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## **PROLOGUE**

"Wande we shouldn't be doing this"

I whispered softly in response to his touch, what we were doing here was wrong on so many levels.

Him: "It feels right Madlomo,"

Every time he would refer to me by my clan name, something deep inside moves. It was like I was under his spell or something.

Our foreheads met and we slowly engaged in a kiss. So full of passion, life could stop at that moment.

I couldn't believe what I am doing, yes my marriage with Siyabonga is failing but why jump from one man to another?

But God why does it feel so right? Why is my heart so at peace with this man? Is it because he is a spiritual healer?

My hand gently touched his arms, I felt so much at peace. This man carries an aura of tranquility, but it still doesn't justify what we are doing here is wrong.

Our lips moved an inch away from each other.

Him: "Make me yours Madlomo, let me love you,"

he whispered softly.

Again, the calling of my clan name.

Why is this man doing this to me!

Me: "You know I am still married to someone else

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"

Him: "No! You are not, stop refusing my love,"

Me: "Please give me time to sort out my problems first,"

Him: "Ndizakulinda,"-I'll wait for you

Me: "I should be heading home,"

He remained quiet.

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Driving Home had never been an issue before, but the moment I landed in South Africa I knew my world was to change. Being an artist comes with so much work and travelling places, with the near opening of the new one in Port Elizabeth the months will be hectic. I had been receiving calls left right and center, gallery owners calling for me to exhibit my work with them, I unfortunately had to decline.

After Tanzania the plan was to fly to Europe but being married to a businessman comes with duties of being a wife. However, nothing could've prepared me for what I was met with after I stepped my foot off that airplane.

My Journey began with my feet stepping on the grounds of the windy city...

## ONE

It was always a breath of fresh air whenever I came back to Port Elizabeth, the windy city with all its demons but I was home, where my life revolved. I have been away from the country for three months. It did me well because Tanzania, where I had been, treated me well. That country is full of amazing, talented and gorgeous people. I have no complaints and their artwork is so out of this world, mind-blowing. Now being back in Port Elizabeth or South Africa in general, means I have to cough out all I had learnt in that country and use it as an inspiration for my next art collection, with soon opening a gallery here in P.E I have to stand out. I am not famous, no! But my work is and I loved it that way.

My phone rang as I pushed the trolley which had my luggage in it. It read 'husband'

Me: "Hello"

Him: "hey, I can't fetch you baby, I have a meeting in five minutes time and I am sorry I won't make it,"

Me: "It's fine, I'll take a cab back home,"

Him: "Okay, I can't wait to see you,"

Me: "I can't wait to see you too,"

Him: "Okay, I have to go bye,"

I exhale. Sometimes I wonder how I ended up with this man but he said he's busy and I will accept that.

The driver of the cab was very nice, he knew I was tired and didn't do any silly chit-chat. I made it to Wells Estate midday, the security didn't give us any hassle at the gate. I offloaded my luggage and left some of it on the entrance passage.

I went straight to my bedroom and threw myself on the bed, tired from all the travelling over hours.

I must have dosed off because I was woken up by a gentle shake, I opened my eyes and it was my husband. The man I said my I do's to.

Me: "You are back,"

I yawned and stretched myself,

Him: "Yes, and it is so good to see you back,"

He was showing no signs of interest, no smile.

Me: "I missed the house, home..."

He seemed uninterested, his face drew something I had seen before. It told something I wasn't ready for.

Him: "Bulelwa there's something I want to tell you

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Already.... I felt my heart pump in confusion.

Me: "Yes," I sit up

Him: "There's someone else,"

I was confused... I looked at him as realisation hit me.

Me: "What do you mean?"

Him: "The months you were not here, I pursued something else with someone, for that I am sorry. Me saying this to you is an indication that I am deeply sorry Bulelwa please find it in you to forgive me,"

Me: "Who is she?"

Him: "You don't want to know,"

Me: "Do not fool me Siyabonga!" my voice got louder

Him: "My P.A, Sisanda and she is expecting my child,"

I felt like someone took a knife and stabbed my heart many times. In the years that I have been with this man we had tried so hard for a baby, we tried to a point that I could not take it anymore, hearing him saying those words brought back all those nights I had cried praying and begging for God to bless me with a child. He betrayed me.

Me: "She is expecting, your... your child,"

I stuttered, this was not the way I expected to be welcomed home... be welcomed by such a bomb.

Him: "Yes,"

I got up and wore my shoes, my heart was already in pieces. I could feel my soul slowly leaving my body.

Me: "Where are my car keys?"

Him: "Bulelwa I am sorry,"

Me: "My car keys!!" I shouted

Him: "Here!" he handed the car keys

I was at loss of words, the pain I felt was excruciating, unbearable... How could he? after what we've been through,



why men are such a disappointment. Years of trying to be better in marriage all went down the drain unappreciated.

Me: "I have only been away for only three months and this is my welcome back! Well played Siyabonga,"

Him: "It was a mistake Bulie!"

He shouted.

I shook my head as tears threatened my eyes, I furiously walked out of the bedroom, down the passage and descended the stairs down to the kitchen, I headed to the garage. Got in my car and drove out of the yard.

