Mpumi: We can have a quickie for the last time, and no one has to know.

Mpilo: But I will know. We're not going to have a problem with boundaries, right? I don't want you coming on to me like that again. We talked about this, Mpumi.

Mpumi: I know. I was just testing you. Many men fail to follow through. For the first time, I'm impressed that you resisted this body.

Mpilo: We just buried your brother. Behave yourself and go get yourself a model overseas. I'm certain they're flocking at your feet.

Mpumi: You'll be the first person I send my nude collection.

Mpilo: And I'll cut you off. I don't want nonsense.

Mpumi: Damn, you're whipped.

Mpilo: I know what I want, or should I rather say who.

Mpumi: Don't worry, your girl has nothing to worry about.

Mpilo: When are you leaving?

Mpumi: My flight is this weekend.

I gulped down my beer.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

How I managed to hide my necklace for so long is a wonder to me too. I was in solitary confinement for two days for engaging in a fight. Damn, soon enough; they'd have broken my bones. I had to do something.

In the darkness and with loneliness, I started to choke. The necklace on its own accord was strangling me. I looked at it, attempting to halt it from squeezing the life out of me. My eyes popped when the necklace was suddenly changed into an umbilical cord.

My sins were coming back for me.

When I saw my life flash before me, the umbilical cord was ripped from my neck and I gushed for a huge intake of oxygen, coughing.

I looked up to see a familiar face.

Nikiwe: Thank you for saving my life.

I said when I regained my composure. Gogo Khanyisa's daughter stood before me in the flesh.

Her: You won't be needing the necklace anymore. I've managed to stop the dead spirits from haunting you.

Nikiwe: Thank you. How is my sister? Is she surviving?

Her: As far as I know, she's fine. She came to me with a request before she was arrested.

I narrowed my eyes. Whatever Zenani was up to couldn't be good.

Her: It's what we call the exchange of fates, and she asked me to make it befall upon your daughter.

Nikiwe: Please tell me that you didn't follow through with her request. I hope she's not planning to have my daughter killed.

Her: It's simply an exchange of fates. Her destiny will be swiped with another.

Nikiwe: What does that mean?

Her: You should be thankful that it will not be based on her entire life. She'll just have to make sacrifices that will ensure she lives.

Nikiwe: Blood sacrifices?

Her: No, a sacrifice of her happiness.

Nikiwe: Zenani never learns. Can't you reverse it?

Her: I've already said too much. My job here is done. I've collected all my debts, and from now on you and your sister will have to fend for yourselves.

Nikiwe: Thank you.

Her: I have a fruitful womb to get back to.

She vanished, and I cussed under my breath. Damn, what the hell was Zenani thinking!

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Somikazi Nkosi

I was staring at nothing, wrapped in a world of emptiness. A video of memories paced through my mind.

Somi: I have so many regrets as I'm standing before all of you to bury my husband. In the last days of his life, it was no secret that things between the two of us were rocky. I wished I had gotten a second chance to fix things. I wish for so many things, but it is for certain that one thing you can't reverse in is the death of a loved one. Mzi, I'm sorry for a lot of things. It was never my intention for things to end like this. All of us never expected this, and that is what makes your death more painful. We can't turn back the hands of time, but I wish I could so I could be able to do things differently... I will always love you, my husband and I want to take the time to thank you for being the man that you were. Things weren't always rosy, and you have hurt me so much, but I wouldn't trade you for anyone else. I remember our wedding day. Everything was so perfect, and the happiness within me that day couldn't compare to anything else in this world. I'll treasure our time together so much,

because for so long we grew together in hardships and success, but somehow it all ended because of me. Come back to us, my love.

I broke down in front of the many pairs of eyes, and Nqaba came forward to help me to my seat.

Nqaba: It's not your fault, big sis.

Somi: None of you understand. If only I could rewind everything, I'd have done a lot of things differently. Things probably wouldn't have turned out like this.

Nqaba: You're going to be okay.

We tuned in our attention to Qaphela. Seeing the destruction my choices wrecked shattered my heart to a point of no return and an irreparable state.

Qaphela: My blood. He was more than a brother to me.

He had to be the one taking it the hardest more than the rest of us. Their brotherhood was simply the best. I was beyond the word sad but equally I was tormented by guilt and regret.

Happy brought me back to reality. She was standing in front of me with a tray alongside my mother.

Happy: You have to eat something, Somikazi.

Mom: What you're doing is not healthy. I know you lost someone dear to your heart, but what's it helping to starve and dwell in your sorrows the entire day.

Happy: She's right, sis.

Mom: Maybe you should come back home with us. Perhaps a change of scenery will do you good.

Somi: I'm not hungry, and I'm not going back with you to the village. Let me grieve my husband the way I see fit.

Mom: You forget that I know the pain of losing a husband. It gets better with time, but you have to be willing to pull yourself out of that dark place. Don't let yourself drown; we're all here for you.

I snuggled in the blanket enveloping me, and covered my head. I wanted to be alone.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Impepho rafted through the hut, hitting my nostrils. I walked in with Kamva, and the familiar woman requested for us to take off our shoes, and sit on the mat.

I liked that she was friendly, and her aura rendered warmth to us, making us relax in her presence.

Phumla: I've been talking to your uncle, and he's been telling me about your challenges.

Me: This year, I haven't caught a break. Things just keep going wrong.

Phumla: After here, we'll go to the river for a cleansing. Buhle, we'll have to perform a ceremony to formally and properly introduce you to the ancestors.

I nodded.

Kamva: Does things look bright for the journey ahead?

Phumla: I'm afraid not. There was only so much I could do for you without your presence here. My

husband's gift was passed down onto me, and there were some things I had to master before I could fully practice and pledge my loyalty to the royal family.

Kamva: Again, I wanted to apologise for the hand my mother played in destroying everything. Uncle Qhawe didn't deserve to die at her hands. You didn't deserve to lose your husband, and your kids their father.

Phumla: We've known the truth for months now. So her arrest didn't come as a surprise.

Kamva: I shouldn't have believed her.

Phumla: It's all in the past now.

I was looking forward to a new beginning and bright future, leaving all that is the past behind.

Phumla: But I'm going to have to warn you. Things haven't yet settled. There is more to come.

Me: What do you mean?

Phumla: Being here isn't going to make everything magically disappear. Another storm is yet to come.

Kamva: Isn't there something we can do to stop it?

Phumla: Both of you are going to have to prepare yourself. I haven't been shown everything. I'll keep trying to seek the meaning behind my dreams. You'll have to be strong in order to overcome the darkness.

Me: It really isn't helping us. We can't fight something we have no idea of.

Phumla: Something is going to attempt to tempt you. I see a clash of destinies and after that all I'm met with is darkness. I'll try to help you withstand the storm, but you're going to have to go all the way yourselves. You cannot allow your happiness to be taken away from you.

I grasped some of the things she was saying, but I was confused truth be told.

Phumla: I see a hand attempting to defy what has

already been written in rock.

Kamva: This is confusing me. Is this about Buhle or me or the both of us?

Phumla: I can't tell, but don't give in. Else it will be too late, and you'll live a life not meant for you, and with someone who is not for you. Everything will turn upside down.

Mpilo Ngubane

Happy handed me a sandwich and I thanked her before returning my attention to my laptop. She joined me on the high chairs.

Mpilo: I'm working here. Don't you have anything better to do?

Happy: Don't think that I didn't notice what went

down between you and Mpumi yesterday.

Mpilo: What has that got to do with you?

Happy: All I'm going to say is that don't hurt Buhle. She's been through a lot for her age, and I don't think it would do her good to add a cheating partner on the list.

Mpilo: You're disrespecting me now. That is none of your business. My love life doesn't concern you.

Happy: I know.

Mpilo: Happy, I know it's your thing to be forward, but not right now. I'm busy.

Happy: You're being defensive. I know what I'm talking about, Mpilo. Mpumi was ready to drop everything, and marry you.

Mpilo: All these years you have known her, you still don't know how she operates? She was pulling my leg. You have nothing to worry about.

Happy: Tjoh, jail has made you one grumpy man.

Mpilo: Actually you should start packing your bags. The family is going back home, and you should go

with them.

Happy: Not happening. I've decided to stay in Joburg.

Mpilo: Well then, you're going to have to find another place to stay.

Happy: So you're chasing me out?

Mpilo: No, but I need my space and no offence, but I don't plan to come home to a loudspeaker every single day.

Happy: You're hurting my feelings. I think you were better off in jail. At least there, you couldn't annoy me.

I chuckled and took a bite of the sandwich. After swallowing, someone knocked at the door.

Happy: I'll get it.

Mpilo: I'm serious, Happy. You'll move in with Somi when she goes back to her house. I think it would do her good to stay with someone, but as for me, I need my space.

She went to attend to the door.

Happy: You're heartless.

Mpilo: That isn't going to change my mind.

She came back with Nhlakanipho.

Mpilo: Nhla, what are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be on the road?

Nhla: I thought I should come and talk to you before I leave.

Mpilo: Good, because there is something I also want to talk to you about.

I closed my laptop, and Nhla sat down on the high chair across me.

Happy: Let me give you two some space.

Nhla: Happy, make me tea before you go.

Happy: You know where everything is.

Nhla: I'm your king.

Happy: Back in the village. Not here.

Nhla: You'll need something from me like you always do, and I'll recall this day.

Happy: I have everything I need.

Nhla shook his head at Happy's retreating figure with a brief laugh.

Nhla: This girl needs deliverance.

Mpilo: What's on your mind?

Nhla: I hope you and your brother will do better. This thing of yours of always been dragged into scandals is not on. Keep your affairs out of the media. That's all I ask for.

Mpilo: I hear you.

Nhla: Otherwise, I'm glad that you're out of prison.

Mpilo: Trust me, there is no one who is more relieved than me.

Nhla: What did you want to talk about?

Mpilo: I've found someone I want to spend the rest of my days with.

Nhla: You're talking about Buhle?

I nodded. I've never felt this way for another woman other than Buhle.

Nhla: What do you need me to do?

Mpilo: I want to pay lobola for her.

Nhla: Have you talked to her about it?

Mpilo: No, but I will. Moreover it's not a big deal. I'll wait for her to complete her studies before I officially make her mine. I'd like to think that lobola

is just a formality.

Nhla: Which brings two families together, but I'll speak to the uncles back home. They'll send the letter, and we'll take it from there.

Mpilo: Thank you. Mzi's death has shown me that life is indeed short, and you have to make the most of it.

Nhla: Look at you getting married before your elder brother.

Mpilo: You better hurry up and choose a bride for yourself before this family does it for you.

Nhla: Yeyi, you know them very well.

Noxolo Ndebele

Immediately after arriving in the village, I made a stop by the royal palace.

The King offered me a ride to Nomthandazo's house, but I opted to walk there with Buhle. My bags would be transported there by one of the guards.

That man was flames. I didn't want to lie.

Buhle: I'm going to tell him that you said he's a whole snack.

Noxolo: Don't you dare. I'll disown you faster than you can say hot.

Buhle: I'm glad that you're here with me.

Noxolo: Are you okay though?

Buhle: Something just unsettled me, but it's nothing I can't handle. Moreover I don't think it's about me.

Noxolo: Okay, it's time to spill the tea about Kwanele. What happened?

I was looking forward to seeing him, and tell him that karma never misses an address.

Buhle: Apparently he was having an affair with his friend's wife. You remember Raymond and his wife Linda?

My eyes widened and soon enough, my mouth followed.

Buhle: So it turned out that Raymond found out about the affair, and confronted him only to find them naked in bed. A fight started, and Kwanele pushed Raymond who hit his head and fell to his death.

Noxolo: They were fighting over the girl? But whatever, that Raymond deserved it for helping his friend get away with your mother's death.

Buhle: I think when Linda attempted to run after what she witnessed, Kwanele killed her. I have no

idea how the police discovered this, but I'm glad they did otherwise he would have tried to cover it up.

Noxolo: Now that's the best news I've heard in a while.

Buhle: It definitely calls for a celebration.

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Anna Ndebele

I exhaled, and decided to go through with what I've been thinking about the past couple of days. I unlocked my phone, and went into Facebook to write a post. My nerves skyrocketed, but I started typing and soon I was flowing with words.

*Anyone who tells you that teenage pregnancy is nice is lying to you. I'm six months pregnant, and it

hasn't been easy for me. What more when I give birth? (Read comments)

#Speak your truth.*

I published the post and started writing on the comment section.

The first trimester was the hardest with the nausea and cravings. My hormones are always alternating - mood swings. Most of time, I'm tired and I'm doing my final year in high school. Pregnancy while still schooling is not easy. Don't let anyone fool you.

People were reacting, and I continued typing.

Teenage pregnancy is not a mistake!! Yes, myself included. I knew what I was doing when I decided to have sex. I may have not planned it, but it can't be classified as a mistake. I didn't happen to fall on a dick. Series of choices led to this pregnancy.

We don't have streams of income, yet we go and fall pregnant. The responsibility will fall on our guardians because we still want to be given a second chance so we can continue with our studies and pursue our dreams. We're burdening ourselves and our families, nonetheless a child is a blessing but let's stop having children that we are just going to throw to our families to care for.

I fell pregnant while condomising and using contraceptives. REMEMBER THAT PREVENTION METHODS ARE NOT 100%. But if you still choose to have sex, make use of them but do that knowing that you still have chances of falling pregnant.

Unprotected sex is a NO-NO. Not only can you fall pregnant, you put yourself at risk of contracting STDs. Note that I'm not judging anyone, but I don't want any of you to make the same mistakes.

The post was gaining traction at light speed.

Females. The responsibility of prevention does not only fall on males. You let your boyfriend pound into you raw? Be prepared for anything. Take accountability for the role you played. Don't let them smash you raw. Refuse to be manipulated.

You're pregnant? Leave room for disappointment. These niggas can take off anytime. Contracts at this stage can come in handy.

To females who fall pregnant for the grant, STOP! You're burdening taxpayers and you're being unfair to your child.

I will not speak on abortion, but I think everyone has the right to do what they want to do with their bodies.

Learn from others' mistakes. Don't let yourself be another statistic.

Comments were flooding in. I read one.

"It ended in tears." I smiled and responded with laughing emojis. "It definitely did."

-You're a disgrace- I rolled my eyes and scrolled past the comment.

-Atleast you didn't terminate the pregnancy.

ABORTION IS WRONG.- I responded. *You have no business telling people what they should and shouldn't do with their bodies. Unless you're willing to take care of children who will be born in poverty, you shouldn't open your mouth and make people feel guilty for doing what's best for themselves.*

And please don't involve rape into this. We're talking about consent here.

For those who think their insults will move me, you're mistaken. I'm not bothered because I have spoken my truth. You had the option to scroll past this post. I don't see why you want to use vulgar language and insults to get your point across.

I read another comment. -So we mustn't celebrate our children? We must constantly beat ourselves up because of one mistake we committed? Instead of dwelling in regret, we choose to embrace our bundle of joys. The child is here now, and they deserve our love.- I started typing a reply. *No one said you mustn't celebrate your children, but don't mislead your peers by only highlighting the positive aspects of having a child at a young age. There are many negative points to it. All I'm saying is that teenage pregnancy should not be normalised and glorified.*

The amount of shares kept increasing. Another comment came in from Cindy. -I'm proud of you.- I

hearted the comment with a smile and content with myself.

-Thank you. Finally a sensible post. Another thing, women, we ought to do better. You can't allow yourself to be impregnated by a man who doesn't take care of children from his previous relationships. What makes you think that he'll take care of yours?-

-Women, it's time for us to take responsibility for our actions too. When a good guy comes along, we turn him down because we say that he's boring and he doesn't have that thing. And fall pregnant for the bad one but act surprised when he does us dirty. Let's choose better, not only for ourselves but also for our children.-

Buhlenkosi Malinga

After been from my mother's gravestone exhausted, we walked into her house and threw ourselves on the couch.

Noxolo: Nothing has really changed around here.

Me: But it's good to be back here. Life in the cities is draining and overwhelming.

Noxolo: Tell me about it. There is always something going on. There is no peace.

Me: I don't even want to mention the crime. Even a first year varsity student such as myself has experienced it.

Noxolo: Let's hope you're going to stay far away from it. It's dangerous.

Me: I know. I just plan to get my degree, and go on with life. That's all.

Noxolo: What are you planning to do with this house?

Me: You know, I never thought about it.

Noxolo: It's in your name, and I don't think it's a very good idea to leave it unoccupied for months.

Me: You're right. Maybe I should sell it, seeing that I want to cement a life in Joburg.

Noxolo: You're ready to let go of everything that reminds you of your mother? We did have many memories with her here. Maybe you should rent it out to generate an income.

Me: That's a good idea, but none of us have the time to find a potential and trustworthy tenant. And remember that people migrate to urban areas.

Noxolo: I hear you.

Me: I think I'll just leave in my name. I'll ask my uncle to occasionally pop in and check if everything is in order. I mean it will come in handy when life in Joburg knocks me down.

Minutes passed with us sitting in silence.

Me: You should check your list of contacts. I've

saved my uncle's number there.

Noxolo: Why would you do that?

Me: Because he was flattered when I told him that you think he's a snack.

She laughed.

Noxolo: You have a big mouth. I was just admiring God's creation. It's nothing deep.

Me: Matter of fact, before the end of next month, I'm going to make sure that you two are an item.

Noxolo: I don't understand why you can't focus on your own relationship. I can't have a 19 year old matchmaking me with someone. Single life is the best.

Me: Until salt gets you.

She clicked her tongue, and she couldn't help but chortle.

Noxolo: Let's talk about your relationship with Mpilo. What are you hoping for?

Noxolo: I love him and all. I'm just going to take it as it comes. I enjoy being with him. He makes me feel safe.

Narrated

Zenani was showering in prison alone. She stopped thoughts from flooding her mind as the water hit her naked body. Having money came with its peaks. After switching off the water, dripping with water, she got out only to find three women awaiting her. She covered her private parts with her hands. She didn't have a good feeling with these women's presence.

Zenani: What are you doing here?