The security of the estate refused to open the gate for me.

Me: "Bhuti please! Do not test me!"

I was fuming.

Him: "Ma'am you are in no state to drive,"

Me: "In Jesus name you are in no position to tell me what to do! You open the gate or I will drive through it,"

Him: "Your husband instructed me to not let you out,"

I revved my car.

Him: "Okay, Okay yho sister,"

He opened the gate and I drove out of the estate in anger, I had no idea of where I was going but the speed at which my car was travelling, could've killed me on the spot. The tears were already blinding my vision.

## TWO

I found myself driving to the church and I arrived unharmed, the speed I was driving at was more than enough to get me in an accident and kill me right away.

I parked my car and walked in the house of the Lord. It was empty so I went straight to the front and went down on my knees. My tears fell down as I couldn't say what's hurting me, I finally gathered the strength and called out my Lord and savior.

Heavenly father I kneel before you as a broken woman, my husband has committed adultery but I trust in your love to give me strength. Father gave me power to fight this as the devil came in my house dressed in skirts and tempted my husband, if this is your doing my Lord then let it be it. Heal me father, show me the right path and lead me to where my happiness lies. Do not let the devil take over my life rather save me from any evil done to destroy my life. I have faith in you, I ask for a heart that is pure, I ask for peace and abundance in my life, I ask for positivity in the name of Jesus I believe all I ask will be done in your mighty name Amen.'

I took a deep sigh and a sweet voice echoed on the walls of the empty church. It was the pastor's wife, her voice was angelic.

Her: "It is good that you came to the house of the Lord, believe that he will heal you and show you the way,"

I turned and smiled at her as I got up, wiping my tears.

Me: "I am sorry, there was no other place I could think of,"

Her: "No, don't apologize my child, the temple of God will always be open for those who seek comfort, do not apologize you did not do anything wrong. The house of the lord is always open for everyone to come and release the heavy load,"

Me: "And I feel like it is such a heavy load that he has given me,"

Her: "God doesn't give you a burden you can't carry, he knows you are capable of fighting whatever you are going through. I heard your prayer from start to end, God shall grant you the strength you need, and know that he is never too late nor too

early he is just on time, qina emthandazweni and you'll see him performing miracles in your life, ”

We sat down on one of the benches and she held my hands.

Me: “ Thank you for the reviving words Ma, but can you give me advice on what I can do with the situation that I am facing?” she exhaled

Her: “I cannot tell you what to do but I can give you guidance on what you can try doing first. Yes your husband committed adultery, broke his vows that he said in front of the Lord, but my dear forgiveness is key. He did you wrong I agree but forgive him my dear for your own peace and sake. Do not let hatred take out the humbleness in you, replace it with forgiveness. Act in humbleness because if you do not, the devil will take over your life and you do not want that as he the devil will make you do things that are not in Christ. Forgiveness is key.”

Me: “Thank you for sharing this with me Ma, you've opened my eyes,”

Her: "Remember to not act in an unholy way and remember that God is always with you okay,"

I nodded. A girl child about ten years of age walked in and greeted

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with her head slightly looking down in respect

Child: "Molweni Ma, I am sorry to disturb you but umamfundisi uyacelwa on the Sunday school class,"

Her: "Okay my child, I'll be there just now,"

Child: "Okay Ma,"

The girl walked back out.

Her: "My dear, as you can see I am needed, please think about what I said okay sisi," I nodded

Me: "Thank you Ma, I should probably go too,"

Her: "Uhambe kakuhle sisi, don't forget to pray, he will never leave you nor forsake you my dear,"

Me: "Okay Ma," we let go and she walked to the other door and I exited the church feeling much better.

I got in my car and drove to the petrol station.

I filled my car up and bought flowers.

I found myself driving towards the Forest hill cemetery.

That is where we laid my mother to rest.

I got out of the car and walked to where her grave was at.

God decided to take her away from me, she was at peace now but it's hard to forget her.

She was such a lovely mother. Down to earth and an advocate for education, a lady who believed in herself.

I miss her.

I placed the flowers on the tombstone slab and talked to the silent grave.

Me: “Mom I wish you were here with me, life is getting bitter for me and I miss you but that is not why I am here. You taught me to always trust in the power of the lord and be a strong woman for that lesson I thank you very much, I hope you are resting peacefully and no longer feel the pains of this world (chuckled), I would have loved to come here with grand-kids but God hasn’t granted me with one yet, I guess he is waiting for the perfect time,”

I spent an hour to two talking to her telling her about my trip to and back from Tanzania. The painting and drawing I had worked on, my artworks and exhibitions. I somehow felt her presence even though it was dead quiet, but I felt closer to her.

And the sun had already set. I should head back to the house, it is getting dark.

Me: “I have to go now mom, I will visit you again and I miss you every day, you don’t even visit me in my dreams anymore. But it is okay,”



I smiled and walked back to my car.

I drove from the graveyard back to the estate, one long drive but worth it as my spirit was revived.

I parked my car in the yard and I noticed a White Chevy Spark car in the driveway, I wondered who would visit at such a time.

Nonetheless, I walked inside the house through the kitchen door and I was met by Siya's PA, Sisanda!

Oh my God what was she doing in my house!?

The baby bump was visible and she was drinking a glass of water, so much at home.

What did this woman want in my house?

I was being tested.

### THREE

I closed the door behind me and placed my keys on top of the kitchen counter. She turned and looked at me, and smiled. The liver.

Her: "Hello, I am Sisanda," she let out her hand for a shake, I declined.

Me: "I know very well who you are,"

Sisanda is probably a size twenty eight, with a fluffy Afro and she is light skinned. She is not tall nor short either.

Her: "Oh, someone is in a mood," she placed the glass on the sink.

Me: "Where is my husband?"

Her: "Why would I know?"

Me: "Because you are here,"

Thiza ndiyalingwa.

Her: "So me being here how does it..."

Me: "You know you are lucky that you are pregnant, otherwise I'd be mopping the floor with your face? What are you doing in my house if my husband is not here?"

Her: "Oh dear you haven't heard? I now live here,"

Me: "Wait... what do you mean you live here?"

Her: "Well I am carrying Siyabonga's first born, you really did not expect me to live far away from his father?"

Another bombshell. Why would this man disrespect me like this.

Me: "You did not have to rub it in, how long have you been staying here?"

Her: "Three weeks,"

Me: "Wow,"

Her: "You really didn't know? Yho get yourself checked lady, you cannot be serious right now, did you not notice?"

Me: "Excuse me,"

I grabbed my keys and went upstairs to my room. Searched for my cell phone and found it. It had missed calls and messages, all from Siyabonga. I dialed him back

Him: "Thank goodness you're okay, where are you I am worried,"

Me: "Quit acting like you care, where are you?"

Him: "I am driving back home,"

Me: "Oh well, drive faster we have to talk,"

Him: "What... you are at home?"

Me: "Mxm," I dropped the call and sat on the bed. How did I not see all this, the calls were not the same and he was always busy. I had been a fool.

I am bruised deeply inside my heart, all those years we were trying for a baby without succeeding. The sleepless nights, the cries and prayers, all that for nothing. But I am not questioning how God decided this to play out.

I also cannot deny the fact that I was emotionally hurt, I was drained. He did not only get her pregnant but invited her to stay for the duration of the pregnancy, he gave her keys to our house! But I was told to pray for forgiveness, hatred has no place in my heart and my tears will not be in vain.

I said a little prayer, my heart aching like someone decided to cut it slowly and painfully. I leaned on the headboard and felt tears wetting my face.

This man doesn't respect me at all and it is time to let all of this to be, slowly step out of this union.

After what felt like forever I got out of bed and walked to the shower.

There is something peaceful about warm water hitting your skin, it soothes and makes you feel clean, not only external but internal too.

I wore pajamas, a sponsored t-shirt with cotton shorts and silk doek to be exact, yes they count as pajamas too.

I walked out of the bedroom to the kitchen, oh yes my dear husband was busy on the stove cooking.

Him: "I thought you were resting,"

Me: "I was,"

Him: "I am making something to eat, I told the cooker to take a day off,"

I didn't even bother with answering him, I took out fruits from the fridge and turned on the kettle for water to boil, I needed a strong coffee.

Him: "How was Tanzania?"

Me: "Fine," I sat down on the chair and ate my fruits

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Him: "Just fine?"

I gave him the look, and continued indulging in my fruits, His missus walked in, my stomach turned, I didn't even feel like eating anymore.

Composure Bulelwa.

Him: "You know you should be sleeping by now?"

He asked her, it had been certified; I was the clown of the circus.

Her: " I know, but with all these cravings I can hardly close my eyes. White bread with raw purple onion rings and a spread of mayonnaise, mhhh"

I almost choked! Who in their right minds eats that? Ohh I wouldn't understand 'odd pregnancy cravings'

Him: "What!?"

Her: "Yes, and make it for me,"

Clingy, lady hold yourself.

I got up and walked back to my bedroom, I couldn't be seriously watching them doing all that, to say I am hurt was an understatement. I was beyond hurt.



The door opened and he came in,

Him: "Bulelwa,"

Me: "Go be with her, she needs you more than I do,"

I was defeated. Yes.

Him: "I don't want her, I want you,"

I chuckled

Me: "Am I written 'fool' in my forehead?"

Him: "No,"

Me: "Then why do you keep on treating me like one huh?"

Him: "I am sorry,"

Me: "How will sorry fix everything huh?"

I kept my voice firm.

Him: "It won't, I know that but we can move forward from this,"

Me: "You cheated, impregnated her and invited her to come stay in our house! Our home and now you tell me we can move forward from this!? You must be high on something strong,"

Him: "We can talk it out, please calm down,"

I laughed.

Me: "Calm down! You do shit and tell me to calm down? Today you woke up planning to send me to hell straight! Hayi ndiyagezeleka,"

Him: "This is for the both of us Buli, listen when she told me she was pregnant I initially suggested an abortion, I even gave her

money for it but she didn't do it. She told me she couldn't and I sat down and thought about this. I am going to be a father, something I've wanted for the longest time. I then later I gave her keys to the house because I need her to be here so she can have a smooth pregnancy and she wouldn't have that in her flat,"

He was proud of what he did, not at all sorry. By the look of things; he would do it again.