As Zenani wanted to grab her towel, two of the three women grabbed her forcefully, and pinned her down into a kneeling position.

Zenani: What the hell are you doing? GUARD!

They covered her mouth with her own underwear, and her screams came out in muffles.

The remaining woman with a hanger molded to her own satisfaction, plunged it into Zenani's anus. Zenani screamed to the top of her lungs as an excruciating pain shot through her.

One of the females whispered into her ear. "This is not your mother's house where you think you can do as you please."

Her anal hole felt like it was on fire, and she couldn't help but shed tears. "WE run this ship."

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Mpilo Ngubane

I wheeled my small suitcase into the lounge, and simultaneously someone pounded on the door.

Mpilo: Come in.

I went to the kitchen and grabbed an apple and a cold bottle of water from the refrigerator. I'd eat a full meal on the way.

Qaphela and Thabile walked in, and we exchanged greetings.

Thabile: We seem to have caught you at a bad time. Are you going somewhere?

Their eyes roamed around my apartment, and I placed the apple and bottle on the inbuilt kitchen table, and went to join them in the lounge.

Mpilo: I have an hour to spare before my flight.

Qaphela: Where are you going?

Mpilo: Don't worry about that. What brings both of you here?

They sat down, and I remained standing and leaned against the armrest of one of the couches.

Qaphela: We're alone, right?

Mpilo: Yeah, the family departed yesterday, and Happy is occupying your brother's house.

Thabi: We have a problem.

Mpilo: What's up?

Something seemed to be weighing heavily on them.

Qaphela: I went to see Mthandeni yesterday, and I think the cops have the wrong man.

Mpilo: What do you mean? You think he's really innocent? Of course, he'll say anything to save his skin.

Qaphela: I hear you, but something tells me that he's telling the truth. You could see the desperation in his eyes. I didn't see a man who had just taken out a powerful man.

Mpilo: You guys should let this go. As for Mthandeni, he has a lot of enemies inside. They'll do the job for

you, and you wouldn't have to lift a finger.

Thabi: But we have to find out what really went down at that warehouse.

Mpilo: Okay, what did Mthandeni have to say for himself?

Qaphela: Apparently he got stopped at gunpoint on his way home. Then they drove out of the city, and he was given a bottle of water which he seems sure that it was drugged.

Thabi: Kidnapped by a woman and man. They knew what they were doing. I think they were aware that we were beefing with Mthandeni, and took that as an opportunity to kill Mzi, and cover it up.

Mpilo: You said there was a woman involved? What about Unathi?

Thabi gave Qaphela an intense look.

Mpilo: Don't worry. Qaphela didn't tell me anything. Nothing ever passes me. I know you were involved in

Dube's death.

Qaphela: Dube had a lot of enemies. It could've been any one of them.

Mpilo: True, but over the years, none of them succeeded in taking him out. Thabile managed to take him out because he didn't expect it. A surprise attack.

Thabi: This is bad, because if most of you could connect the dots and make out that I killed him; what about Unathi? What's stopping her from finding out the truth? That I'm the one who framed her?

Mpilo: Because she doesn't know what we know.

Qaphela: So Unathi could be the one who killed my brother?

Mpilo: We don't have enough information to suggest that she was the woman. It could be anyone.

Thabi: But she has a score to settle. First we stopped her from poaching our clients and moving into our territory. Then we pinned Njabulo's death on her.

Mpilo: She must be emotional with her half brother's death. This is unlike her.

Qaphela: You're the perfect person for this, Mpilo. You have a history with her. You could bed her, and find out more.

Thabi: You seem to have a history with the whole female population in this city.

Mpilo: You're exaggerating now, but I'm not doing that. Unathi is not stupid. She'll easily catch on. Moreover, I can't do it. I don't want anything to ruin things with the woman I love.

Thabi: He's right. We're going to have to find another way around this.

Qaphela: Then let's bring Buhle on board.

Thabi: You really think a woman with a sane mind would allow her man to rekindle things with an ex? Be it pleasure or business, it would ruin things between them.

Mpilo: Tell him, please. You need to work with Mthandeni on this. He'll come in handy and point you

in the right direction.

Qaphela: We should always be careful. She could strike again at any moment.

Senzokuhle Ngubane

With my fork and knife, I cut into my ribs, and enjoyed my lunch alone. I was missing my wife a lot, but she was stuck in her village.

I chewed on the meat, and a voice disturbed me. "Don't you think you should cut down on fat? You don't want to be bigger than your suit at the end of the year."

I failed to recognize the owner of the voice, until he came to stand in my line of vision.

Senzo: Mthunzi.

Mthunzi: The man of the moment. I just thought I should come and thank you.

I didn't know how to feel about his presence, but it just took me back to him attempting to break up my marriage.

Senzo: I don't want problems.

Mthunzi: Don't worry. I heard you're getting married at the end of the year. Congratulations, and I just wanted to thank you for inviting me to the wedding even though it came as a surprise considering how things were the last time we saw each other.

I was perplexed by his words. This meant Kamva invited him behind my back.

Senzo: It's not a problem. Have a good day.

Mthunzi: Likewise.

He walked away, and I hauled my cellphone from my jacket dangling over the chair I was rooted on. I called my wife.

Kamva: I was just thinking about you. I miss you so much.

Senzo: I don't understand what's still keeping you there.

Kamva: I don't know but I'm attempting to seek answers about the brewing storm I was warned of.

Senzo: You still haven't gotten a clear answer? I know how the underground gang likes to speak in riddles.

She laughed.

Kamva: Spoken like a true 2000 kid.

Senzo: You wish... I hear that you've sent Mthunzi an invite to our wedding? What happened to close friends and family?

Kamva: I'm sorry. I know I should've talked to you about it.

Senzo: After everything he did, why would you invite him?

Kamva: I wanted him to see the results of his plans with my mother and how they managed to bring us closer together instead of breaking us up.

Senzo: Seriously? I don't understand why you'd choose to invite negative energy to our wedding. You should've cut ties with him.

Kamva: I know, baby but we must shine on our haters.

Senzo: You and your drama.

Kamva: I know I should've spoken to you about it.

Senzo: But we agreed that we'd hold off on the wedding arrangements for now. We just buried one

of us.

Kamva: I know, but I thought I should send out the invitations as early as possible so people can RSVP and save the date. You know people in our circle are always busy.

Senzo: I just don't want us stepping on anyone's toes.

Kamva: It will be fine. Remember that we got married soon after my father's funeral. It doesn't mean that we're celebrating death. It can never be too early for happiness.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I was coming from the royal palace with my aunty, heading home.

Me: You see? I told you that my uncle has a thing for

you.

Noxolo: He was being polite.

Me: You call that being polite? The way you're acting, you show that you've been out of the dating game for a long time now.

Noxolo: And you would know? How many boyfriends have you had? You're annoying now, because you talk to me like you're talking to your peer.

Me: But aunty, you're playing hard to get. It's as if you're doing this to prove me wrong.

Noxolo: Of course. Who do you think you are to bet on my love life?

Me: You're even more stubborn than me.

Noxolo: Let's say I'll give this a try. How is it going to work? I live all the way in Alex, and he's here with a bucketful of responsibilities.

Me: I know, but that's something you can work out in future.

Noxolo: Isn't it obvious? I'll have to move here, and I don't want to be far from my sister again.

Me: You speak like she's a toddler that needs you to hold her hand. She's an adult, and I think this time me and her will be on the same page. You need to give yourself a shot at happiness. You deserve it.

Noxolo: Fine, I'll think about it. Now, will you stop nagging me?

I excitedly clapped my hands. I only wanted to see her happy. She has done so much for me. We walked into the house.

Nothing could ever prepare me for the sight that we walked in. A romantic setup adorned the sitting room. Rose petals, unlit candles and the works. What stunned me more was Mpilo's presence, and he was on one knee with a ring in his fingers. I didn't miss the huge smile on his handsome face. He just reminded me why I loved him so much, but let's rewind back to the ring. Bewilderment had my mouth open.

Noxolo: Surprise!

Me: So this is why you forced me out of the house.

Noxolo: Don't keep a gentleman waiting. Is it going to be a yes or no?

Me: Aunty, he hasn't even said a word... Mpilo, I'm shocked.

Noxolo: Now I have something to nag to you about. Since you couldn't even for one second shut up about what a good couple me and your uncle would make.

I was utterly speechless.

Noxolo: Okay, let me keep quiet. Mpilo, the floor is yours. Make us proud.

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SEASON FINALE

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Awakening from my sleep, I resorted to sitting upright. I smiled when I saw Mpilo in sportswear, but I panicked when the sunlight rays indicated a new day.

Me: Good morning. I should probably go back to my room before auntie wakes up.

Mpilo: She's already up.

Me: She's going to kill me when she finds out I didn't sleep in my room.

Mpilo: It's only a matter of time before we become one, and she better get used to it.

Me: Thank you for yesterday. I didn't expect you to propose. Everything was so surreal.

Mpilo: I thought you might turn me down. I know things are moving fast between us, but I'm sure this is what I want. I want you to be mine.

I blushed profusely, and looked at the diamond ring. It fitted me perfectly.

Me: The ring is beautiful. Thank you. I can't believe that I'm engaged at 19.

Mpilo: Don't worry. Take your time. We'll have the wedding after you graduate.

Me: Where are you going so early in the morning?

Mpilo: I'm going for a run.

Me: I would join you, but I'm not a fan of physical exercise.

On the mat, he started doing burpees to warm up for his run. My smile faded when my aunt banged on the door.

Noxolo: What is your problem, Buhle?

Me: You see, Mpilo? You should've waked me up.

Mpilo: You were sleeping so peacefully. I didn't want to disturb you. Moreover your aunty was already up the minute I opened my eyes.

I narrowed my eyes at him playfully. I could see that he's enjoying this.

Mpilo: Let me go for that run. I'll see you in twenty.

Me: You're going to leave me to face the heat alone?

Mpilo: You'll just tell her that you missed being in my arms.

I clicked my tongue as he laughed and opened the door.

Noxolo: Breakfast is ready.

Mpilo: Thank you, but I'll eat after my jog.

Noxolo: Let's hope you don't get lost. You don't know this place.

Mpilo: I'll be fine.

Aunty walked me, giving me a stern look.

Noxolo: And then? You couldn't behave yourself for one night?

Me: No, aunty. I came to see Mpilo at dawn, and we spent hours talking. Nothing happened.

Noxolo: I hope so, because you wouldn't only be disrespecting me, you would've disrespected your mother's memory. Having sex under your mother's roof?

Me: Aunty, you're making me uncomfortable. I swear nothing of that sort happened.

Noxolo: Well, you better keep your legs closed

atleast until after your lobola negotiations. I know you children of these days, you can't wait for anything. You always want to rush in things.

Me: Aunty.

Noxolo: And I hope you're using protection. You don't want to be like Bongiwe.

Me: Aunty, please.

Noxolo: When is he leaving? It's not going to look good if your uncle finds out you're cohabiting with him.

Me: He's leaving after breakfast. He has a late meeting with a client.

Noxolo: Go have a bath, and we'll eat breakfast together. I'm going to see a friend real quick.

When she left, I dropped back on the bed, with a huge smile. Things were finally looking up, and I was with someone I loved to the moon and back.

Senzokuhle Ngubane

I knocked on Somikazi's bedroom door. She had it locked, and I was getting worried about her. I didn't understand if this was still about Mzi's death, but she was taking it very hard and she was gradually slipping into depression, but she wanted no help.

Senzo: Somi, I'll break this door if you do not open it right this instance.

Somi: Leave me alone.

Senzo: What is going on with you? You're scaring me now.

Somi: Senzo, I just need time to myself. Don't you have a life to get back to?

Senzo: I can't leave you like this.

Somi: Look, if you're worried about me taking my

own life, you can relax. I'm not going to do that.

Senzo: Look, I'm going to drive you back to your house. Happy will look after you. I can't leave you here all alone.

Somi: I'm not alone. Your housekeeper is here. Dora will look after me.

Senzo: We don't pay her to do that. This is not up for discussion.

Somi: I don't want to go to a place that will remind of Mzi. Day and night, I'll keep seeing him. Leave me alone. Is that so hard to do?

I exhaled and did as she wished. Descending the stairs, my cellphone rang in my trousers. I took it out, pressed the green icon and brought it to my ear.

Kamva: My husband.

Senzo: Your sister-in-law is still locking herself in the bedroom.

Kamva: I can't imagine her pain. You need to understand she lost her significant other. It would also kill me to lose you.

Senzo: I don't know. Not even our father's death, did she take it so bad.

Kamva: Her marriage with Mzi may have not been the best, but she loved him a lot. You heard her yourself. She wished she had a chance to fix things.

Senzo: I'm really worried about her.

Kamva: There is one person who could get through to her. Talk to Lwando.

Senzo: Now that you mention it, I haven't seen Lwando in a while. He didn't even make it to the Mzi's funeral. I thought he'd pull through to support his friend.

Kamva: Maybe he's been busy with work.

Senzo: I think they had a fallout.

Kamva: Maybe. But it has to be big for them to go for so long without any contact.

Senzo: I'll talk to him, and find out what's up.

Kamva: Or maybe he's just giving the family space to grieve. He's probably dealing with his own things.

Senzo: I remember Somikazi telling us that he was hijacked, and they left him for the dead.

Kamva: Let's leave people's business, and focus on ourselves... Guess what I'm wearing.

Senzo: You see it fit to play this game when we're hundreds of kilometers apart.

Kamva: You haven't guessed.

Senzo: You have time to play. Let me get to work, before I find someone close by to release the tension.

Kamva: I'd bury both of you alive.

Thabile Mampane

I walked into a clothing store, and scanned through the different sections whilst on the cellphone with my mother.

Mom: So you thought you should not come home these holidays?

Thabi: I'm sorry, ma. There is still a lot to do this side.

Mom: You mean your illegal business?

Thabi: There are a few loose ends I need to tie up, before I can finally leave.

Mom: You do know that your birthday is approaching soon.

I looked at a couple of jeans, feeling the texture and checking the sizes.

Thabi: I'm aware.

Mom: What are you planning to do on the day?

Thabi: I don't know, ma. A birthday is just like any other day. There is really no need for you to fuss over it.

Mom: Nonsense. We must do something special. I'll talk to your cousin about it.

Thabi: How are things that side?

I collided in someone as I turned into another aisle.

Thabi: I'm sorry.

Amanda: I didn't see you there.

I gave her a weak smile, and left her standing there.

Mom: We're not complaining, but things do get hectic. Libone is struggling with her schoolwork. You know how she is. She's too playful.

Thabi: She should've picked subjects she could

handle. I know the excitement of choosing subjects in grade 9, only to go to grade 10 and find out that they're not what you expected them to be. Pure Maths was something else.

I heard someone call out my name.

Thabi: Mom, I'll talk to you later. Love you.

Mom: Love you too.

I disconnected the call, and turned back to hear what Amanda had to say.

Amanda: I'm glad I ran into you. I've been looking for you.

Thabi: I've been busy. Why?

Amanda: I've been meaning to talk to you about something.

Thabi: I'm listening.

Amanda: I don't mean to bring up the past, but Shawn is asking that you visit him in prison. He wants to apologise for what he did.

Thabi: So you finally accept that I've been telling the truth this entire time?

Amanda: I mean he was convicted for the crime. I guess I also owe you an apology.

Thabi: I'll think about it. Is there anything else?

Amanda: I could go with you if being in his presence alone will make you uncomfortable.

Thabi: We'll see.

Amanda: How about we meet for drinks tomorrow?

Thabi: I meant it when I said I'm very busy.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Noxolo: Today I want to make the bastard feel the pain we've felt for months.

Me: Aunty, we must take it easy on him.

Noxolo: Easy for what? Did he take it easy on us?

Me: I'm kidding.

Kwanele finally came through, and you'd swear we were in a staring contest. Shame, auntie Nox didn't hold back.

Noxolo: Yes, dog. Remember us?

Kwanele: How could I forget you?

Me: Finally my prayers have been answered. Your day has finally come. Every dog has its day.

Kwanele: It doesn't matter what you say, because it seems that you forget easily. I took on the father role in your life, Buhle. I don't even get a thanks for the good job I did?

Me: Wonders never cease to end. Father role, my foot. All you managed to do was scar my childhood. You're a coward. Top range of cowards. The only thing you're tops at, is victimising women.

Noxolo: I didn't forget that you tried to kill me. Now you'll be made a bitch inside, and I hope they drill and drill your anus.

Me: Auntie, is it ironic that the same people who covered up for him are the same people he killed?

Noxolo: He's just a dog. It's a pity that he couldn't stay loyal to the person who held his freedom.

Me: What goes around comes back around. That's life for you.

The hatred we felt for this man filled the entire space.

Kwanele: What are you doing here? You came here to gloat? What? Did you expect an apology from me?

Noxolo: I see prison hasn't changed you. Very soon, you'll swallow your words. I tell you.

Kwanele: Guard, I'm done here.

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SEASON FINALE

Two weeks later

Narrated

Zenani's boyfriend, Sifiso had appeared at the prison to visit Zenani.

Sifiso: It seems that you're better.

Zenani's eyes darted around to her fellow prisoners

being visited by their loved ones too.

Sifiso: Is your butt coming along right?

Zenani: I'm glad to see that my pain is amusing to you. But to answer your question, it is still uncomfortable to sit here and there.

Sifiso: Had you agreed to having anal sex with me, the pain wouldn't be too extreme. You'd have gotten used to it.

Zenani: Piss off. I didn't call you here to make jokes about my pain.

Sifiso: What's up?

Zenani: My stay in this place is hell. Those women don't want to leave me alone, and they're pissing me off with each passing day.

Sifiso: I can see that they have rearranged your face.

He chuckled.

Zenani: I'm not laughing, Sifiso.

Sifiso: What do you need me to do?

Zenani: The problem is that I have created lots of enemies for myself over the years. I'm going to need to put the most feared woman of the prison in her place, and automatically everyone will leave me alone. I need to kill her, and I'm going need you to help me with a weapon.

Sifiso: I would advise you not to go down that route. It will end badly for you.