Me: "So for the duration of her pregnancy she will be here?"

Him: "Yes,"

Me: "You love her?"

Him: "... No, I don't"

Me: "You just wanted a child with her?"

Him: "It was unplanned, hence at first I told her to abort it,"

Me: "So what do you think will happen to our marriage?"

Him: "We work it out, we can overcome this. We will take it as a test from God,"

I chuckled.

I was made a fool. I shook my head

Him: "We can work it out Bullie, I do not want to lose you but I will understand if you want a divorce. Mother is also coming for a visit this weekend,"

I remained silent.

Him: "I hope you will be here and yes Sisanda will join us too,"

I looked at him. First day being home after I had been away for months and I was welcomed by a gift full of disappointments, betrayals, heartache and pain. Welcome back Bulelwa.

He walked out of the room, I crawled under the covers and hugged myself. I felt like my soul was being taken out of my body violently. He cheated yet goes on as if it was not wrong. He impregnated her and that hurts more than anything.

I am going to be mocked and laughed at by people, maybe he did that to prove he is not the problem but what he does not know is I can conceive too.

When I was in Tanzania I got myself examined and there's nothing wrong with me, I was told I produce eggs and anytime it meets a sperm I could get pregnant without any hassle.

What confused me more was that; If he was not the problem and I am not either? Why would it be so hard for him and I to have our own children? He is fertile and I am too but what keeps going wrong!

The only explanation I could come up with at the moment was that, maybe God didn't want us to have one, maybe our time was coming and I could only hope.

I dozed off after trying to contemplate what might be keeping us from having a child.

## FOUR

I woke up with a strong headache, my eyes were puffy from crying. The time on the watch read 07.15, I said my morning prayer and got out of bed to refresh and be ready for the day. The sun was out early. A sunny day it was going to be. I dressed in a dress and flats.

Having braids was really helpful, just spray and brush the thing, then you are ready to for the day.

I made my bed, took my handbag, keys and walked out.

I entered the kitchen and of course it was a happy family; with my so called husband playing and brushing the baby bump, I just stood by the entrance and watched them, it must've been nice.

Her: "Stop it now!" she giggled

Him: "Let me bond with my baby for a minute,"

I swallowed hard.

Her: "You can bond another time, I need to get ready for work,"

Him: "You work for me, so you don't have to worry,"

Her: "More reason for you to stop,"

she giggled and I walked in and cleared my throat. They both jumped.

Me: "Good morning,"

Him: "Morning my love, how did you sleep?"

Me: "Fine, quite a cozy one for the two of you,"

Her: "I am sorry about that.. well.."

Lady just shut up.

Me: "You don't have to explain yourself to me,"

Him: "We weren't cozy as you thought, I was just..."

Me: "I seriously don't want to hear it,"

I took out a bowl and poured cereal, followed by cold milk.

I like them cold and crunchy.

Me: "Sisi when are you leaving my house?"

I took in spoons of my cereal.

Her: "Excuse me?"

Me: "You heard me,"

Her: "I don't know what is wrong with you, but I am not leaving this house,"

Him: "Bulelwa we talked about this,"



Me: "I don't want her here, she must go somewhere else,"

Her: "Too bad, if someone is leaving here it has to be you," I almost choked.

Him: "Sisanda please shut up! Bulie we'll work around this,"

Me: "I am the wife in this house okay, what I say goes and right now I want you out of my house, I don't care whether you are carrying the president's daughter or whatever! You must be out of here. And Siyabonga, the nerve to bring your mistress into our home! Wow bhuti,"

Her: "Please do not call me a mistress because you don't even know what Siya and I have.

Him: "Sisanda mind you tone, you are talking to my wife here,"

Her: "Oh now she is your wife, weren't you divorcing her? Last night you were in between my sheets telling me you'll file for a divorce! Today she is your wife?"

Okay I choked this time! Hard too.

Me: "What!!!"

I coughed hard,

Her: "I see you haven't told her, well Siya here is divorcing you, him and I will get married! You are so slow sometimes,"

I grabbed the bowl and threw it furiously in their direction and they ducked, it smashed across the wall. My hot slap landed across her face, she screamed loudly!

Him: "Bulelwa!!!"

Her: "I am going to get you arrested for assault! Hitting a pregnant woman is a crime,"

Me: "I would love to see you try, until that divorce is finalized I want you out of my house!"

Her: "I will not do such! Maybe if your womb was able to carry what I am carrying we both wouldn't be in this!"

Him: "You two stop behaving like hooligans! Kwaksasa!"

I grabbed my keys and handbag, walked out of the house with Siyabonga following me,

Him: "Bulelwa let's talk and what you just did there was uncalled for!"

Me: "I have nothing to talk to you about, and it is not like what she said there wasn't true!"

Him: "Bulie, please marn!"

He pulled my arm.

Me: “Khawundiyeke rhaa!!”

I yanked my arm out of his touch and walked to my car in the driveway,

Him: “You should stop running away from your problems Bulelwa! When are you going to learn to face them,”

Me: “My problems? You are not serious. As far as I know I have no problems!”

Him: “Haibo Bulelwa!”

Me: “Ndiyeke ke,”

I got in my car and drove out, from the estate to my friend’s house in Colchester.

Zininzi, she is a lawyer and a single mother to this beautiful nine year old Bayolise. I would say her lifestyle was just being free

and loving her child. It has been unfortunate for her that the father of her child died a month before she was born, my friend was devastated. It was God who came through for her and helped her get back on her feet. I have to say she has done pretty well over the years, in terms of emotional healing and letting go.

I reached my destination, parked in the driveway and went inside. Knocked at the door and I was welcomed by the little princess.

Her: "Aunt Bulie," She jumped up for me to hold her,

Me: "Hello Baby B,"

Her: "How are you, mom is going to be so happy to see you,"

We walked inside the house,

Me: "Really?"

Her: “Yes and I have missed you so much! I had no one to take me for an ice-cream whilst you were gone,”

Me: “Now that I am back we will go my love and you are so heavy,”

She laughed and I put her down with Zininzi walking in,

Zininzi: “I thought my ears were deceiving me but no!!”

Me: “Hello my friend,”

We shared a warm hug,

Zizi: “Look at you all glowing and beautiful, Tanzania did you well sister,”

Me: “Thank you my friend, I can see you’ve been taking care of by Bayolise here,”

Zizi: “Yho this one is the reason I’ll get old quickly, let’s go sit down and you can tell me all about Tanzania, Bayo bring us snacks dali,”

We walked to the lounge area,

Zizi: “Bulie, Tanzania did you good, Madlomo you are glowing,”

Me: “Awu stop it already, I am still the same,”

Zizi: “Really babe, Mr April must be happy you are back,”

Me: “Argh, I wish my friend, lemons were served yesterday yho

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Zizi: “What happened?”

I told her everything.

Her: "What!! After all these years!?"

Me: "Yes, after all we've been through,"

Bayolise brought the snacks and excused herself.

Zizi: "Friend you have to fight for your marriage! You really cannot let all those years go to waste,"

Me: "At this point I am tired my friend, I really do not know how to move forward, even so I still long for his touch, I sound desperate but he is the only man that I know and... ay my friend I am stuck,"

Zizi: "Sweetie, I say stay and fight for your man, I mean that woman is nothing to what you have gone through with your husband,"

Me: "Nhe?"



Zizi: “Yeah, or you can move out from your house and start your life afresh,”

Me: “I guess, I should choose,”

Zizi: “Yes, and you know you are always welcome to come stay here with me,”

I smiled.

Me: “I know friend, I know. I am thinking of going to Grahamstown for a few days and then come back, but for now I have to focus on my gallery which I will open soon at Walmer park, I have to try and find an apartment that is closer there so that I don't have to travel long distance, and traffic here isn't nice,”

Zizi: “I hear you my friend and I think it is a good plan too, but I still say fight for your man, girl you've been through hell and back with him,”

Me: “You should see how joyful he is around her, and the girl doesn’t let a chance slide, she makes sure she rubs it in,”

Zizi: “Okay move out my friend, I take the fight back thing back. Leave him dali because he will change you to be the worst person and you are not that at all,”

Me: “You see why I am stuck in between! Anyway, enough about me and my marital stresses, how has your life been?”

She smiled. Genuinely.

Zizi: “Life has been fine my friend, amazing in fact and God has been taking care of me I must say,” She winked.

Me: “If you are happy then who am I to be sad huh?”

We laughed, and talked about everything. It was good, after months of speaking English non-stop and a bit of Swahili it was

good to catch up with someone close. I even forgot my marital problems.

After hours of talking and laughing I had to go back to the house, devil's pit.

I exhaled as I walked in and went to sit on the couch facing the wall, looking at my paintings on the walls and just reminiscing on the good days of my marriage. I closed my eyes for the afternoon rest, my body was still used to Tanzania, I actually missed that country, I had been so happy...

Arguing voices woke me up from my nap, I stood up and walked to where the noise of the voices was coming from and it led me to the kitchen. I leaned on the side, I knew eavesdropping was wrong but I couldn't help it. I could hear Sisanda's voice and the other one was unfamiliar. It is a male voice with a coloured accent.

Sisanda: "you have to leave Frankie, they can't find you here,"

Him: "Why should I without you?"

Sisanda: "You'll have to,"

Frankie: "Sisanda you're carrying my baby, I want you to come home with me,"

Oh Okay. Ewe Bulelwa it's that, wow.

Sisanda: "Stop that, this is not your baby and you know that,"

Frankie: "Sisanda I know you're carrying my baby, Stop this nonsense you're doing and come home with me, you know that I am the father of this baby. This oak can't even shoot man,"

Sisanda: "Frankie you're not the father!!"

Frankie: "I am! Now stop being a bitch because April is not the father, you just after the money," true.