Zenani: I need to bulldoze them. My patience has ran out, Sifiso. I'm not anyone's plaything, and I'm going make sure I send that message to the entire female wing.

Sifiso: You could be locked in solitary confinement for days. Worst scenario, you'll be adding more years to your sentence. My advice to you. Attempt to blend in. Stay in your lane.

Zenani: I'm constantly provoked, Sifiso.

Sifiso: Establish a gang of your own, or join the

opposition of the gang that is harrassing you.

Zenani: I'm going to lose my mind soon, and this is Nikiwe's fault. I hope they're doing far more worse things to her.

Sifiso: You're really not cut out for prison.

Zenani: This place is way below my standards. Are you going to help me with the weapon?

Sifiso: I'll see what I can do, but you also need to be smart about this. There are so many ways you could improvise. There are a lot of things you can use to make a weapon. Think of something. A toothbrush. Shoelaces. Don't you have kitchen or garden duties? Prison rule number 1: always be aware of your surroundings.

Zenani smiled, the wheels turning in her head - plans formulating.

Zenani: You see why I love you so much. You make things easier for me.

I'll think of something.

Thabile Mampane

My nerves were shooting through the roof. I kept fidgeting with my fingers. It was one thing to put people in their lanes, but it was another to be confronted by the demons of your past. Amanda stroked my back. She attempted so hard to be there for me, and this decision, I made with great hesitation.

Amanda: We can leave if you want to. You don't have to do this if you're not completely ready. My brother was one of the people who took away a part of you, and I can understand how hard this is for you.

Thabi: I want to do this... I'll be fine.

Amanda: Are you sure about that? You can always change your mind.

Thabi: I have to do this if I want to move past that incident. It's just that it's being so long not thinking about it, and now everything is coming back to me.

Seeing Shawn being brought to the table we occupied made my eyes well up with tears. I thought of that fateful evening whereby they had forcefully ripped out a part of me. The memories were vivid in my mind, and I remembered my pleas and screams which fell on deaf ears. Rather they had their pleasure at my expense. I reminisced the painful words they threw at me. My tears escaped, and I wiped them off quickly.

I didn't know how to feel about the look in Shawn's eyes. It was a mixture of regret and remorse. It completely set me off.

Shawn: I don't even know where to begin. Words will never be enough to express how sorry I am... Thabile, I am sorry for being a part of your pain, and a past you wouldn't like to revisit. I know no matter what I say, it will never erase the damage my actions have caused you. I am so sorry. It's just a pity that it took my own rape to understand the trauma of it all. Not only did we hurt you with our actions, our words also did. Thank you for giving me a chance to talk to you today. I'm sorry for everything. The last thing I expect from you is your forgiveness, because I know what I did was unforgivable, but your presence here is enough for me. I'm truly sorry...

His apology flew over my head, and my mind unable to deal with the memories of the whole ordeal and my heart shattering all over again, I ran off. Amanda seemed to be hot on my tracks and she stopped me, taking me into her arms.

Thabi: That reminded me of how powerless I used to

be. Not anymore. I'm not that girl anymore.

Amanda: It's okay. The pain never completely goes away.

I pulled away from her embrace and composed myself. Everything I had buried away dug itself up, but I was now a female with power. Not only in the outside world, but also within me. We went to sign out, and Amanda headed with me to the dormitory.

Noxolo Ndebele

Buhle's anxiety had her by the tits. She looked beautiful in a headwrap, and a traditional attire. Her lobola negotiations were underway, and she kept blabbering about the things that could go wrong. I could see that my niece loved Mpilo a lot and it was rare to see such a carefree and beautiful love. As

much as they were moving fast, relationships had no formula.

On my side, I had finally accepted the way things played out and I was moving forward away from the past.

Noxolo: Buhle, please relax. You're going to drive me crazy.

Buhle: I'm just scared. I hope everything goes well.

Noxolo: Everything will. Don't worry yourself too much about it.

Buhle: Aunty, I hope my uncles don't ruin things for me. Some people love money too much and I hope that they don't set the bar too high.

Noxolo: I think given the chance, Mpilo would pay any amount. Don't sell yourself short. You deserve every cent.

Buhle: I hope everything goes well, because I need to go back to Joburg. Varsity has reopened and I'm

here.

Noxolo: Please stop worrying, Buhle. Everything will go well. You'll be back to school tomorrow. You have friends that are sending you the notes, right?

Buhle: I do, but everything is just nervewrecking.

Noxolo: You're doing well with your studies so far. You'll be fine. Stop giving yourself unnecessary stress.

Buhle: You're right. This is a time to rejoice. I'm going to be with the man I love. I'm happy and life is good.

I shook my head with a small smile, and she came to sit with me on the bed, after pacing up and down the length of the entire room.

Buhle: But Mpilo and I meant it when we said that we're not going to get married until you pursue a relationship with my uncle and see where it takes you.

Noxolo: Shame, you're setting yourself up for failure

because you'll wait forever.

Buhle: We'll do a double wedding.

Noxolo: You dream too much, but I'm hitting it off well with Mandlakhe. But wedding bells? Too soon.

Buhle: We'll see.

Kamva walked into the room, and placed a tray housing two glasses of apple juice on the pedestal.

Kamva: I think they're going to wrap up the negotiations soon. But Buhle, I must commend you for your bravery. You're brave, girl.

Buhle: What are you talking about?

Kamva: I mean you grew seeing your mother being in an abusive relationship. Abused by the man she loved. It takes guts to do what you're doing. Let's hope Mpilo doesn't change on you.

This girl needed a hot smack from me. What

nonsense was she spewing? It would do her good to stay away from Buhle with her negative energy. She walked out, and closed the door.

Noxolo: Wat gaan aan met jou suster? Jealous much?

Buhle: Don't mind her. She doesn't see it, but she's behaving exactly like her mother.

Noxolo: The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

Thabile Mampane

I was having a good time with Amanda. We were catching up on everything, but I kept my secrets away from her. I didn't trust anyone, and Amanda was the last person to talk to about serious things. We just conversed about her job and the trivial things that happened the past few months since our

fallout. Later we decided to watch a series on my laptop, indulging in snacks. I started getting hot when an explicit scene came on screen, and I could see that Amanda was also moved. I cleared my throat, and was surprised when she moved in for a kiss. My eyes widened to the size of saucers, and I stopped her.

Thabi: What are you doing?

Amanda: I think it was the right thing to do. The action was happening on screen, and it's only right that it also happens offscreen. I heard girls fuck better than boys.

I laughed a bit.

Thabi: What happened to your boyfriend?

Amanda: I broke up with him. I was tired of him. I always had this fantasy to explore lesbian sex with you.

Thabi: Amanda, you're crazy. I'm sorry, but you're going to have find someone else to fulfil this fantasy you have, because I like someone else.

Amanda: What a disappointment. Is it Buhle?

Surprisingly things between me and Amanda weren't awkward after the stunt she pulled. Amanda was just forward like that.

Thabi: What? No. It's a man.

Amanda: So you're telling me that you haven't made a move? You're worse, Thabile. Do I know him?

Thabi: No, but me and him have grown close over the past few months. At first, I resented him but I began to like him as time went on.

Amanda: So he doesn't know?

I shook my head.

Amanda: You're slow, girl. If he's as hot as I know you love them, someone else will beat you to it and snatch him from you.

Thabi: It's too complicated. I don't even think he sees me as someone worthy to be his committed partner.

Amanda: I'll help you get him. Just to make up for the kak friend I've been.

Thabi: I don't know what makes you think that I can't get him on my own? You know how I used to chow hotties, both girls and boys.

Amanda: Something is holding you back. Does it have anything to do with what happened earlier on?

Thabi: The rape incident?

Kamvelihle Ngubane

When the uncles from Mpilo's side were departing, I

offered to walk them out. Seemed like everything went well, but not for long. I had a trick up my sleeve.

I took out my phone from my pocket, and accessed my gallery. I quickly looked for Buhle's sextape with Bandile and played it for the uncles before they clambered into their vehicle.

Kamva: See? That's who your daughter in law is. I hope you're ready.

I could see the shock on their faces, and they threw a comment here and there. But I cut everything short, bid them goodbye and trotted back to the palace with a sly smile.

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SEASON FINALE

Noxolo Ndebele

I watched Mandlakhe roam around the garden in his palace with his cellphone pressed to his ear. The previous day he asked me out for a picnic lunch, and it didn't take much for him to convince me. I was happy that Buhle's day went exceptionally well yesterday; it was time I got my own groove back. My sister's voice snapped me out of my reverie. I focused my attention back on the cellphone.

Khethiwe: I will only let your absence pass because you're getting it on with a rich king.

Noxolo: I'm just getting to know him. I can't deny that I'm starting to feel something.

Khethiwe: Then by all means, go for it. I don't see any reason why you want to hold back. This could be your chance at happiness.

Noxolo: I hear you, but I don't think I'm ready for the changes that will happen if something serious comes out of this.

Khethiwe: Please. As if you didn't abandon us for years to that place; it wasn't even about hiding anymore, you decided to settle in that place. I don't understand what's there to think about. Go with the flow, and this time, you're doing it for your happiness, Nox.

Noxolo: Say things escalate and things between him and I get serious. What do I know about royalty? We're talking about people high on the social ladder. I'm just a hood woman who speaks slang and tsotsitaal. I was a criminal before. I don't know nothing about this.

Khethiwe: What I like about you is that you adjust easily to change. Everything that you're talking about is not important. You'll cross that bridge when you get there. For now, just have fun and stop thinking about the differences between the two of you.

Noxolo: Who could have known that you do give

sensible advice?

Khethiwe: Piss off. You better make sure that things work out with that man. Otherwise I'm telling you. When you come back, I'm pairing you with Kaizer.

Laughter surged through me.

Noxolo: You're mad. Kaizer is like a brother to me. A romantic relationship with him is out of the question.

Khethiwe: Yet once upon a time, you were willing to carry his seed.

Noxolo: I'll talk to you later. Tell Bongiwe that I'm proud of her. I saw her post on Facebook. It takes guts to do what she did. Especially with the stigma of pregnant teenagers.

I noticed Mandlakhe making his way back to our spot under the shade of a tree.

Khethiwe: I still can't believe you're dismissing me for a new dick.

Noxolo: Yoh, ha.a Khethiwe. You'll be the death of me.

Khethiwe: I'm kidding. We'll talk.

She hung up, and Mandlakhe sat down on the blanket I was on.

Mandlakhe: I'm sorry I took long. It was an important call.

Noxolo: I didn't mind. I got time to catch with my sister.

Mandlakhe: I hope you were telling her only good things about me.

He leaned forward, and tucked a single rose behind my ear, surprising me.

Noxolo: You're making me feel like a teenager.

Mandlakhe: That's the aim. Who said that romance is only for the young? We're still in our 40s and we must show these children how it's done.

Noxolo: You're definitely different from the way Buhle described you.

Mandlakhe: Buhle and I don't know each other that well. But I'm glad to see that my charm is working on you.

Noxolo: You're something else, you know.

Mandlakhe: Food will be ready in 15.

Noxolo: And here I thought that you're going to be the one who cooks for us. You disappoint me.

Mandlakhe: I'll satisfy you in other departments.

Oh my gosh, I couldn't contain my laughter, and he joined me until we were out of breath. I was definitely enjoying his company.

Mpilo Ngubane

After my shower, I pulled on my trackpants. Proceeding to the kitchen whereby my love was, my cellphone rang on the pedestal. I picked it up before I had the chance to depart from my bedroom. At seeing my mother's image, I heaved a sigh and answered the call.

Mpilo: Morning, ma.

Her: So it wasn't enough that you didn't tell me about your plans to marry that girl; I had to find out from your brother. Now I have to deal with your uncles.

Mpilo: Ma, what is it?

Her: Your uncles are not happy with your choice.

Mpilo: What changed? They were more than happy to handle the negotiations. I hope you didn't say

anything to them. It's no secret that you don't like Buhle.

Her: Disgusted is an understatement. They have seen your girl's sextape, and I promise that I had nothing to do with that. They're telling me that they can't let you go ahead and marry that girl.

Mpilo: Ma, I'm in a very happy mood, and I'm not going to let you or anyone else ruin my day. I'm tired of fighting over one thing.

This was getting old. I meant it when I told Buhle that she was bigger than her past and I'm sticking to it. She was my happiness. People should find something else to ruin.

Her: Couldn't you have picked another girl? That girl of yours is bringing drama into our family and she's not worth it.

Mpilo: Luckily I'm going to be the one spending the rest of my life with her, not you. Ma, I love you but

I'm not going to let you or anyone else dictate the way I should live my life. I'm an adult.

Her: So we must just accept this? Have you even thought of how you'd be dragging our name through the mud? What is it with her?

Mpilo: Ma, I have to get ready for work. Bye.

Her: I tried, but just know that your uncles are not going to go easy on you.

I disconnected the call and rid myself of the irritation pulsating in me before I trod to the kitchen. Seeing Buhle slaving around in the kitchen in my shirt brought a smile to my face. The conversation I had with my mother forgotten. I went to hug her from behind, and planted a kiss on her neck.

Mpilo: Good morning, beautiful.

Buhle: Morning. I've made you breakfast. Eat up, and I'll go take a shower.

I went to settle on the highchair, and moments later she slid me a plate of scrambled eggs, bacon, two slices of toast and sausages along with a cup of black coffee without sugar.

Mpilo: You outdid yourself, but on second thoughts, how about I enjoy you for that shower?

Buhle: Didn't you just have one?

Mpilo: But we can pick up where we left off last night.

Buhle: Not happening. You're going to delay me even more. I need to get to campus.

Mpilo: I love you. You hear me?

Buhle: I love you too. Let me go before you convince me otherwise.

Mpilo: Don't worry. School comes first. I have a lot of work to get through myself.

Buhle: Thatha Mr Lawyer.

I clicked my tongue, and she retreated in laughter.

My shirt on her looked damn sexy. I shook my head, and indulged in the breakfast prepared for me.

Narrated

Kamva started packing her clothing and toiletries for in a hour she was heading back to Joburg.

The events of yesterday had completely slipped her mind, and she halted her packing when her phone rang.

On the other side of the line, Nikiwe dialled her daughter's number from prison. As much as she wasn't happy about how things crashed between them, she still loved her and wanted to make things right.

Kamva: Hello. Who is this?

Nikiwe: My child, please don't hang up. I have something important to tell you.

Kamva clicked her tongue, and tossed her cellphone to her bed without hanging up unwittingly. She continued stuffing her clothing into her suitcase whilst her mother talked unaware that her daughter was not listening.

Kamva: I must change my number. If prison rats can still reach me, I will never have peace in my life.

She couldn't hear her mother on the phone.

Nikiwe: Kamva, it is crucial that you go to see your aunt. She's probably the only one who can help you out of this. She resorted to witchcraft because she

was angry with you. You're the only one who can get through to her. I have faith that there is a way to reverse all of this. Otherwise your life will be a mess. You'll mess everything around you. Please listen to me. I know that you want nothing to do with me, but I'm looking out for you.

Nikiwe paused.

Nikiwe: Kamva? Hello? Kamva, please talk to me. I hope that you're listening to me. This is important.

A prisoner tapped Nikiwe on the back. "Piss off wena. You're wasting our time. Move. You're not calling with your iPhone here."

Thabile Mampane

Amanda bid me goodbye at a restaurant with a hug. She whispered into my ear, and acknowledged Qaphela before she walked away.

Amanda: Remember what we talked about.

When Amanda was finally gone, Qaphela's face softened.

Thabi: You didn't have to be cold to her.

Qaphela: I don't trust her. There is something off about her.

Thabi: She's forward, I know. But she's harmless, and I'm not telling her anything that I'm not supposed to.

Qaphela: Okay. Just be careful.

Thabi: Have you found anything?

Qaphela: Bra, it's just dead ends after dead ends. Nothing points Unathi to this other than the fact that she's a woman, and she could have a score to settle.

Thabi: Maybe we're looking in the wrong place. Find out all the women who were close and acquainted with Mzi. We'll investigate them all, but please promise me one thing.

He looked me with questioning eyes. It took a lot in me to keep things between us platonic and professional for now. One thing I was good at was hiding my emotions.

Thabi: That you're not going to attack Unathi without any proof. I lost my father because someone jumped to conclusions. For all we know, Mthandeni could be lying to us. There are too many possibilities around this.

Qaphela: My father wants the killer's head. Very soon, he'll take matters into his own hands and I'm telling you. He'll kill everyone he thinks could have killed his

son. That man is ruthless.

Thabi: You're his son. Make him see reason. We'll find out the truth, but we can't just kill innocent people.

Qaphela: But I'll have to warn you. My father thinks you're one of the people he must investigate.

My eyes popped. I was shocked.

Thabi: Your father thinks that I killed Mzi?

Qaphela: For the drug business. He thinks you're going after me next.

Thabi: Don't tell me that you believe that. I'm still an amateur in this. Moreover I told you that I want to leave this business.

Qaphela: The fact that I'm telling you about this means that you didn't do it. We spend most of the time together. Where would you find the time to kill Mzi unless you hired someone? But I know you by now, you do things yourself.

Thabi: Damn, someone must sleep with one eye open because your father might take me out at any moment.

Qaphela: It's not only you he suspects. Somikazi is also on the list. But he thinks that she took an 'un-calculated' risk since she didn't receive much from Mzi's will. That man is going to make sure that he leaves no stone unturned.

Thabi: Q, your father is intense.

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SEASON FINALE

Senzokuhle Ngubane

Amanda walked in, and gave me a file I requested. I attempted to page through it, but I couldn't

concentrate on my work. A lot of things raced through my mind.

Amanda: Are you okay?

Senzo: I don't know.

Amanda: It's a good thing you asked me to postpone all your meetings for today. You don't look ready to tackle clients.

Senzo: I'm worried about my sister. Life for the rest of us is going on as normal, but she's drowning and I don't know how to help her.

Amanda: It will get better.

Senzo: Mpilo is now an engaged man, and I'm getting remarried in a few months. We're celebrating love while one of our own lost her love.

Amanda: Buhle and Mpilo are engaged? That's news to me. Is it me or they're moving ridiculously fast?