Sisanda: "That's not true,"

Frankie: "It is and you know it,"

Sisanda: "Get out of this house now,"

Frankie: "Sisanda this is not over, I want my baby and you know that it's my baby so don't you think you'll run, I'll always find you,"

Sisanda: "Frankie get out,"

I cleared my throat and walked in. I needed to see this Frankie person so I would be able to recognize him when I want to have a little talk with him. Sisanda had shock written all over her face.

Frankie: "Mrs. April"

Me: "Hello and who is this Sisanda "

Sisanda: "This is Frankie my cousin, he was around so he decided pop in and check up on me but he was leaving now,"

Me:"ohh that's bad, is he in a hurry? I would love to chat with him,"

She shook her head

Sisanda: " Why the sudden interest in my cousin? Frankie we will chat on the phone please leave,"

Me: "The security at the main gate hardly lets anyone in here without consulting us first, but that doesn't matter now. And lady back off please I am not like you,"

Frankie: "I apologize on her behalf Mrs April. She gets like this sometimes, and more I am sorry for how she took over your household. I can understand what you are going through. And

even our family is disappointed in her that she would be a homewrecker,"

his tone emphasized 'homewrecker'

Me: "We take it as it is Frankie, please stay until my husband is back from work, he will be here in two hours' time, that's if you have time,"

Frankie: "I have all the time in the world ma'am, I will wait for your husband as we also have to talk about paying damages, because you see, our family is deeply rooted in culture, so we have to do right by them,"

Me: "I see, Sisanda please make him feel at home. i'll be right back,"

I slightly smiled and walked out of the kitchen.

Her: "Bulelwa what are you playing at?"

I did not notice she was following me.

Me: "Don't start with me please,"

Sisanda: "This is going to backfire badly!"

Me: "Leave my house that's all,"

Sisanda: "You won't see that,"

Me: "Fine,"

I left her and ascended the stairs to my bedroom. Siyabonga has been fooled. played.



FIVE

I walked in and took my phone out of the handbag and dialed Siya. It rang a few times and he answered.

Him: "Bulie,"

Me: "Are you coming back for lunch?"

Him: "Yes, I'll be at home lunchtime,"

Me: "Okay, we have a guest, he is waiting for you,"

Him: "what guest?"

Me: "A man by the name of Frankie is here, he says he is Sisanda's cousin well she claims it's her cousin too,"

Him: "what!?"

Me: "Yes,"

Him: "I'll call Sisanda, we will talk later,"

Me: "Sure,"

I ended the call and went back downstairs to the kitchen to prepare lunch, Frankie walked in holding a whisky glass.

Him: "You have a beautiful house,"

Me: "Thank you,"

Him: "I am sorry about the liquor, couldn't resist it,"

Me: "No problem,"

Him: "Can I help you with whatever you're preparing?"

Me: "I think I'll manage but you are welcome to keep me company,"

Him: "Sounds just about right with me, what are you going to cook?"

Me: "Macaroni and cheese,"

Him: "Oh I love it, "

Me: "is it ?"

Him: "Yes,"

Me: "Nice, well tell me about you? What do you do?"

Him: "You know my name, I am Frankie, it's actually Frank but you know people,"

I chuckled.

Him: "And I work as an estate agent,"

Me: "Oh you are into property?"

Him: "Yes and I want out, I've been doing that thing for years man! So a little change can do,"

Me: "I totally understand, besides change is good,"

Him: "Yes and you are an art person, how is it like? Maybe you can draw me you know!"

I laughed.

Me: "I love it! I mean when you wake up and do what you've always dreamed of doing is liberating. I could actually take you up on that offer!"

him: "And rumor has it that you are opening another gallery at Walmer park"

Me: "Yes, but not as of yet, I still need to put together an art collection, and now you are giving me ideas,"

Him: "Okay, tell me more,"

Me: "Well I am thinking of doing something that will grab the local's attention, I've always managed to grab the attention of other nations but rarely in my own hometown. I have never seen my neighbors attending my exhibitions, which is something I would like to change,"

Him: "And that is why many of our artists don't get the support they really need, they are focused on what other nations are doing rather than starting at home and offering the world who

they actually are. So work on that, try and find ways you could draw their attention,"

Me: "Thank you, and this is actually the reason why I was in Tanzania. Well apart from showcasing my own art I was learning some new things there,"

Him: "And how was being out of the country?"

Me: "It's always good being out of the country, but I missed home and it is very unfortunate that I came back to this,"

Him: "Oh sorry but don't beat yourself up for trusting him, you thought he'll behave and stay faithful since you guys are in a relationship, actually married"

Me: "Yes, but hey expectations kill"

Him: "and again I am sorry for what Sisanda did, it was wrong of her to do you like this,"

Me:" We can't keep blaming her though, my husband had a hand in it too, had he also stayed away neither of this would have happened,"

Him: "How do you feel about the whole thing?"

Me: "Well I am hurt, and I just hope it'll pass and I'll move on with my life,"

Him: "I was also trying to talk her to come back home, our parents don't know she is pregnant, she's been hiding from everyone,"

Me: "You guys are very close,"

Him: "We are, I was raised in her home when my mother passed,"

Me: "Oh okay, I now understand,"

This man was a professional liar, his eyes did not flinch nor did his finger reach up to his face. Someone who lied without a flinch.