Senzo: As long as they are happy, then by all means they can move as fast as they want.

Amanda: You're right. Going back to the issue of your sister, the best option would be to seek therapy for her. She's definitely showing signs of a depressed person, and trust me, you need to do something before she falls deeper into that hole.

Senzo: I'll look into it.

Amanda: Please do, because mental health is very important. And the last thing you want is for your sister to be depressed, because believe me, it's hard to pull yourself out of that state.

Senzo: Speaking from experience?

Amanda: Yes. When you're depressed, it's like a part of you dies. You become this empty vessel and sometimes it's hard to identify the cause of your sadness. Happiness is shortlived and you get these sudden waves of melancholy crashing against you every now and then. The things you used to enjoy doing, you lose the motivation and energy to do them. It's frustrating, honestly. I remember always having a lack of appetite and lost so much weight. Surprising, because I loved food. Yeyi, food was my

life. I swear suffering from depression while still schooling should be included in a thousand ways to die.

Senzo: Yet you're still alive. It sounds like a daunting journey, but I can't relate. I choose not to dwell much on things. I take everything as it comes.

Amanda: I didn't expect you to relate, because how the hell you depressed when you have money?

I let out a short laugh.

Senzo: Now that's some stereotype bullshit.

Amanda: I'm joking, because mental illnesses affect everyone. Rich or poor, when it comes for you, it will get you. And we've been working together for months now, you should know not to take most of the things I say seriously.

Senzo: I'm drained, and in an hour-

I looked at my wristwatch.

Senzo: Kamva is dragging me to meet our wedding planner.

Amanda: Nice life problems. Anyways let me get back to work. You'll let me know when you need something.

Senzo: Sure.

She departed, and I attempted to focus on my work for the next hour.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I met Thabile on campus, and we navigated our way to our room.

Thabi: I still can't believe that you're engaged.

Me: You're not the only one. Had anyone told me months ago that my life would be looking up for me, I wouldn't have believed them. I've never been so happy in my life.

Thabi: I'll patiently wait to be honoured as a bridesmaid.

Me: I got you covered.

Thabi: That's more like it.

Me: It's a good thing you're taking me out. I missed going out.

Thabi: We must celebrate. Very soon, Mpilo will be taking up all your time.

Me: Things will happen as they should. I know I have no worries when I'm with Mpilo.

Thabi: That's cute but there's a lot I still need to update you on.

We walked in our room, and I tossed my backpack to the bed, and rummaged through my clothing for a good outfit to wear.

Thabi: So you don't have any more classes today?

Me: No, you?

Thabi: No. That means shopping, and more shopping. My treat.

Me: Wait a bit with that. Tomorrow is someone's birthday, and she's standing right in front of me. Tomorrow, I'm paying.

I was so excited for the future ahead.

Thabi: Oh that.

Me: Oh that? You could sound a little more enthusiastic.

Thabi: Argh, it's just that I'll be turning 20, and I've seen and experienced shit that tends to only happen

in movies. So all in all, my excitement lies in another things.

Me: I wonder what those other things are.

Thabi: Baby girl, have you ever held a gun in your hand? That shit is empowering.

Me: I don't know where they picked you up. Anyway, what were you planning to do tomorrow?

Thabi: My mother and cousin are coming down here. We'll see.

I tallied a dress against my body.

Thabi: You'd look bomb in that dress.

Me: Forget that. What's the story with Amanda?

Thabi: What do you mean?

Me: Why did you let her back into your life? Out of all people you could have chosen to rekindle a friendship with, you went for that snake? Overlooking Dimpho and your other friends, you

chose Amanda?

Thabi: It's not a big deal.

Me: Girl, you'll regret it. Amanda akana inner peace. You know? She reminds of Kamva.

Thabi: And how are things between the two of you?

Me: Gods know I've attempted so many times to fix our relationship, but I fail at every turn. I figured maybe it's better we continue having a dislike for each other. Because no matter what I do, Kamva finds fault in it. It's like she doesn't want to see me happy.

Thabi: Wasn't this entire hate sparked by her mother?

Me: You were right. An apple doesn't fall far from its tree. Kamva has this dark side to her and she showed it to us when she planted drugs on her own mother without any second thought. You can't grow up surrounded by snakes, and turn out to be a lizard. Impossible.

Thabi: Just so you know, that ring looks fly.

Me: That was so random, but I know. My man has

splendid taste.

We broke out into a loud laughter.

Noxolo Ndebele

Mandlakhe and I were walking in the streets. We turned heads wherever we passed by. Understandably, because he was their king. A guard was following behind us at a distance. We uttered random words and phrases to get to know each other better. Some of the stares I got from women around here weren't so friendly, but my attention was on the man whom I was rapidly growing fond of beside me.

Noxolo: Married before?

Mandlakhe: No, you?

Noxolo: Your family didn't attempt to arrange a marriage for you? I know the drill with royal families.

Mandlakhe: Didn't give them a chance to.

Noxolo: I was scared you might be hiding an entire wife from me, but we're the same. I also never got married.

Mandlakhe: Career wise?

Noxolo: Let's just say I'm a hustler. Story for another day.

Mandlakhe: Okay. I'm a retired soldier. It gets traumatic with the wars and bloodshed, but I took it up because I wanted away from my family. Months and years could pass before I could see them. Did me good because I was away from negativity and a toxic environment.

Noxolo: Let's not get too heavy. We don't want your people to see you in tears.

He playfully clicked his tongue.

Mandlakhe: But I'm back, and things are in a better place.

Noxolo: I'm glad.

Mandlakhe: Kids?

I sighed. That was still a fresh wound.

Noxolo: I can't have them, but I'd have really liked to.

I think he could see that I wasn't very keen on that topic, and he didn't probe further.

Mandlakhe: I have a son that I recently discovered.

Noxolo: Really? Any baby mama drama?

Mandlakhe: Not even. I'll explain the entire story to you when we got time.

I just nodded, and we continued on our path.

Mandlakhe: Siblings?

Noxolo: Milestones?

We spoke at the same time, and him being a gentleman, he let me continue.

Somikazi Nkosi

The word empty described me perfectly. I didn't know how to move past everything I did. Happy appeared on the patio whereby I was basking in the sun. At least today I had found the energy to get out of bed.

Happy: Finally. Does this mean that my sister is back?

Somi: I'm not in the idea, Happy.

Happy: This is not on. Living with you is like living with a corpse now. It's been a month of moping around, dade. It's enough now.

Somi: You're more than welcome to leave.

Happy: Instead of spending your days feeling sorry for yourself, you could invest that time into something else.

Somi: I thought we agreed that when you move in, you'll give me peace.

Happy: Look at yourself, Somi. Your eyes are forever swollen surrounded by dark circles. You're always locked up in your room. You're even starting to lose weight. I know you're still grieving your husband, but this is too much now.

Somi: You'll leave my house.

Happy: Perfect opportunity for you to starve yourself to death? Find something to do that will take your mind off things. Maybe contest Mzi's will.

Somi: Are you hearing yourself?

Happy: It's better than sitting here and depressing all of us. Moreover after everything Mzi did to you, he should've left you his entire estate. It's the least he could have done. I know he amended his will the period after you served him divorce papers, but still.

Somi: My husband is gone, and you think I care about his riches?

Happy: I give up on you. You're cramping my style.

I rolled my eyes and ignored her. She was completely insensitive towards my feelings, and very soon, I'd want her out of my house. She failed to give me peace. Always on my case. Damn, she wasn't living up to her name.

Narrated

Amanda tidied up her desk as she was knocking off. She passed by her boss' office and peaked in with her head only at Senzokuhle.

Amanda: I'm going. Is there anything you need before I leave?

Senzo: I just came back to collect a file. I'm fine.

Amanda: Well, have a good evening and thank you for giving me the day off tomorrow.

Senzo: As long as everything is organized, and I won't struggle without my PA for the day.

She walked off and used her cellphone to request a cab. Her phone rang, and when she saw the familiar number, she heaved a sigh and answered it.

Voice: I'm running out of patience.

Amanda: I did say I'll get you the information you

want. You don't have to remind me every chance you get.

Voice: This is not rocket science. What I want is very simple.

Amanda: Thabile is beginning to warm up to me.

Voice: Look, all I want is something I can use. I didn't ask for Thabile's deepest darkest secrets. All I need you to do is find me an opportunity whereby I can implement my plan. It shouldn't be this hard.

Amanda: Fine, I'll keep in touch.

Voice: This week. I want results, or else the deal is off the table.

Amanda: Please don't. I'll give you what you want.

Amanda couldn't afford to fail at surprising her brother and family by getting Shawn an early parole.

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I'm sorry for the slow updates, but I'm starting to

write tomorrow. I want to finish the story as soon as possible so I'll keep pushing.

Sleep well

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SEASON FINALE

Buhlenkosi Malinga

Today I was an early bird. Happiness just radiated off me and I noticed I had this glow. Must be the ring. I smiled, thinking about Mpilo. On top of that, it was Thabile's birthday. I was excited and joyful because this is the same woman who looked out for me and had me covered in the most difficult times of my life. I had gotten to know her in the shortest time, but I was glad of our friendship because she was definitely a friend for keeps. It was going to be a blast of a weekend.

My phone rang and I stopped highlighting some notes in my textbook and reached for it. It was Thabile's mom.

Me: Good morning, ma.

Her: And how are you, my child?

Me: I'm good and you?

Her: I'm good. Is the plan still on track?

Me: It would be if your daughter was awake.

Her: I know her too well. If it was up to her, she'd sleep for three years straight.

Me: That's true... She's lucky to have you as her mother. I doubt she has it figured out that you plan to surprise her with a car.

Her: Just checking in.

Me: Not a problem.

Her: I'm just attempting my best to fill in the void of

her father. He'd have gone all out. What I'm doing is just a drop in the ocean.

I faintly smiled, thinking of my own parents. Auntie Nox filled in that gap, but at times, I'd be reminded of them. I noticed Thabi stir on her bed.

Me: She's waking up.

Her: Let me videocall.

Me: Okay.

The call ended, and soon enough a videocall came through and Thabile's mom and cousin's faces filled the screen. I skipped to Thabi's bed and pounced onto her, and she groaned, opening her eyes.

Thabi: What are you doing? So early in the morning.

We started singing for her.

Thabi: Oh gosh. Not this again.

Thabi's mom: Wake you. The sun is already blazing hot.

Libone: Cuz, I wish I was you right now. When I think of your gift, I drip with envy.

Thabi's mom: And we're looking at it right now.

There was shuffling and movement on their side, until a midnight black BMW model came into view. Excitement started appearing in Thabile. She was now fully awake.

Thabi: No! Tell me it's not a dream! You didn't, ma.

Libone: I told her to get the car in blue, but she didn't listen.

She started screaming, and I laughed. Her mom revved the engine, and the sound was of a beast.

Thabi: Damn, Buhle. Where is my toiletry bag? But wait, you're not in town.

Thabi's mom: Who said so?

Thabi: I knew that parking lot was familiar.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Being in this place was slowly but surely taking away my dignity and my strength. Most of the time I was exhausted, and walked around looking like a zombie and avoided stepping on people's toes. Something I excelled in was being a mastermind, and not a fighter therefore I stayed losing in prison. But I had to think of ways to survive in this place, and not

create any enemies for myself. Soon they'll be focused on newbies. I mean that's how they operate.

I thanked Sifiso for coming through and I intensely looked at Zenani's boyfriend sitting across me.

Nikiwe: Thank you for coming. I appreciate it.

Sifiso: I take you as a sister. It's no sweat. But you don't look any better than your sister.

Nikiwe: Prison isn't child's play. There is always something going on.

Sifiso: What can I do for you?

Nikiwe: I want you to relay a message to Zenani.

One thing, Zenani was stubborn but I probably was the only one who could get her to listen.

Sifiso: What's up? I doubt she will listen. You know

how she is.

Nikiwe: I need you to get her to stop her nonsense. She must reverse her spell and not involve my daughter in her games.

Sifiso: What has she done now?

Nikiwe: Just talk to her, and she'll get it.

Sifiso: I'll try, but whatever it is, you know that your sister is hardheaded.

Nikiwe: I'm just scared for my daughter. Me and Zenani are paying for our sins, but Kamva had nothing to do with this. The thing is I know how witchcraft can ruin lives, and I don't want my only daughter to suffer at the hands of her aunt. I owe her this much.

Sifiso: I'm not even interested in knowing what Zenani did this time. I've put up a lot with her and I've gotten used to her never backing no matter what. She can be dying, but she'll still spend that little time she has to make her enemies pay.

Nikiwe: Nothing can break my sister, that much I

know.

Sifiso: Let me see what I can do. I'll attempt to have you both in the same prison. At least that way, you can look out for each other.

Nikiwe: Thank you.

Sifiso: I'm not promising anything, but I'll try my best. I will also try to smuggle in cellphones for you and Zenani so you can communicate with each other and me.

A smile decorated my face.

Nikiwe: Thank you so much. Zenani is lucky to have you. While everyone turned their backs on us, you're still here looking out for us.

Sifiso: You and your sister must make up now. Though it wasn't a good move to have her arrested.

Nikiwe: I know. Perhaps she might escape this, but for me, there is no way out. They have too much evidence against me.

Thabile Mampane

I was in a bubble of happiness. When I revved the car, it did something to me. I circled it, admiring the car. Yeyi, the excitement couldn't compare to anything. A car was never on my mind, but now that it was here, I thought of the different places I'd frequent. No more cabs.

My mother had checked in herself and Libone at the hotel, and soon enough Qaphela had come to join the party, and wished me a happy birthday. Buhle was taking videos.

Mom: Don't you want to take it for a spin?

Thabi: I definitely will, but right now I'm so famished.

Buhle: Expected. The way she bolted out of bed and had the quickest shower; something she never did. Her excitement is on drugs.

Thabi: Thank you, ma. This is legit the best gift.

Mom: Don't think that because you have this car now, you can misbehave. I will easily return it to the dealership.

Thabi: Ma, please don't start.

Libone: When was the last time you were in the driver's seat of a car? I don't want to die young. I don't trust your driving.

Thabi: What's there to question? I have my driver's license.

Libone: The way you're shaking right now, you make it obvious that you bought it.

I burst out laughing.

Thabi: Have you forgotten that I had the best teacher?

Pa made sure of it. The experience I have, controlling a truck is nothing.

Libone: Do you hear yourself? You're just lucky that it is automatic. Give you a manual, you'd kill us all.

Mom: We all miss your father.

We moved to a more painful reality. A reality without my father. This had to be a bittersweet moment.

Libone: And here I was thinking who would give me driving lessons?

Mom: Why look far when you have me?

Thabi: No offense, ma but every time we're in your car, the heart attacks we get. I can't.

Mom: You're crazy. I'm the best driver this world has.

It was good that all the people I loved were in the same space.

Buhle: I'm going to go inside and check on the food.

Mom: Let me come with you.

Libone: Right behind you guys.

They headed to the entrance of the building, and I was left with Qaphela.

Qaphela: Finally, we're alone. I can borrow the car in peace. Bring the keys.

My words were swallowed when Amanda cleared her throat beside us. When did she even get here?

Thabi: Amanda.

Amanda: I just thought I should come and wish you a happy birthday.

I tossed the car keys to Qaphela, and pulled Amanda aside.

Thabi: And you couldn't do that over the phone?

Amanda: Tjoh, why so cold? Did you wake up on the wrong side of your bed?

Thabi: I don't think I like this thing of always running into you. It makes me think that it's more than a coincidence.

Amanda: Your location was tagged on the photos you posted earlier on.

Thabi: Oh.

Amanda: I see you bought a new car. Congratulations.

Thabi: Thank you, but from here on, I want nothing to do with you.

Amanda: Did I do something wrong?

Thabi: Not yet, but I'm not going to give you a chance to turn on me again. I have nothing against you, but

we can't be friends again.

Amanda: I can't say that I'm not disappointed, because I really wanted to fix things. I thought we were getting somewhere.

Thabi: Well, you thought wrong.

I stalked towards Qaphela strapped in the driver's seat. I heeded the warnings about Amanda. I wanted to give her another chance, but I really can't allow the same snake to bite me again. I gave her one last glance as she walked away. She was talking on the cellphone, and something in her walk screamed determination. I wonder what she was up to now. I shook my head and brought my attention back to Q.

Qaphela: Hop in.

Thabi: After I have something to eat.

On cue, my stomach rumbled.

Qaphela: Oh well, that's your loss.

Thabi: There is something you can do for me though. You see that backseat, I plan to do a lot of things. Car sex has always been on my bucket list.

Qaphela: I'm surprised at your words, because I've always took you as a little sister.

His smile was still intact.

Thabi: If I wanted a brother, I'd ask. Think about my offer.

Qaphela: I wonder where you got the liver to utter those words.

I watched him drive off, and trod inside with a smile.

Narrated

Unathi Sithole rooted on the balcony of her manor, looked at the beauty of the sky adorned with millions of stars in the nightfall. She tucked a strand of her weave behind her ear and picked up her ringing phone. A lot of things were going through her mind.

Unathi: I could do with some good news.

Voice: You'd be happy to know that soon Thabile will be history. I've just planted the bomb in her new car. The next time it's used, she will blow up into ashes.

Unathi: I'm not even going to ask how you managed, but I'm happy. She must die. The bitch had me framed for murder, unprovoked.

Voice: Moreover indirectly, she had a hand in your brother's murder.

Unathi: Next target. Zenani. I heard she's in prison now. It will be easy to take her out. That will be for

him.

Voice: What about the deal you had with Amanda? She did tell you about Thabile's car.

Unathi: I don't care about that. This information is something I could have easily found out myself. And she must be smoking something if she thinks that I'm going to take out her rapist of a brother from jail. I'm a woman, and I'm not going to let a rapist roam the streets free.

Voice: But think about it. Those boys are Thabile's rapists. Before you kill her, you could get them released and have them drive her off the rails. I know I'd flip if my rapists were suddenly free.

Unathi: We both know that you'd have killed them, but that's besides the point. I want that girl dead. I don't have time to be playing games with a little girl who thinks she's all that, whilst she has no clue. She should have asked about me in the streets.

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SEASON FINALE

Thabile Mampane

Getting up from the hotel bed, I walked to the bathroom on a call with Buhle. I got inside, and looked myself in the mirror. I didn't look too bad - just more prominent eye bags.

Buhle: Where is your mother?

Thabi: They just went out. Libone was nagging us for a drive.

Buhle: Seems like you don't want the car. You should just pass it on to us.

Thabi: You don't have a license.

Buhle: I don't know the first thing about driving. I

never got the time to learn.

Thabi: You have a whole hulk to teach you. Perhaps add a little servicing here and there.

Buhle: Is that meant to be dirty?

I briefly let out a laugh, and filled the basin with water.

Buhle: Don't forget about this afternoon.

Thabi: I won't. A pamper is exactly what I need at the moment.

I hauled out a bar of soap from the cabinet.

Buhle: Did I sense something between you and Qaphela?

Thabi: I don't know what you're thinking about.

Buhle: I'm not stupid. I could see something there.

What is going on?

Thabi: Nothing much. Just this and that.

Buhle: You're not telling me anything.

Thabi: You'll be the first to know if anything happens. Should I pick you up or you'll catch a cab to the spa?

Buhle: Just listen to that.

She chuckled, and soon had the call disconnected. I did my face wash, and soon after skipped to my bedroom to pull on comfortable clothes, discarding my revealing nightwear. I lotioned my face. Initially I was going to order room service, but I just decided to go down to the restaurant. I called my mother before heading downstairs but it didn't go through. I didn't think much of it.

I also made a mental note to go see Q in his penthouse briefly before I went out to meet with Buhle.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

Soothing music blared in the adjoined bathroom of my bedroom from my cellphone. I sang along to the lyrics.

Kamva: 'Clear skies, white walls

Sunset in my rearview as the night falls

Listenin' to old Kanye feelin' like new Kanye (Hey-hey
-hey)

My life in harmony like two Wanyás (Okay)

I shouldn't have to tell you that I been here

This is not a gimmick, please don't push me to my
limit

I be gettin' tired of bein' friendly (Tired of bein'
friendly)

I go hard until my tank is empty ('Til my tank is empty)

I'm not really into competition, no

Hatin' me won't ever get you mentioned, oh

I stay in my lane, oh, I stay in my lane

I be drivin' new terrain but my view never change'

There is just something about music. It calms you down. It heals your soul. Truthfully, I loved music from artists in South Africa like Amanda Black, Yanga - former Idols winner and more. I listened to international music here and there but home was where the roots were.

I pushed my notebook closer, and looked at a loose photograph of Mpilo and Buhle smiling, their eyes glimmering with happiness. With a scowl, I cut off Buhle's face and crunched it into a ball. I kissed Mpilo's lips on the picture and picked up my blunt of weed from atop the vanity table and had a drag. I

don't remember the last time I had this. I missed the feeling. The calmness.

Funny, because the song I was listening to had weed in the name.

Kamva: 'Lil' mama fly as a plane, she got that G5,
yeah

Thoughts of me droppin' the top, don't make me
hand her the whip

All we been smokin' is guilt, she 'bout to roll up again

But we ain't even gettin' high no more, uh-uh

Nah, we ain't even gettin' high no more, uh-uh

Nah, we ain't even gettin' high no more, uh-uh

Nah, we ain't even gettin' high no more, uh-uh

Nah, we ain't even gettin' high no more'

Another song came on, and I was over the moon.

Carefree. A knock came at the door, and Senzo called out my name. It seemed to have knocked me back to my senses, and I flung the notebook to a wall. I didn't know what to think about the feelings I was starting to have for Mpilo. On the other hand, I loved my husband to death and this just made guilt coil in my stomach. It just happened out of nowhere.

Senzo: Is everything okay, Kamva?

Kamva: I'm fine. Did you need something?

Senzo: I'm going out to meet the gents. Will you be okay?

Kamva: I just have bad stomach cramps. I'll be fine.

Senzo: Your behavior is starting to be strange. I hope you're not going Somi's route. Do you want us to talk?

Kamva: Senzo, go and have fun.

Senzo: Don't think I don't know you're smoking weed in there. I can smell it.

Kamva: The best herb. You want to join me?

Senzo: I'll pass. I'll see you later. I love you.

Kamva: I love you more.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

I was lying on my stomach, my forearms bolstering me and my cellphone in my hands and on a call with the keeper of my heart in my room. My curiosity was piqued when I scrolled through news update. A tragedy had struck.

Mpilo: I'm going to end the call now, because you're busy pressing your phone and it's disturbing me.

Me: I'm sorry. It's just that something has my attention. Did you hear about the bombing near The Essence?

Mpilo: You're talking about Q's hotel?

Me: Yes, it looks bad. A car bombed, and apparently there was someone inside. It happened 15- 20 minutes ago. Most of the pictures and videos are a blur.

Mpilo: People are quick. You're telling me it's already trending.

Me: You have no idea. Just reading about it gave me a bad feeling.

Mpilo: I'm expecting Q and Senzo in a few. He'll probably tell me more about it.

Me: I just don't understand. The car went up in flames just like that, and people are coming up with their own theories.

Mpilo: It could have been a problem with the engine. We don't know.

Me: Someone planted a bomb. I'm telling you. The things we see in this city. Ngeke.

Mpilo: Bad things happen every minute of the day anywhere in the world.

Me: This just set me off. I hope you'll always be safe.

Mpilo: Don't worry about me. I'm not going anywhere. It's good to see you fussing over me.

Me: It's just that you and Thabile and the lot of you are involved in shady dealings. That must have been one of the causes. Yeyi, people are heartless out there. They kill without a care.

Mpilo: You worry too much. We're still on for tomorrow, right?

Me: Yes, I'm missing you a lot.

Mpilo: Ngiya'kuthanda. Yezwa sthandwa sam?

Me: I love you too. Be safe.

Mpilo: Always.

Me: Let me prepare to meet Thabile. She will be here in an hour.

Mpilo: Okay.

Mpilo hung up, and I continued scrolling down the news. Something about this bombing didn't sit well with me.

Narrated

Something shocked Amanda when she turned on the news channel on the television. A car bombing had occurred, and even with the blazed and distorted car, it was familiar. She thought back to Thabile. The fact that she may have partook in the killing of someone she once was close with disturbed her peace. She made a call, her heart heavy and rising with anger.

Unathi: I was very clear.

Amanda: I didn't sign up to have Thabile killed. I didn't sign up for that shit!

Unathi had a bored tone.

Unathi: What are you talking about?

Amanda: You son of a bitch!

Unathi: Don't you fucking speak to me like you're speaking to your peers! I'm not your friend.

Amanda: I saw the news. You planted a bomb in Thabile's car.

Unathi: I have no idea what you're talking about.

Amanda: You're heartless. You'd do this to another woman while you're one yourself? You just said that you wanted something of yours back that she took? Nothing about killing her. Had I known I wouldn't have helped you.

Unathi: Bitch, I was talking about my reputation, my business and my freedom... Are you done? Don't you ever call me again.

Amanda: I may have not signed up for this, but we had a deal. When are you taking my brother out?

Unathi gave a mocking laugh.

Unathi: That rapist is right where he belongs.

Amanda: You're going back on your word.

Unathi: I didn't get the help I wanted from you. So help me, if I find out you're recording this conversation, you'll follow your friend.

Amanda: You're going to regret this.

The call disconnected, and Amanda smashed her cellphone on the ground in frustration. Luckily it didn't break.

Thabile Mampane

That apprehension again. It was the same feeling I

got the night my parents were shot, and my father left me. I attempted so many times to call my mother and Libone, but they weren't answering. I just decided to settle for an Uber to go see Buhle; seeing as that my mother and cousin were out there, enjoying themselves. I had gone to check on Q, but it seemed he had been out for a while now.

I was in the cab, and my attention was quickly shifted from my cellphone to my surroundings. There was a commotion, and people were gathered around along with cops. My heart stopped, and I asked the driver to stop. Minimum smoke filled the atmosphere. Clambering from the car, I went to see what's going on. I pushed through the crowd to the front.

Everything in my heart constricted when my eyes fell on the dangling number plate. A familiar one. My mother had this gift planned out from a while ago, that she made sure that everything was on track

when I received the car. My tears involuntary fell, and my body couldn't house anymore of all the emotions pulsing through me and I dropped to my knees.

Thabi: No!

My heart couldn't take the pain. An officer approached me.

Officer: Are you okay, mam? I'm going to need you to step back.

Thabi: Please tell me that there was no one inside.

My voice quivered and I asked with the hope that the only family I had would tap me on my shoulder and tell me that they were lucky to escape death. My heart started to race from the shards of my shattered heart and my breathing became rapid. Someone came to my rescue, but I wanted death to claim me too.

Mpilo Ngubane

Senzo, Q and I were having drinks. We were catching up. It had been a while since we had a chilling session.

Senzo: Guys, I'm telling you. Kamva has been acting strange. I don't know what's going on with her.

Mpilo: On the other hand, it's Somi. She refuses help.

Senzo: Sometimes that gender can bring problems. It's a good thing we're having a chillax without them.

Qaphela: Let me drink to that. Yesterday one even made a bold move on me.

Mpilo: Let me guess. Thabile.

Qaphela: You're wrong.

Mpilo: Please. I was wondering why you haven't bedded her yet, but I didn't want to come across as forward.

Qaphela: Because you're forward. I didn't make a move on her, because I know her to be lesbian.

Mpilo: I thought she played for both teams?

Qaphela: It doesn't matter. She's young for me.

Senzo: What are you talking about? You're 26, and she's 20. Look at Mpilo, he's 10 years older than his fiancée.

Qaphela: Paedophile.

They both cracked up.

Mpilo: You're discouraging me now. I'll end up breaking off things with her.

Qaphela: Don't worry, Buhle is an adult and I trust that she knows what she's doing.

Mpilo: Hence why I wanted to wait until she finished

her studies before we make everything official. I just want her to explore her youth and have fun before she dives into marriage.

Senzo: Spoken like a real man.

I downed the last bit of the beer I held in my hand and reached for another one.

Mpilo: Is it me, or you also feel the Mzi's absence? We used to do this with him.

Senzo: True, there is a gap.

Qaphela: He would sit there and tell us that real men don't gossip.

Mpilo: Just like you're doing right now.

Qaphela: And it frustrates me that I keep hitting dead ends with his murder. We must be looking in the wrong direction. We must change focus.

Senzo: I thought his killer was arrested? That cop?

Qaphela: It's complicated.

Someone's cellphone beeped and seemingly it was Q's. He hauled it out and read the message.

Qaphela: I got a message to tune in on the news immediately.

At the same time he rose to his feet, my phone rang and my mother flashed on the screen. I answered it, and stepped away for a moment.

Mpilo: Ma.

Her: Your uncles and I had a talk and we've come to a decision.

Mpilo: I'd like to hear this one.

Her: It's either us or that girl.

Mpilo: Weird that you want to compete with a girl and you're triple her age.

Her: Family comes first.

Mpilo: Please think about what you've just said, and call me when you have come back to your senses. I say this with respect for you.

I hung up, slightly annoyed. What was with family wanting to control your life? I moved back to the gents, and their eyes were fixated on the television.

Qaphela: This girl annoys the shit out of me.

I looked at the screen, and a girl, I think her name was Amanda appeared.

Mpilo: Senzo, doesn't she work for you? I wonder how you do it. I'd have certainly fired her on the first day.

Senzo: She's not that bad. We work well together.

Mpilo: She must be fake. Rude to us, and sweet to

her employer who funds her lifestyle.

Qaphela: Keep quiet. Let's hear what this is about.

Qaphela increased the volume and we listened to Amanda who seemed to be distraught. Talk about acting. She'd definitely collect all the Oscars.

Amanda: I wanted to share the truth with all of you. This is for my former friend especially. I don't know what happened, but after finding out about the car bombing that happened today, my heart isn't at peace.

She had taken a video of herself, and somehow it reached the news channels.

Amanda: Unathi Sithole approached me a few weeks back. She wanted me to befriend Thabile Mampane again and fish for information from her. It wasn't meant to be anything harmful hence why I agreed. I

was driven by the fact that Thabile had my brother arrested. After a lot of deep thinking, I realized that my brother was in jail because of his own deeds, and it was about time I let the law take its course.

Qaphela: Damn, I knew that girl was up to something.

Amanda: Thabile did the right thing, and stopped our friendship but little did I know that Unathi was using me to try to kill Thabi and I had no idea. When this bombing happened, and Thabi happened to be involved, I knew that Unathi was behind the attack. She hated her beyond the word, and I have no idea what sparked it.

Qaphela: She keeps talking about a car bombing.

Amanda: To everyone who is watching this video, this may be my last words as Unathi threatened to kill me dare I open my mouth. So if I go missing or turn up dead, you know where to look. The same goes for my family. Any unnatural deaths in the family, she must be the first one.

At the end, I was speechless. So Thabi died in the

bombing or I heard wrong?

Qaphela: I'm going.

You couldn't miss the fear and concern in his voice and with those two words, he was gone.

Narrated

Unathi's temper was shooting through the roof and she hurled the remote to the screen of the television. Her friend attempted to calm her down.

Unathi: The fuck is wrong with this girl?

Friend: Unathi, you need to calm down.

Unathi: The fuck? I could go to jail for this nonsense!

Friend: Exactly. All she has said isn't backed up with evidence.

Unathi: Even so, she gave a convincing performance. People will believe her.

They let the telephone and cellphone ring.

Unathi: Already people are blowing up my phone.

Friend: Maybe you should run?

Unathi: Stupid suggestion. That's a clear admission of guilt. Don't you realise that this girl has buried me?

Friend: What are you talking about?

Unathi: If her family members have any enemies, they are going to take this opportunity to kill them, and automatically, I will be the first suspect. This is not good, but I'm not running.

Thabile Mampane

I looked at the sharp blade of the knife, contemplating what more I had to live for. My tears flowed freely.

First it was my father, and now both my mother and cousin are gone in the span of less than a year. My heart was bleeding tremendously, and with one plunge of this knife into my chest; I would be bleeding for real.

Since life was hard, surely death had to be easy. I wouldn't have to deal with the pain. Already I felt this gaping hole in the place of my heart and I wanted the pain to stop so badly.

Thabi: Why me? What did I do to deserve this?

Had it been under normal circumstances, I would have been startled by the banging at the door.

Qaphela: Thabile, it's me. Please open up for me.

Do I reach for the knife or the door? It is between life and death. Which one do I choose?

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SEASON FINALE

Thabile Mampane

God, I was screaming for your mercy. I wept in Qaphela's arms, and my tears were probably soaking

his shirt wet, but I couldn't stop crying my heart out. His hand stroked my back in a soothing manner.

Thabi: So it wasn't enough that I was raped? Not by one guy, but by three and my then boyfriend watched the whole thing and did nothing... I lost my father. Not to one bullet, but sixteen pierced his chest, but still I moved past there. I was finally picking up the pieces of my life. I was starting to become myself again, but another tragedy had to happen. I lost the only people I had left.

Qaphela: You still have me. I'll always be here for you.

Thabi: Q, it's like this world forces you to be bad. It just keeps on taking and taking without giving back. It takes until you have nothing left. Since it finds pleasure in taking, why didn't it take me too because I'm too much of a coward to do it myself?

Qaphela: I can't even begin to comprehend the pain you're feeling, but never think that you're alone. You have us, and you have so much more to live for.

Thabi: Do I now?

He looked into the depths of my broken soul.

Qaphela: I know it hurts, but one day you'll look back and realize how much the pain made you stronger. You're the strongest person I know, and I have no doubt that you'll make it out stronger.

Thabi: What if I don't want to make it this time? What if I'm tired of fighting?

Qaphela: Life is a battle, Thabile and you should never throw in the towel.

Thabi: That bomb was meant for me. I was the one who was supposed to die. Not Libone who still had a bright future ahead of her. She was only 16, and she died because of my stupidity. My mother is gone. She warned me about this life, but I didn't want to listen to her. It's my fault that they're gone. I should have listened. I could have done things differently but I chose not to.

Qaphela: You can't blame yourself. You couldn't have

known. None of this is your fault.

I dwelled in regret. It overwhelmed me to the point of no return. Guilt. Anger. Sadness.

Thabi: What about Unathi? Do you think I deserve this because I framed her? I don't blame her. I started this, now it has backfired on me.

Qaphela: Let's not talk about that.

My eyes zoned in his lips, and I found myself crashing my lips against his. He spoke against me.

Qaphela: You're not thinking straight.

Thabi: Don't fight it.

Qaphela: It's not a good idea. You're grieving.

Thabi: I've wanted this for a while now. Just one night.

He attacked with a demanding kiss, and his hands started roaming my body. I felt a bulge in his trousers, as it didn't take long for me to become wet.

This had to be wrong. I was mourning for goodness sakes, but it felt so right. Our clothes were soon scattered around, and it was now skin to skin.

We made passionate love for the entirety of the night, and there was just something euphoric about pain and pleasure blended together. Tonight was everything for me, but soon I'd have to go back to the reality and the fresh wound of being an orphan.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

The next morning, I woke up in Mpilo's bed. My head was buried in his chest, and his finger rubbed small circles on my arm. I wetted his chest with my tears. What happened to Thabile really broke my heart.

Me: Baby, Thabile doesn't deserve this. My heart breaks for her. There is only so much pain one can handle.

Mpilo: Your friend is strong. She will overcome this.

Me: It just pains me, Mpilo. I know the pain of losing a parent, and I wouldn't wish it even on my worst enemy.

Mpilo: This whole thing is bad and heartbreaking.

Me: I've been trying to call her but my calls aren't going through.

Mpilo: She probably needs her space.

Me: I just want to be there for her. We should try by all means to make her feel like she isn't alone and she still got us. Pain can consume you to the point where you're not able to recognize yourself anymore.

Mpilo: Makes me think of my sister.

Me: She hasn't been able to move past Mzi's death?

Mpilo: No, I'm surprised because she has never one to mourn for too long.