We talked about his so-called 'childhood' with Sisanda. He was a very interesting man, intimidating at that but calm, however I failed to see why Sisanda was attracted to him as he didn't look like her type.

What I mean by that is he was unmarried. I did not confront him about what I overheard but left him to continue with his lies.

Sisanda walked in pulling her big suitcase.

Me: "Is someone leaving?"

Her: "Don't act like you didn't know about this,"

Him: "Drop the attitude Sanda,"



Me: "At least wait until I am finished with lunch, then you can leave after,"

Her: "And risk being poisoned by you? No thank you

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Frankie can we go now?"

Him: "That would be appreciated Mrs. April but as you can see hormones are playing with her," she rolled her eyes,

Me: "I can tell, drive safely,"

Him: "Until we meet again Mrs. April, and I wish God to bless you with your own one day,"

Her: "Lidlolo, nothing will ever grow in that rotten womb of hers"

Someone was mad but composure Bulelwa. She was trying to start a fight.

Me: "I wish you a happy life Sisanda," I smiled

Him: "That is enough Sisanda, we will go now sister, bye," She walked out first, leaving Frank to pull the suitcase and the bag.

Me: "Until we meet again Frankie, bye,"

He walked out and I heard the sound of the car driving away. I exhaled, whatever Siyaboga said on that phone call got her off her high horses.

I said 'I do' to a disappointment. Lunchtime came and passed, my husband did not come back for lunch. I tried calling but it went straight to voicemail. Usisibhanxa Bulelwa.

The house was quiet and empty, we were almost out of groceries too.

I cracked my head trying to figure out whether to go to the shopping center or the mall.

I ended up driving to Greenachres mall.

I bought a few groceries, the mall was not busy as it usually gets. I was able to go in and out. My cellphone rang as I packed my groceries in the car.

I took it out and it's Zizinzi, I answered.

Me: "You miss me already?"

Her: "Yes, and where are you?"

Me: "Uyatefa, ndise Greenacres,"

Her: "Great! Please drive straight here I need you to help me with something,"

Me: "Okay, I'll be there just now"

Her: "Oh and we will need a bottle or two of white wine,"

Me: "Now I have to go back inside, your timing is awful friend,"

Her: "I know, I'll send a text of other things I need just now okay,"

Me: "Okay,"

I walked back inside the mall and my phone beeped, I looked at it and it is the list of items I have to buy nameley; Biscuits, bread, soda water and fruits. I texted her back

Me: "Are we baking a cake?"

Her: "Lol, no my friend I am trying out a new recipe,"

Me: "Okay, you..."

I bumped into someone so hard that my wallet, keys and cellphone landed on the floor, my cellphone smashing loudly. I almost screamed. I looked up and it was a man already going down picking up my things.

Me: "Jesus!"

Him: "I am so sorry I wasn't looking, uxolo sisi," he handed them to me and luckily my cell phone didn't crack.

Me: "No, no! It's not your fault uhm, I was also texting whilst walking, it could've been pole or something," I looked up facing him, more like scanning this man who I just bumped into. Jeans, long sleeved white t-shirt, medium sized dreadlocks and I couldn't help but notice the beads around his neck and wrist, they were not your usual ones but ancestral beads. He was a shade lighter than brown.

Him: "And I should've looked on where I was going," He smiled, the man had a dimple on his left side of his face. Bawo Intle lendoda.

Me: "I am glad you understand," I nervously chuckled.

Him: "Wait... I don't want this to come as off but I do know you, you are? The famous artist uhm..." I laughed

Me: "I am not famous but my artwork is, I am Bulelwa,"

Him: "Yes of course, my niece is into fine arts too and she adores you,"

Me: "Oh really?"

I genuinely smiled, it's always a good feeling when you meet someone who actually adores your craft, even if it's the uncle.

Him: "Yes, and unrelated to this but I can feel you are not at peace, your soul is disturbed,"

Me: "At the moment I am going through something, but I will try and work on finding inner peace,"

I smiled.

I loved it when we talked about energy. I believe that auras do communicate and mine just did that to this man.

Him: "You have a beautiful smile, keep it pasted on your face. Oh where are my manners, I am Mawande Dlamini,"

Me: "Oh thank you, well you know me, Bulelwa," we shook hands

Him: "Let me not keep you Lelwa, it was nice meeting you or rather bumping into you," he chuckled.

Me: "I was actually the one who bumped, but definitely a pleasure to meet you, send my love to your niece,"

Him: "I will," He smiled again.

We went our separate ways. I walked to the store to purchase these items.

SIX

The drive back to Zininzi's house was a smooth one, no hassle. She was already standing out as I drove in her driveway, I parked and got out with her plastic.

Me: "You are such a handful my friend,"

Her: "I know my friend and you love me like that,"

I handed her the plastic bag.

Me: "What is it that you needed help with?"