Me: Maybe something is holding her back. Be understanding, and perhaps she only just needs an ear. Tell her that bottling up her feelings isn't going to help her with anything.

Mpilo: All I can say right now is that Amanda and Unathi are not safe. A war will take place.

That ran chills down my spine.

Me: Bloodshed, Mpilo. You shouldn't be encouraging it.

Mpilo: I'm not encouraging anything. Thabile has nothing to lose now, and she'll strike with full force. Unathi made a huge mistake.

Me: What happened between them?

Mpilo: Baby, it doesn't matter. No one will just sit back, and watch the person who killed one's family live.

Me: I just don't want Thabile to get hurt. This is just going to be a cycle of vengeance. Blood will be spilled each time Thabi and Unathi strike back. Is it really worth it?

Mpilo: Thabile doesn't keep an enemy alive, but I'm afraid this time, she might have reached her breaking point.

Me: She's just a university student. She shouldn't have been dragged into this life, because it's clear that she's up against someone who's not afraid to kill.

Mpilo: Someone who lost her entire family can top that, trust me. Right now, Q is looking for his brother's killer, and when they find him, it's not going to be pleasant.

Me: Too many people have died this year.

Mpilo settled my head on a pillow, and got out of bed.

Mpilo: Wake up, and go have a shower. I'll take you to campus. In the meanwhile, I'll make us breakfast.

Me: I'm not going to school today. Thabile needs our support.

Mpilo: Okay.

He came to peck me on the forehead and trod away.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I was burdened with the rapid growth of these forbidden feelings I had. It made me sick to the core, but I couldn't help them. I did the next best thing and called Aunt Phumla for help.

Kamva: Aunty, I have a problem.

Phumla: Talk to me.

Kamva: I'm developing feelings for someone I'm not supposed to.

Phumla: What is going on?

I inhaled slowly, and released the air before narrating everything to her but without a mention of names.

Phumla: Who are they?

Kamva: You wouldn't know them, aunty.

I don't know why I couldn't tell her the entire truth, but I just couldn't bring up Buhle and Mpilo in this.

Phumla: It's not looking good. I also have news for you.

Kamva: What's going on?

Phumla: I've found out the person who's behind this.

Kamva: Please tell me. At this point, I'd do anything. Soon my marriage will suffer from this. I can't even look Senzo in the eyes no more knowing that I'm fantasizing over his brother.

Phumla: What do you mean?

I closed my eyes, and reopened them.

Kamva: I'm talking about his closet friend. He takes him as a brother.

Phumla: The only way to lift this curse is to get the person behind it to reverse it.

Kamva: What curse?

Phumla: Talk to your aunt.

I went completely still. Puzzlement was the order of

the conversation.

Phumla: I know it's surprising, but be thankful that we found out early before things got out of control.

Kamva: Zenani is behind this? What kind of person is she?

Phumla: When you manage to get through her, let me know. She's the only person who can stop this.

Kamva: Damn, can't believe that my life is in her hands. Zenani will never budge.

Phumla: It's up to you to convince her, otherwise things will continue to spiral out of control, and it will get to a point whereby you will not be able to do anything about it.

Kamva: Isn't there another way? We're talking about Zenani here. She does what she wants, and she doesn't care who gets hurt.

Phumla: Well, you better do something fast because her sins will catch up with her, and once she leaves this world, nothing can be done.

Talk about confusing revelations. Zenani was the devil's agent. I didn't understand if she did this to get back at me for getting her sister arrested or she wanted to get even with Nikiwe since she snitched on her.

Phumla: I'll help you as best as I can. Even an evil heart can be softened.

Not the two spawns of Lucifer. Nothing could soften them, but at least I knew where to start. This had to stop!

Somikazi Nkosi

Happy pulled up with someone I never thought I'd

see again. My face brightened, and she strode away from my bedroom leaving me and Lwando alone. She closed the door.

Somi: It's good to see you.

Lwando: This is not a social visit.

My smile faded, and I just nodded. It seems that he will never forgive for the mess I pulled him into. He possessed coldness.

Somi: So what's up?

Lwando: Your family is asking questions out there. They don't believe that cop killed your husband. Do you know what that means for us?

Somi: You're panicking. We'd be long dead if they knew anything.

Lwando: I don't want problems.

Somi: Sooner or later, they're going to question what

made us fall out, and it won't be too long before they connect the dots.

Lwando: Is that your way of getting us to mend things? I meant it when I said that I'm done with you. Your father in law came to see me a week ago. He thinks that I killed his son because I wanted to be with you.

I quickly sobered up. That wasn't good.

Somi: And you thought it's a good idea to come see me?

Lwando: I don't care. Drop this depressed act of yours, and contain this situation. They're closing in on us, and you still have time to shed tears? Fix this.

Somi: Maybe it's time I told them the truth. Whatever happens to me after that does not matter. At least I'll reunite with the only man I ever loved.

Lwando: Somikazi-

Somi: Don't worry. I'll not mention your name. You're

safe. Now leave.

I snuggled in my blanket, and closed my eyes. The door opened and closed, and I prepared myself for the end. After all, only the truth can set you free.

Thabile Mampane

I walked into the police station, my heart drumming fast. I stopped dead in my tracks when my cellphone vibrated in my jeans. I stepped away from the scrutiny of people to a corner and with reluctance at seeing the caller, answered it anyway.

Qaphela: Thabile, please don't do what you're thinking of doing.

I heard shuffling from his side.

Qaphela: I wake up, and find out you're not in bed only to see a note that you're going to turn yourself in. Are you mad, Thabile?

Thabi: I'm thinking straight.

Qaphela: No, you're not. Wait for me to get there. I'm 15 minutes away from the station.

Thabi: It will be too late.

Qaphela: You'll make me get into an accident. Is that what you want?

Thabi: Q, please. It's already hard enough.

Qaphela: What about the funerals? You can't get yourself arrested, Thabile.

Thabi: What bodies will I bury?

Qaphela: Stop what you're doing. Unathi got arrested this morning. We'll make sure she never sees the outside of a prison again.

Thabi: I don't care, but I'm doing this. Maybe you'll

understand one day, because I'm doing this for my mother. I'm doing this for my cousin.

Qaphela: Damn it, Thabi! Please think about what you're doing. We didn't use a condom last night. I'm certain you wouldn't want to give birth in prison.

Thabi: I passed by the pharmacy this morning. You have nothing to worry about.

I hung up, and approached an officer at the desk. He was stamping documents.

Him: What can I do for you?

Thabi: I'm here to turn myself in.

Him: Talk.

Thabi: I killed Njabulo Dube.

Him: Things just got interesting. Boss lady!

He turned back to me.

Him: Weird, because we had a suspect already and the charges didn't stick because nothing unnatural was picked up in his postmortem.

Thabi: I'm confessing, aren't I? Do your job, please.

2 months later

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SEASON FINALE

2 months later

Thabile Mampane

Some decisions I have taken in this life, I wasn't proud of but I'd gladly do them again. Confined in prison forced me to think the whole day since we didn't do much. It went from having to relive the memories of my rape to my family's deaths. I looked at Qaphela after my eyes skimmed the visiting room, and discreetly watched the guards roaming around. Qaphela leaned in closer.

Qaphela: Thabile, what are you up to?

Thabi: I need to protect myself inside.

I scanned the surroundings again, before Q handed the pocket knife to me under the table. It happened so quick that the guards wouldn't have caught us even if they wanted to. I concealed it.

Thabi: Thank you.

Qaphela: Thabile, talk to me.

Thabi: What do you want me to say?

Qaphela: What about us? You were not supposed to do this.

Thabi: Just stop. I know what I'm doing.

Qaphela: You're ruining your life, Felicity. What about school? Do you really plan to spend years in this place?

Thabi: You're starting to sound like a broken record. It's been 2 months now.

Qaphela: We've attempted to help you out of this, but you keep shutting us down.

Thabi: That's because I don't want to make it out of here until I finish what I came here to do.

Qaphela: Talk to me.

Thabi: All will be revealed. You should just stop with your endless questions.

Qaphela: I care about you, and you keep brushing me off.

I could see that I was making him angry, but I had more important things to worry about.

Qaphela: I still don't understand. Your confession created a uproar on social media. Did you do this because you were feeling guilty for killing the man who in cold blood ended your father's life and almost killed your mother too or there is something else?

Thabi: You already know the answer to your question. You just choose not to see it.

He narrowed his eyes at me, and that stirred some feelings in me. It aroused, and I found myself pressing my thighs together. I reminisced the night I had sex with him. He rocked me to the moon and back. I willed myself to stop thinking about that.

Thabi: Do you know me to take decisions without careful thinking? I want to end this once and for all.

Qaphela: It's not a good idea.

Thabi: I don't care. What happens to me after tonight will not bother me because I'd have done right by ma and Libone.

I was done wasting my tears because of my wounds and scars. Something had to be done, and I was going to finish everything tonight.

Narrated

Zenani: Sifiso, I need you to do something for me.

You could see that she was being tortured inside, but one thing she'd never stop was being evil. She thrived on darkness. You could swear evilness was an addictive drug to her.

Sifiso: I'm listening.

Zenani: Tomorrow is Kamva's engagement party. Prepare some men, and ammunition and wipe out everyone at the party.

Sifiso's face changed. He made a realization that Zenani is a parasite, and he wondered why it took him so long to see that.

Sifiso: Are you hearing yourself? So it wasn't enough that you placed a curse on her, and you refuse to reverse it? Now you want to kill her and everyone associated with her?

Zenani: Kamva got people to turn up the heat on me inside. She thinks that by getting people to torture me, I'll do what she wants. All I know is that as long as I'm suffering, everyone will suffer with me. They will never know peace in their life.

Sifiso: You know that at first, I loved this fire within you, but now I'm not so sure anymore.

Zenani: As long as I am still alive, I'll never accept defeat. You know me, Sifiso.

Sifiso: Your sister was sentenced to life in prison without possibility of parole, and it's sad that you don't realise that you're going to end up like her.

Zenani: Please do this last thing for me. I'll never ask anything from you again.

Sifiso: No, I'm done with you. I'm not going to help you to ruin people's lives further.

Zenani didn't look too happy, and the walls were closing in her too but one thing she'd never do is lift the curse that was meant to collapse Kamva and Buhle's lives.

Noxolo Ndebele

Things between me and Mandlakhe were going strong. I was in love with him, and it had been for too long since I experienced love of that magnitude. Khethiwe came to the lounge and bounced on the couch with a plate of freshly baked cookies in hand.

Khethiwe: So I'll finally get to meet the man who has captured your heart?

I reached over for a cookie, and drilled my teeth into it for a bite.

Noxolo: I'm surprised you're more excited than me.

Khethiwe: I have to... At some point, I was afraid you'd end up with Kaizer.

Noxolo: You're starting.

Khethiwe: Your friendship with that man was questionable. I'm sure your man would agree with me.

Noxolo: You're boring because I don't see anything wrong with Kaizer. He's a man who's not afraid to get his hands dirty. He gets the job done.

Khethiwe: I'm going to ignore that you asked me that. What is wrong with Kaizer? Sisi, everything is wrong. The man himself is wrong.

Noxolo: I wish he could walk in here and hear all the things you're saying about him.

Khethiwe: Don't wish that. He'd mop the floor with me. That's how scary he gets.

Noxolo: I doubt Kaizer lays his hands on women, but there are another ways he can punish you. First would be to rid you of the salt that's making you spew nonsense.

Khethiwe: Ever since you returned from that village, you've become nasty. Seems like our king is making you speak in tongues. Between the two of us, how big is his weapon?

I narrowed my eyes into paper slits. Also the

laughter, I couldn't hold it in.

Noxolo: We're too old for that nonsense. Mind your own.

We heard a scream, and automatically silence befall us as my sister and I looked at each other questioningly.

Khethiwe: Did you hear that?

Noxolo: I think it was coming from your daughter's room.

Khethiwe: Let me go and check.

She disappeared to her bedroom, and worry hounded me. I followed suit.

Khethiwe: Her water just broke.

We looked at each other in fear, and my orbs darted to Anna who was sweating profusely and breathing heavily. She kept wincing in pain.

Khethiwe: Ask the neighbour for a lift. We need to get her to the hospital fast... Bongiwe, focus on your breathing.

Noxolo: Okay, I'll be right back.

Mpilo Ngubane

After a steamy session with Buhle in the shower, I laid back on my bed scrolling through my emails while Buhle was organising our outfits for my brother's engagement party.

Buhle: Baby, I need to go back to res. I forgot my purse.

I momentarily looked up from my cellphone.

Mpilo: Buhle, but it's late.

Buhle: But Mpilo, I want it for tomorrow.

Mpilo: Just choose from the purses you have there.

Buhle: But Mpilo, they don't go well with my outfit.

Mpilo: So why did you buy them?

Buhle: For other occasions.

Mpilo: Fine, we pass there tomorrow morning.

Buhle: Thank you. See, that wasn't so hard.

I rolled my eyes, and reverted my attention back to my cellphone.

Buhle: I'm getting a new roommate soon. I can't believe that the university is thinking of replacing Thabile.

Mpilo: She did confess to the crime, and she doesn't want our help.

Buhle: I wonder what's wrong with that girl.

Mpilo: She's hardheaded. Reminds me of my future wife.

Buhle: I'm not stubborn. Take that back.

Mpilo: Keep telling yourself that.

A message from Kamva on Whatsapp came through. It didn't sit me well, because I have been sensing some weird vibes from her the past two months - it even gotten to a point where her presence makes me feel uncomfortable.

Buhle: Anyway, I was thinking that it's time I move out of res.

Mpilo: You're always here lately. Might as well make it permanent.

Buhle: Not happening. I'm not cohabiting. I'll find an apartment to rent.

Mpilo: Just a suggestion. You don't want your entire inheritance to go into rent expenses and your tuition.

Buhle: You have a point, but I don't think I'm ready. Next week, I'm meeting up with a financial adviser. I want her to help me budget the remaining million I have left for the next 5 years. I also was brainstorming small business ideas for me to generate an income. Nothing hectic, but something that will help me pay for my expenses.

Mpilo: That's good. We should talk more about that.

I had no regrets about choosing Buhle as my partner. Not only was she beautiful, but she had brains to go with the beauty. I loved her resilience and her need to be independent. It didn't offend me in any way, because even though we were together and in love, it was healthy to create success from outside our

relationship. We were individuals before we fused into one. I was glad that my mother finally came to senses and stopped her ultimatums. The only person right now who needed to come back to her senses was Thabile in prison.

I pressed Kamva's message, and downloaded the pictures she sent me. My eyes bulged, and what I saw would scar me for eternity. A full naked picture of Kamva stared back at me. Her nipples erect, and her legs widely spread. I wanted to unsee this!

Mpilo: Wtf!

I quickly went to delete the pictures. I don't understand what possessed Kamva to send those messages.

Buhle: Are you okay, Mpilo?

Mpilo: Just saw something that will traumatize me

for years to come.

Buhle: Let me see.

Mpilo: I deleted it.

I attempted to convince myself that she meant to send those snaps to her husband, but how do you make that mistake? Do I go to my brother about this or hope that it was merely an honest mistake? Things will never be the same.

A message came through from her again. "There's no need to feel guilty. I'm certain your brother has seen your woman's pussy. I'm returning the favour."

God, what did I just read? What the hell was going on with Kamva. I typed in a reply. "Wtf, woman! It's your engagement tomorrow. Respect yourself." From there, I blocked her number. How will I look my brother in the eyes after this?

Thabile Mampane

Lights out. I tiptoed across the cell I shared with other inmates. Q offered to get me a private cell but my plan would be hard to implement. Everyone knew that you sleep with one eye open in this place, but that didn't stop me from going to avenge my mother. When I got to Unathi's bunk bed in the darkness, I grasped the hidden knife from my orange uniform, and placed it on her throat. Her eyes leaped open.

Thabi: Shhhhh.

Unathi: What are you doing?

We spoke in whispers.

Thabi: Did you really think I'm stupid enough to get

myself arrested for no reason?

Unathi: You wanted my head.

Thabi: You killed my family.

Unathi: It was meant for you. You're a diehard, aren't you?

Thabi: We'll meet in hell.

Unathi: You kill me, you'll die too. Don't make that mistake.

Thabi: With pleasure.

I slid the knife across her throat, and blood oozed out. Life left her. I was taken back when someone knocked the life out of my hands. My victory was cut short when another inmate - I recognized as Unathi's closet friend inside - pierced her own knife into my stomach, and twisted my insides. Blood gushed out of my mouth as pain hounded me and a scream repelled from me. People were awakening now. "She warned you." The woman whispered into my ear.

All I heard from thereon was whistling and guards walked in on a chaotic bloodbath. What happened afterwards was a blur as strength and consciousness rapidly left me.

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SEASON FINALE

Narrated

In his sport attire, Senzokuhle raced to catch up to Mpilo with the timer strapped around his wrist. Panting, he picked up speed and caught up to his brother who was a few metres ahead of him.

Senzo: Damn, you still got it.

Mpilo: 3 kilometers, I'm impressed. Old age hasn't caught up to you yet.

Senzo: Please don't start with me. I haven't been to the gym in months.

They slowed down, and Mpilo started to do side hops. 30 second break between each three reps at 45 second intervals. Senzo alternated between hooks and punches at an imaginary punching bag in the air. He halted his movements when his cellphone rang somewhere on him. He stepped aside briefly.

Senzo: Senzokuhle Ngubane speaking.

Mpilo did jumping squats as he awaited his brother to finish up on the cellphone. His toned legs bulged with with every jump of his.

Senzo: Thank you for letting us know.

Returning the cellphone to his shorts, he went back to Mpilo and they walked to their cars parked in a shopping complex and headed to the parking lot where their cars were.

Mpilo: Is everything alright?

Senzo: The call was from the prison Zenani was in. Apparently last night, she died.

Mpilo: That woman was quite a troublemaker. I don't feel sorry for her.

Senzo: I don't either, but I don't know how Kamva is going to take it.

Mpilo played it cool at the mention of his brother's wife.

Mpilo: I doubt she'll feel anything about it. But then at the same time, they were family.

Senzo: I've been picking up awkward vibes between you and Kamva. Is there something you want to tell me?

Words were stuck in Mpilo's throat, and he didn't know how to get them out. He gave nothing away, masking his turmoil of emotions.

Mpilo: No. There's nothing going on.

Senzo: I asked her about it. Said that you've inherited Buhle's dislike for her.

Mpilo: She can't be serious. You know better than anyone that I choose not to involve myself in Buhle and Kamva's catfights, because it will make us fight too.

As they got to their respective cars parked besides one another, they said their goodbyes.

Senzo: You're right. I just don't understand what's wrong with those two sisters. They should make up already.

Mpilo: I'll see you in a few hours.

Senzo: We should have done a joint engagement.

Mpilo: Me and Buhle, we're not in a hurry.

Senzo: Okay.

Each got in their cars and eased down onto the streets in opposite directions. It took Senzo around 10 minutes to arrive at his crib. His home was not short of individuals decorating the manor for the engagement party. He interacted with a number of the people, before skipping to his bedroom to have a shower. He found his wife tidying up their bed.

Senzo: Have you showered?

Kamva: No, we still have plenty of time.

Senzo: Good, we'll shower together and start off the

day on a good note.

Kamva merely smiled, and patted the creases off the duvet.

Senzo: I have news for you. I'm not sure that this is the best time.

Kamva: What's going on?

Senzo: Your aunt passed away last night. They didn't tell me the cause of the death.

Kamva: That can't be.

She looked spooked.

Senzo: Will you be okay?

Kamva: I need a moment.

She retreated away from their bedroom. It wasn't

that the death wasn't finding her good, but Zenani can't die while she was the only hope she had at getting her sanity back. She called her aunt.

Kamva: Auntie... It didn't work out... Zenani is dead.

Phumla: I did tell you that you're running out of time, Kamva.

Kamva: What does this mean for me?

Phumla: We'll find a way, I promise.

Kamva: I need you.

Phumla: Your uncle and I will be there soon. Talk to your husband about this. You need him now more than ever.

Kamva: You said that she was the only way out of this.

Phumla: Don't lose hope. For now, you'll have to find something of sentimental value to your aunt. Maybe we can work with that. We're not like your aunt. We're not agents of the darkness. Have faith. Your ancestors will come through for you.

Kamva: I hope so. I really do.

Phumla: Prayer, my dear. You and your sister are spiritually weak.

A tear went astray on Kamva's face.

Anna Ndebele

Natural birth was a bitch. I had to accommodate the pain I felt down there. I was a teary mess. An empty vessel. Laid back on the hospital bed; unblinking and my eyes welling up with tears, they fell when my mother came to me.

Khethiwe: My child, how are you feeling?

I didn't open my mouth.

Khethiwe: Bongiwe, talk to me. Are you worried about your finals? You have me. I'll help with the child, and you'll be able to study. Don't worry so much.

I still said nothing.

Khethiwe: Baby, is it the pain? I know labour is very sore but you'll recover in no time. You had no complications, and you should be discharged soon.

That was one of the rare times where my mother got affectionate, and I should be cherishing that. She wiped my tears with her fingers, and more just streamed down my cheeks.

Khethiwe: Don't you want to see the child? He's such

a cutie.

Anna: Please don't talk to me about that child of a bastard who left me to fend for him alone.

I exploded. Now that the child was here, something stood in my way of connecting with him. I didn't even name him.

Khethiwe: Bongiwe, please don't think of that man. Right now, your baby needs you. He'll need his mother.

Anna: Mama... he looks exactly like him. His eyes. His nose.

Khethiwe: Baby, he was born yesterday. You can't really tell these things. It's too soon to tell.

Anna: Imagine 9 months carrying him in my womb, only for him to come out looking like the guy who betrayed and deceived me. After playing me and my family, his father ran.

Khethiwe: I thought you had gotten over it.

Anna: I thought so too. But raising a child alone was never part of the plan.

Narrated

The party was just getting started at dusk. People were filing in past the red carpet to where the life was. Xola Moya Wam by Nomcebo Zikode blasted through the speakers, and it was a sophisticated gathering filled with people of class and who reeked of wealth but yet who knew how to have fun.

Everyone was mingling. The dresses were nothing short of glamour. The men rocked their suits. And this was only an engagement party, come the wedding; probably will be triple the extravagance.

Before the fun had began, everyone had a moment of silence for Nkosiyabo Ngubane and Mzi Nkosi.

Noxolo in love with Mandlakhe, midst the jolly crowd sang along to the song. It pulled at her heart chords.

On the other edge of the garden, Buhle and Mpilo were taking plenty of pictures and videos of themselves and the surroundings around them. Memories to be forever treasured. Love was definitely the order of the day.

A man Buhle wasn't familiarized with pulled her lover aside to talk business. Another perfect opportunity to make connections - it can't only be a celebratory event for love.

Buhle scrolled through the recent pictures on Mpilo's gallery and deleted some of them - ones she deemed of low quality and blurry. In the recycle bin, as she wanted to clear up the cache; she came across a photo that made her heart stop beating

fleetingly. The music dimmed to nothing as her heart pounded loudly and fast in her chest. Her mood went from hundred to zero real quick at seeing her sister's naked picture in Mpilo's cellphone.

Her mind went blank, and then on overdrive. She felt everything at once - the emotions. What was going on? Why did Mpilo have Kamva's nude? Question after question. She didn't want to jump the gun. She pressed the home button and on cue his cellphone rang. Qaphela's name flashed on screen.

She went to hand over the phone to its owner with a fake smile and walked away. She wanted to calm down before she talked to Mpilo because she'd certainly burst and end up making a scene.

Mpilo answered the call.

Mpilo: Q, I thought you'd be here.

Qaphela: Thabile was admitted to the hospital last night. She killed Unathi, and afterwards someone stabbed her.

Mpilo: So all long this was her plan? Finish off Unathi inside?

Qaphela: Seems so.

Mpilo: Is she going to be okay?

Qaphela: I don't know.

Mpilo: Do you need me there?

Qaphela: No, I'll be fine. You'll tell Senzo that something came up. Don't tell Buhle about this yet. Let everyone enjoy this night.

Mpilo: I'm coming there. We will need to talk. Thabile can't go back inside. Let's argue mental illness. It seems like the only way we can prevent her from getting a heavy sentence.

Qaphela: Maybe a mental asylum for months is better than years in prison.

Mpilo: What hospital are you at?

Noxolo Ndebele

I navigated through the house to the toilet. Mandlakhe gave me the directions. He didn't want to accompany me the way he was engrossed in the topic he was having with men of similar status. It didn't bother me much. At a turn, I collided with someone. I started to apologise to the gent, but my words got stuck in my throat when I drank in his face. Bewildered didn't even come close to the way I was feeling right now. Shocked. Perplexed. After so long, I finally come in contact with the devil.

At my familiar face, his eyes widened in shock too. I saw nothing other than red. Connotation to the colour - rage traveled through my entire body. I pushed him against the wall, and wound my hand

around his neck, squeezing.

Noxolo: You got balls coming back. Seems like today you're going to meet your maker!

I was draining the life out of him. His hands leaped to my own, attempting to free himself from my grasp.

Noxolo: What a dog you are. You played with my niece and left her with a baby... Your biggest mistake was double crossing me. I'm not your peer. I'll squash you like the little cockroach you are!

I stopped compressing his windpipe, but didn't let go. I placed my other hand on his groin. He let out a string of coughs.

Noxolo: Don't try anything funny or I'll rip off your balls. Try me, and you'll know me.

Shakes: We can talk about this.

Noxolo: The only thing we're going to talk about here are my diamonds. Where the fuck are my diamonds? I worked too hard for them, only to have a little boy like you ruin that.

Shakes: I sold them.

Noxolo: You'll cough out that money, boy.

I got startled by Mandlakhe's voice.

Mandlakhe: What's going on here?

I let him go.

Noxolo: Oh, this lad here asked me to fix his tie.

Mandlakhe: Son, you don't tell me that you've arrived.

Shakes: I just got here.

The word son left me confused.

Mandlakhe: I see that you've already met. Siyabonga, this is the woman who has my heart, and Noxolo, this is the son I told you about.

Noxolo: So he's the one you were talking about?

Talk about surprises. Shakes mirrored my expression, but we attempted to downplay it for the sake of his father.

Seemed like a commotion was arising outside, and Mandlakhe strode away.

Mandlakhe: We'll finish this later. I wonder what's going on out there.

Shakes followed behind his father, probably to get away from me. I composed myself and dialled

Kaizer.

Kaizer: Sure.

Noxolo: Shakes is back.

Kaizer: Are you serious?

Noxolo: As a heart attack.

Kaizer: What do you need?

Noxolo: I need one of your guys to watch him. I can't let him get away again.

Kaizer: Now?

Noxolo: Please. He has seen me, and he's going to attempt to make a run for it again.

Kaizer: Okay, send me the address.

Buhlenkosi Malinga

After that damning photograph in Mpilo's cellphone, I pumped myself up with alcohol. I hated that every time things were unclear, I seek refuge in alcohol. I was getting wasted, and my vision was playing games on me.

The couple of the day was in front, giving a speech. My blood boiled. Anger seeped into me.

I staggered to the front, drunk out of my mind.

Senzo: I remember this one time she pushed me into a pool. That's the level of craziness my wife is blessed with.

People chuckled.

Me: Never mind that. Your wife is nothing but a little

whore, and I'm sick and tired of her. I've done everything to stay out of her way, but she keeps provoking me.

Kamva: What are you doing, Buhle? Couldn't you have chosen another day for this? You just had to humiliate me.

Me: Voetsek wena tikline! Don't touch me.

She attempted to push me away.

Me: I'm tired of you. Would it really kill you to see me happy?

Happy: Buhle, you're drunk. Please stop what you're doing.

I turned towards Kamva and pointed my index finger at her.

Me: You're nothing but a whore.

Kamva: Yet it wasn't my sextape circulating all those months ago. Don't mess with me.

Me: Yeyi, you wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for me. Seems like you specialise in having my leftovers. First it was your husband. Need I remind you that I was going to marry him, but I decided against it. Now you're going after Mpilo.

People were murmuring around us.

Phumla: Buhle, stop.

Me: Talk! Cat got your tongue? Entlek wena, o phila impilo yami. This would have been my life. So you better get off your high horse or I'll do it for you. Gaaa.

My head started spinning and fast. Before I knew it, I collapsed and darkness overcame me.

Qaphela Nkosi

Seeing all the machines connected to Thabile filled me with sadness. Damn, I loved this girl and her boldness but seems that it might cost her her life one day. I looked at her hand cuffed to the bed, and the police officer posted outside her ward and ran my hand over my face in frustration. Right now I just wanted her to make it. She'd have to live so I could tell her about my undying love. She was more than a friend. She was my confidant, and all this happened in the span of months. We committed crimes together. She knew things about me that no other person knew, and versa verse.

I took her free hand into my own, and planted a kiss on it.

Qaphela: You have to make it, Thabi. Please. I know that you're strong, and you're going to beat this.

My phone beeped in my pocket. It was a message from Mpilo. 'I'm at reception.'

I rose to my feet and went to peck her on the forehead.

Qaphela: I love you. You've always fought for others. It's time that you fought for yourself. Be the fighter that I know you are.

I didn't want to leave her side. Unathi's people could want to finish her off, but I had gents on the lookout. Every corner of this hospital. Even this officer could be swayed by money, I wasn't going to take any chances. I went to meet Mpilo.

Noxolo Ndebele

My heart rate picked up speed when I saw Buhle collapsed on the floor under the blinding lights outside. I hurried to her side.

Noxolo: What happened here? Somebody call an ambulance.

Phumla: Noxolo, the doctors are not going to pick up anything. This is not a Western issue.

Noxolo: What is going on here?

Senzokuhle was clearing up the space and bid his guests goodbye. I wonder what happened here. Must be the commotion I heard.

Phumla: Let's get her to bed. It's going to be a long journey.

Noxolo: What are you talking about?

Happy: Let me quickly inform Mpilo.

Mandlakhe and Senzo picked Buhle up, and carried her inside. I heaved a sigh, and called my sister.

Noxolo: Sisi.

Khethiwe: You don't sound okay.

Noxolo: Things are bad.

Khethiwe: What happened?

Noxolo: Buhle collapsed. I don't understand what's going on around here.

Khethiwe: I hope she will be okay.

Noxolo: I hope so too. How is my niece doing?

Khethiwe: Don't even ask. She is failing to connect with her baby. She says that she sees Siyabonga in

him.

Noxolo: You won't believe what happened.

Khethiwe: I'm listening.

Noxolo: Siyabonga is back.

Khethiwe: What? I'm shocked! I hope you have prepared a bullet for him.

Noxolo: That isn't even the worst part. He's Mandlakhe's son.

Khethiwe: You lie! How's that possible?

Noxolo: Apparently that drunkard wasn't his biological father. Seems like back in the day, Mandlakhe and Siyabonga's mother had a fling. I told you that Mandlakhe was a retired soldier so he could disappear for months on end, and when Shakes' mother found out she was pregnant, she couldn't find him. She then went back to her marriage.

Khethiwe: Women must stop this handsball they like to do.

Noxolo: Not even. He knew about it. Look, I'll come

to see you and Bongiwe tomorrow. I'm spending the night with Mandlakhe.

Khethiwe: Okay.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I was dogged with exhaustion and a pounding head. Candles were lit around the five of us, and aunt Phumla was praying for us.

Mpilo didn't look too good. You could smell the fear and worry from afar.

Phumla: Faith says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13. We ask for your guidance, Lord. "We walk by faith, not by sight."

Kamva: 2 Corinthians 5: 7.

Phumla: Your love and mercy, Almighty God is sufficient and abundant for the whole of us. Lord, we present before You Your child who is in dire need of your protection. Provide us with strength to fight this evil thrown at us. Your children need You.

She stopped.

Mpilo: Maybe we need to take her to the hospital.

Phumla: This is a spiritual matter. Western medicine will be of no help. Kamva, it's time for the curse to prevail.

Kamva: Auntie, weren't we just praying? We can't do that.

Phumla: God is a provider of strength. The battle is yours. He will never give what you can't bear nor will He forsake You.

Senzo: What curse are you talking?

I narrated everything to them except the nudes.

Senzo: So you kept quiet for two months? We could have worked this out together.

Kamva: I thought I had it under control. You think it would be easy to tell you that I was developing feelings for your brother? Hear how it sounds? It's wrong!

Mpilo: But you could have told us. Now everything is out of control.

Phumla: Right now, she's deteriorating. For her life to be saved, we can't stand in the way of the curse anymore.

Mpilo: What needs to happen?

Phumla: It seems that you're going to have to get married to Kamva. And Senzo to Buhle when she wakes up.

She was throwing curveballs at us.

Phumla: I know it sounds ridiculous, but our top priority right now is saving Buhle's life. Once she wakes up, there is a way to reverse all of this. Where God is present, there is always a way but it's not going to be easy and we need Buhle alive.

Mpilo: We'll do it.

Senzo: Are you sure, Mpilo?

Mpilo: What are we waiting for? Time is ticking. Buhle's life is the only important thing right now.

Kamva: You can count me out. I'm not doing to do this nonsense.

Mpilo: Don't be mad. This curse is because of you.

Phumla: It isn't going to help to bicker amongst yourselves. All of you have this dark cloud around you and the fact that all of you are spiritually weak makes it worse. You're weak in prayer. You don't connect with your ancestors and you have all done things that don't align with goodness. Your

weakness makes it easy for witchcraft to fall upon you.

I was not hearing it.

Senzo: Kamva, she's your sister. I know you guys dislike each other, but are you really going to let her die?

Kamva: Yes, I am. This is not my problem.

Mpilo: You're evil. You're just like your mother and aunt, and here I thought you were a good person. Just blinded.

Kamva: You know nothing about me!

Mpilo: I know that you're going to let your own sister die!

Kamva: Oksalayo whoever dies dies.

The little stunt she pulled had me infuriated.

Somikazi Nkosi

My father in law had me quivering and shaking in fear. I looked down at the gun on the table cocked towards me.

Him: I'm going to ask you for the last time. Did you kill my son?

Somi: I swear I didn't.

Fear had me shedding tears.

Him: Wrong answer. I know of the stupid affair you had with Lwando... You saw that Mzi was standing in the way of being with Lwando so you killed him? Am

I on the right track?

Somi: I had.. nothing to do with Mzi's death.

Him: You're getting on my last nerve and you should know that I will not hesitate to take you out.

Somi: Fine, you're right..

I swallowed the lump that had formed in my throat.

Him: We're getting somewhere. Now TALK!

His temper flared and blazed. All he needed to do was pull the trigger and finish me.

Somi: You're on the right track, but the only thing that you haven't gotten right is the person who pulled the trigger.

Him: And I suppose you're going to tell me.

Somi: It was Lwando. He didn't understand that I

didn't want anything to do with him anymore because I wanted to fix things with Mzi. He became obsessed, and planned to kill Mzi. I didn't find out until it was too late. He threatened me to keep my mouth shut. If you ask around, you'll know that around the time my husband died Lwando sported bruises which he probably got from fighting with Mzi.

It was every man for himself or in my case woman. However I had to warn Lwando. He needs to leave the country as in yesterday.

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FINALE

Somikazi Nkosi

I was restless, and kept tossing on the bed. My mind was occupied with a lot of thoughts and guilty feelings. I sat upright on my bed, and exhaled deeply.

When did I become this person? A calculative bitch who didn't give two frcks about other people. This was not me.

I killed him. Mzi's face flashed through my head. Weird that all this time, I thought Mzi was one selfish man, but I took the trophy. I remembered the fear that pulsed through me as my husband's father looked ready to kill me.

Indirectly now, I was firing a gun at the only person who had been there. Fifteen years of friendship, and I threw it down the drain.

I pulled Lwando into this mess, and now for my selfish reasons, I threw him under the bus. I'd never

be able to live with myself if another person died because of me.

I've known him for over a decade. Friends to lovers and now I'd be the gun that would take him out. I had to fix this. Even if it meant that I'll take my last breath soon, and by the end of the week, I would probably be dead.

I looked at my cellphone for the longest time until my eyes glimmered with tears and I hit the call button.

Mzi's father: This better be important.

Somi: It is... You deserve to know the truth, and if you decide to kill me, I'm not going to stop you.

Him: What is this about? I'm getting impatient. It's flipping 3am.

Somi: You have to believe me when I say that I didn't mean to kill Mzi. It was a mistake.

Him: A mistake of two bloody bullets! Then I gave you an opportunity to come clean, and what do you do, you pin the blame on someone else.

Somi: You were going to kill me, and I didn't want to die, but from hereon you can do whatever you want... I just couldn't stand there and watch your son kill Lwando. Not on my watch, and definitely not because of me. It was just meant to be warning bullets, but I didn't know that they would hit Mziwoxolo.

My face was wet of tears.

Him: You killed my son!

Somi: And that haunts me every single day of my pathetic life... I'll be waiting for your bullet. At least that way, I'll stop thinking and feeling.

Him: Oh no my dear, what makes you think that I'm going to kill you? That would be far too easy. I'm going to make you suffer. Little by little, I'm going to

break you. You'll wish to bring back my son to life, but it will eat at you that you can't.

I swallowed hard. Whatever he was thinking had to be worse than death.

Him: Today you're going to go to the police station and confess your crimes. You're looking at 30 years and above. Nothing less. We're talking murder. Covering up two, and framing a police officer.

Somi: I'd take dying over prison anytime.

Him: You better not be thinking of taking your own life, because I'll not stop at you. Your family will pay for your sins. I'll dig up each and every secret of theirs, and expose them.

Somi: It's not like your son was a good man.

Him: But at the end of the day, he was my son. A son that you killed in coldblood and attempted to cover it up. You deserve everything coming your way. Do the right thing, and I'll leave your family out of this.

He had me backed in a corner.

Somi: Fine, but please give me a week to spend time with my family, before I go to jail for life.

Him: Fair enough, but don't do anything stupid.

I hung up, and my mind was in chaos. What will my family think of me? This was going to taint our royal name for years to come. What about my own reputation? I was not ready to rot behind bars, but did I have any other choice? I cried silently until my eyes hurt. My fate was sealed.

Kamvelihle Ngubane

I kneeled before my bed, and started praying.

Kamva: God, I know that I don't usually pray, but this morning I humble myself before you.

I prayed for all the anger and bitterness to be eradicated from me. I prayed for the cleansing of my heart. For everything negative consuming me to be washed away. With each tear I dropped, I could feel everything being erased and I was beginning to feel lighter.

I felt a feathery touch on my shoulder like a hand, but when I looked around, there was nothing. And for a split second, I saw my father. His memory played through my mind, and I smiled. Must be my imagination.

Senzokuhle walked into our bedroom.

Senzo: Kamva, what's going on with you? Buhle is your sister. Moreover this is not forever. I love you, and only you. We'll find our way to each other again, but I can't let my brother lose himself with your sister's death.

Kamva: Senzokuhle, can we not do this right now? I know you think that I'm evil, but I promise you that I'll fix this.

Senzo: Okay, I'm going to have a shower. I love you.

Kamva: I love you too.

He strode to the adjoined bathroom, and I strolled downstairs to the kitchen. I found Mpilo drinking a bottle of water. I sighed, and went about my business.

Kamva: Good morning.

Opening the fridge, I took out a container of strawberries.

Mpilo: I see you.

Kamva: Of course you see me. You have eyes.

Mpilo: Don't get cheeky with me.

Kamva: Mpilo, it's too early for this.

Mpilo: I see right through you. You think you're clever, but I've got you figured out. You and your plan.

Kamva: What are you talking about now?

Mpilo: You don't want to save your sister, because you see this as an opportunity. Get rid of Buhle, and maybe; just maybe I will have a chance with Mpilo. Isn't that what is going through your head?

I let out a humorless laugh.

Kamva: Last night, did you happen to miss the part whereby we said that these feelings were brought on by the curse? Moreover I don't know what makes you think you're God's gift to women.

Mpilo: You're evil for wanting your sister to die. You're cruel. Perhaps even worse than your mother and aunt.

Kamva: Don't you get tired of singing the same song? Because it's boring me now. Come up with a new tune... I came here to make breakfast in peace. I don't want to fight with you.

Mpilo: I just hope Senzo sees you for the heartless, evil bitch you are.

I was starting to get enraged.

Kamva: Ebhuti, voetsek! You hear me? Piss off. You want to make yourself a better person at my expense. Don't bore me. All of us here have done our share of evil deeds. The only person we can say stayed true to herself and remained a good hearted person is Buhle. Don't get it twisted. The pot calling the kettle black. Let's talk about you. All your career busy defending criminals. As we speak, criminals roam free because of you. Qaphela and Mzi

should've been behind bars a long time ago, but you always had their backs. Making Mthandeni to be this crazy cop, but all he wanted to do was clear the streets of criminals in suits like you.

There was no stopping me.

Kamva: Not so long ago, you capitalized on your brother in law's death. You have no shame. You're drunk. Thinking you're better than me. Now you're thinking of ways you can get Thabile out of prison. A murderer. You have a nerve to think you're better than me, but in reality we're the same.

I clicked my tongue and walked away, irritated and pissed.

Qaphela Nkosi

I bombarded the doctor with questions after she came to check up on her patient.

Qaphela: Doc, tell me she's going to be okay.

She gave me a warm smile.

Her: Don't worry, she's going to be okay. It's only a matter of time before she wakes up.

Qaphela: Thank you so much, doc.

Happiness spread across my entire body and my hope renewed.

Her: She's lucky to have you. You have been here for her since.

Qaphela: I can't think of being anywhere else other than her side.

Her: I'd ask you out on a date, but that would be setting myself up for heartbreak.

We chuckled together, before long she departed. I looked at Thabile, with a fond heart and smile.

Qaphela: You heard that? You're going to be alright and pick up where we left off.

I traced circles on her hand that was in my own.

Qaphela: But there's still that issue of making sure you do not go to prison.

My cellphone beeped indicating a message. It was from my father. 'We need to talk. It's urgent.'

I typed in a reply. *I'll be there in 30.*

Kamvelihle Ngubane

Looking at Buhle in the bed just made me break down. The fall and the rise of her chest made me think that I still had time to fix this entire thing. I went to settle on the edge of the bed, and stared at her for the longest time before I started pouring my heart out.

Kamva: I know that everyone thinks that I'm this evil person, but believe me I never wanted this to happen. I never meant for everything to spiral out of control. I know I'm a shitty person. I've been a shitty sister. Damn, I can't think of anything that I haven't been shitty in. I have done things that I'm not proud of. For

that, I apologise to you. I've attempted to make your life miserable, but I'm glad that I never won. You've already had a tough life, and it didn't sit well with me when I realised that I kept making it worse this past year. It's about time that I play the role of a big sister seeing that I failed to for months. This sacrifice will be nothing compared to you losing your life, and I can't let that happen.

With my eyes full of tears, I removed my ring from my finger. I kissed the gem, and placed it on the pedestal.

Kamva: I'm ready to do whatever it takes.

I wiped my tears, and got up from the bed and walked to the door, only to see aunty Phumla standing in the threshold.

Phumla: You're doing the right thing. I'm proud of

you. This is the first of many pure and genuine gestures towards your blood sister.

She embraced me, and I just broke down further at the warmth she was showing me. My eyes popped when I heard Buhle's voice.

Buhle: What is going on here?

I turned around to see her stirring on the bed.

Phumla: You're awake? It worked.

Kamva: It did?

I was swamped with different emotions.

Buhle: Damn, it feels like I've been hit by a bus.

Kamva: Look Buhle, before you say anything and

start attacking me, I just wanted to apologise for everything. I know it will take more than a lousy apology and I'd understand if you want nothing to do with me anymore, but I just want to do better. I want to be a better person. I'm exhausted of all this fighting.

She sat upright, and leaned against the headboard. I couldn't make out what she was thinking.

Buhle: The curse has been broken.

Kamva: What do you mean the curse has been broken? You know nothing about the curse, right?

Buhle: Father visited me while I was passed out. He narrated everything to me, and apparently this was a form of a test, and you passed it severing the curse, and erasing it from our destinies.

My eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

Phumla: Seems like all that needed to happen was for the two of you to dissolve all the dislike you had for each other. The curse was nurtured by the anger and hatred you had towards each other.

Kamva: I don't know what to say, but I think we can agree that things can not magically be alright as yet. There is a lot we need to get off our chests.

Phumla: Your unions with your husbands have been blessed. The future looks bright.

Buhle: This is overwhelming and awkward for me.

Kamva: You aren't the only one.

Noxolo Ndebele

My eyes traveled from Siyabonga to Kaizer, and back to my newfound stepson. Kaizer leaned against the wall, slicing his apple with a knife threateningly, and

munched on the chunks while me and Siyabonga sat across each other on different couches.

Noxolo: I didn't think I'd be seeing you again under these circumstances.

Shakes: None of us prepared for it. I still can't believe you're my sperm donor's woman.

Noxolo: Sperm donor? You're really disrespectful.

Shakes: He didn't raise me. As far as I know, I only have one father and he's not here.

Noxolo: None of this is Mandlakhe's fault. He didn't know about you.

Shakes: You think a father who knew the difficulties of raising a child in poverty would let his only son be bullied by a woman?

Noxolo: So you wanted him to let you get away with your nonsense? Uyasagana. When you look at yourself, do you think you're worthy and deserving to be next in line for his throne? Because all I see is a disappointment and a township rat.

Shakes: Seems like you see in me what you are. Where do you think your little relationship is going to end up?

Noxolo: Let's get to what you're doing here. Did you know that your ex-girlfriend has given birth?

Shakes: I thought I was here about the diamonds.

Noxolo: You are. I want my money and I hope that to whoever you sold the diamonds to, you got what they're worth. For your sake, I hope that you weren't stupid enough to blow millions in a few months because I want atleast a million rand returned to me. On top of that, you're going to work your ass off to provide and support your son and give him the best life there is out there. You'll do that until you take your last breath. Tell me. Is that going to be a problem, or you want me to show you what I'm capable of?

He looked ready to explode, but Kaizer cleared his throat.

Shakes: Fine.

Noxolo: Don't even think about taking off again because next time I'm not going to be lenient.

Shakes: And risk ruining your relationship? I don't think so. Your little boyfriend wants our relationship to strengthen and I can easily make him turn against you.

Noxolo: Look at me carefully. I've been single most of my life and what I'm not going to allow is you to disrespect me.

He glared at me, and I looked at him calmly. Seconds later, Khethiwe walked in through the door with her grandson in her arms and quirked an eyebrow at me before snaking to one of the bedrooms, probably to put the baby to sleep. She came back moments later and simultaneously Mandlakhe walked in behind Anna.

Noxolo: Mandla, thank you for fetching them from

the hospital.

Mandlakhe: It wasn't a problem.

I swear my niece's jaw dropped when she noticed her ex-boyfriend who took off and left her with a pregnancy in the room with us. She didn't look satisfied, and her hands rolled into fists at her sides. She didn't walk normally, but she didn't look too bad.

Noxolo: Maybe we should give you two space to catch up.

I gave Siyabonga a warning look.

Khethiwe pulled me to the kitchen, and the men went outside.

Khethiwe: Let's hope he doesn't send her back to the hospital. I'm just afraid she's going to hurt herself.

Noxolo: They'll be fine.

Khethiwe: Anyways you didn't tell me that your man is hotter in person.

Noxolo: Bad timing. On the other hand, I still don't know what's going on with Buhle.

Khethiwe: I know you care about her, but don't let it stress you so much. She's going to be okay.

On cue, a message came through. *I thought I'd wake up to my second mother's presence. I love you. They told me that you were worried sick about me, and I just thought I should let you know that I'm fine.*

A huge smile crept up onto my face at the heartwarming message. I may have not seen it before, but the reason I probably chose not to dwell too much on my womb was because Buhle filled that gap. Her and Bongwiwe.

It goes without saying that all of us have been through shit this year, but the important ones made it through. From here, I hoped for a smooth sailing and happy ending.

We heard screams from the lounge.

Anna: So it took another person? Someone else for you to step up to your responsibilities? You're messing with me! I want nothing to do with you. Leave, and take your son with!

But maybe that happy ending needed more time and work.

Simnikiwe Mkhize

Mvelo's ghost suddenly appeared. I almost got a heart attack.

Mvelo: You don't look too happy to see me.

I closed my eyes, hoping that he'd go away.

Mvelo: What? How long did you think you'd get rid of me?

Something flashed in front of me. A vivid image of another prison cell. I saw my sister being smothered with a pillow in her sleep. A sharp pain hit my chest. Then it flashed to another place. Zenani was burning in a furnace. I could hear her screams and her pain. That sight embedded itself in my head.

Mvelo: Even in death, your sister will suffer.

Nikiwe: This isn't real. You're not real.

I could feel the another inmates' eyes on me.

Mvelo: Don't fret. I'll make sure that my daughters never suffer at your hands again. I see that you don't have any friends here, but don't worry, I'll be your companion. We're going to have a blast. Like old times.

My head threatened to burst open. It felt like something was piercing through it.

Nikiwe: No!

Buhlenkosi Malinga

The four of us clinked our glasses of liquor together. The atmosphere was jampacked with awkwardness. A lot had happened between all of us. A lot of things were said. I still couldn't get out Kamva's nudes in Mpilo's cellphone from my mind. Damn, but there was progress. All it took was one step, and the rest would fall into place.

Kamva: To new beginnings.

Mpilo: I toast to that.

Senzo: It's about time we squashed all this animosity. It was going to drive me insane.

Mpilo: Tell me about it.

Kamva positioned her glass on the table, and leaned over to whisper in her husband's ear.

Kamva: You'll find me in the bedroom.

She said it low, but I still heard it. She strutted away.

Senzo: Duty calls.

He followed behind his wife, and well we couldn't say anything.

Mpilo: At least the awkwardness comes to an end. I know that I'm not the only one who felt it.

Me: You're not. Everything can't be fixed overnight. Remember that we all said and did things that are difficult to move past. Like those nudes in your recycle bin.

Mpilo: Please don't remind me.

Me: We should leave. It's late. I don't think I want to spend another night here. There's no privacy.

I winked at him seductively.

Mpilo: I see someone's getting naughty.

I smiled. He handed me his car keys.

Mpilo: Let me quickly go use the bathroom. I'll find you in the car.

Skipping to his car and unlocked it, my cellphone rang. Settling on the passenger seat, I answered it.

Thabi: Babe, I heard that you fainted.

Me: News travel fast. Why you calling from Q's phone? Does this mean you're out?

Thabi: While you were passed out, I was getting treated for my stab wound.

Me: What do you mean?

Thabi: Long story. I'm just glad I'm still alive.

Me: This is news to me. What does this mean, Thabile? You're out?

Thabi: No, I was transferred from the prison hospital because I needed intensive care. I'll be heading back soon with more charges to my name. Life yi film.

Me: What hospital are you in?

Thabi: Visiting hours are almost over.

Me: We'll bribe the nurses.

She started giggling out of nowhere.

Thabi: Q, stop it.

Me: Damn, I see you two are getting freaky on a hospital bed. Let me hang up.

I disconnected the call, and shook my head with a smile. Mpilo came, and relaxed on the driver's seat. He ignited the car and the gate slid open, and he drove away from his brother's home.

Me: Why didn't you tell me that Thabi is in hospital?

Mpilo: When? We were all going through our own things.

Me: But you should have still told me. She's my friend.

Mpilo: I know.

Me: We should pass by the hospital. You know where she's at?

Mpilo: Yes.

Now since that was out of the way, I unbuckled his belt.

Mpilo: What are you doing? I'm driving.

Me: Then pull over. It's been a while.

He pulled over on the side of the road, still in my

sister's neighborhood. It didn't take long for him to harden, and he pulled down his pants and boxers, his machine springing free. I was dripping wet, and I discarded everything I was wearing in the backseat. He pulled out a condom from the compartment under his steering wheel, and rolled it over his length.

Mpilo: This is dangerous. We could get hijacked.

Me: In the burbs? Come on.

I went to straddle his lap and guided his manhood into my vagina. I could never get used to his size nor the way his cock felt against my pussy walls. I started moving rhythmically, and he pounded into me from underneath. The depth was so heavenly. My breasts bounced, and he cupped them, kneading to my satisfaction. The fact that we were doing everything by the side of the road made things more exciting. My moans echoed around the car.

And in this position, I knew instantly that there was no other place I'd love to be than buried in Mpilo's arms. Under the moonlight, I knew that for perpetuity that he was mine and I was his.

We were at it for the longest ten minutes of my life. We'd stop here and there to hold off our orgasmic relief and build up more and more pleasure for a powerful, and mindblowing release. Damn, car sex could get messy.

Mpilo: We should really get going. We'll finish this off at home.

Me: Good idea. I just remembered something.

Mpilo: What?

Me: I have an assignment due tomorrow, and I haven't started.

Mpilo: Tell me you're joking.

Me: I'm not.

Mpilo: Are you serious right now? What were you waiting for all this time?

Me: It slipped my mind, okay.

Mpilo: Then we better get home, and I'll help you with it. We will cross night.

Me: I knew I made the right choice by choosing you.

Mpilo: We don't manage to finish, you'll ask for an extension. The next time you take your schoolwork lightly, we're not going to see each other for two weeks.

Me: That's ridiculous, but let's see if you'll manage without your daily dose of this.

I ran my hands over his chest underneath his shirt.

Mpilo: You want to challenge me?

Me: I'd love to see this one.

I got off from his lap to the passenger seat, and just pulled on my shirt. Mpilo fixed on his trousers, and soon we were back on road.

Me: Oh, and about the assignment, I was playing with you. Failing my first year is not part of the plan, but I'm taking you up on your challenge.

Mpilo: I'm going to love this. I always win.

Me: We'll see about that. There's always a first time for everything.

After all everything hadn't been in vain and I was where I was supposed to be.

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The End

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