Her: "Let's go inside,"

Me: "Okay,"

As soon as I walked in, I heard screams



“Surprise!!”

Me: “What!!” I jumped in excitement and also I noticed a  
“Welcome back Bulie and Zama”

Zamacirha short for Zama, one of my close friends, she had been in the U.K for the past five years we’ve always kept in touch. I turned and jumped as I saw her.

Zama: “Oh my God!!” we shared a hug, the warmest.

Me: “When? How? And why am I only finding out now?”

Zizi: “It’s called a surprise darling,”

Me: “Wow, I don’t know how to feel, I am so happy to see you Gosh!” I pulled her in for another hug and she laughed,

Zama: "I missed you too Bulie,"

Zizi: "Okay, okay, you are going to make me cry now,"

Me: "Sorry,"

Zama: "Well we haven't seen each other in a while, so,"

We laughed and I was introduced to the faces around the house, about six people and among them was Zama's fiancé, my friend was getting married. We walked to the kitchen.

Me: "When did you arrive Zama?"

Zama: "We landed at O.R thambo five days back, then Ncube and I decided to do a road trip down here,"

Zizi: "You actually haven't told us how on earth you met a Zulu man in the U.K?"

Me: "Like chances of that are slim to none,"

Zama: "Through social media friends," She smiled and giggled

Zizi: "You know what, we do not want to hear it at all!"

Me: "Keep it to yourself-sister, but as long as he makes you happy, then all is well my friend," she smiled and it reached her eyes. My friend is indeed happy.

Zama: "But I am scared though, I am scared of marriage,"

Zizi: "Story of my life,"

Me: "My friend if both of you are happy then there's no need to worry,"

Zama: "And we are Bulie, anyway Zizi how many more guests are we expecting?"

Zizi: "Just four more and they should be here by now,"

Me: "Okay, I'll prepare some green salad,"

Zama: "No everything is ready Bulie, we just need to pour wine and drink,"

Zizi: "Yes!"

Me: "A glass of juice for me please,"

Zama: "you're still uptight Bulie, an enemy of alcohol,"

Me: "No, I still have to drive,"

Zizi: “No sisi, you are sleeping over, pour her a glass of the white one Zama,”

The doorbell rang.

Zizi: "I'll go get that, fill up that glass with wine Zama,”

Me: “Zama, how many more guests are we expecting?”

Her: “Uhm, those at the door are the last ones, Zizi’s colleagues. So we are about eleven or twelve,”

Me: “Oh that’s better I thought she invited the whole of Port Elizabeth,”

We laughed.

Zama: “You know Bulie, I am quite hesitant on this marriage thing,”

Me: "What do you mean?"

She poured wine and handed me my glass,

Zama: "I don't know, I'm just hesitant,"

Me: "Don't be babe, just be happy and if the two of you are down for each other I don't see why you should be hesitant,"

Zama: "And we love each other my friend, after two years we are still going strong," her face sparkled up. The happiness glowed, I couldn't help but smile too.

Me: "And I am happy for you,"

Zama: "Thank you my friend, I actually still cannot..."

Zininzi walked in interrupting us, followed by four people, two ladies and two gentlemen.

Oh my God, I recognized the man I bumped into earlier and he's still in the same outfit, I guess we were heading to the same place.

Zizi: "Ladies please welcome my colleagues, I know you don't know them,"

Zama: "Come on Zizi, we know them, we just never talked,"

My eyes were locked on him. He kept stealing glances too.

Zizi: "But anyway, this is Luzuko and Mawande, with Nwabisa and Thabisa,"

Zama: "Nice to finally talk to you all, I am Zama,"

They laughed

Luzuko: "Definitely, nice to meet you Zama,"

Me: "I'm Bulelwa," I said with a smile pasted on my face, my eyes kept going back to him.

Thabisa: "Girl we all know you here, the famous artist," She pulled me in for a hug, again laughter filled the room

Mawande: "Her art is famous and not her," Oh!

Me: "You got it!"

We all laughed.

Zininzi: "I'll take it you've already met her because that is her favourite line,"

Mawande: "We bumped into each other at the mall," He smiled

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God that dimple!



Zama: "Oh, okay, well you see each other again!"

Zama nudged me and gave the 'stop staring' look.

Luzuko: "I thought he was lying when he said he just bumped into you, nice to finally talk to you Bulie,"

Thabisa: "Haywena, an entire Sangoma lies? You want the ancestors to punish you,"

We laughed.

Nwabisa: "I thought he was joking too, nice to meet you Bulelwa. And oh welcome back home,"

Zizi: "Oh yes, Homecoming queens!"

Zama: “The rest of the guys are outside making the meat, I’m sure you know your way around the house,”

Luzuko: “Oh we most definitely do, nice meeting you ladies,”

Zama: “Likewise,”

They both walked out of the kitchen.

Zininzi: “Ladies there’s more than enough things to drink in the fridge please don’t hold yourselves, Bulelwa you should be on your second glass now sisi, I’ll go check on the other gents outside,”

Me: “Your plan is to get me drunk I see,”

The meetup or the party goes on pretty great, I was on my fifth glass of this delicious white wine and I couldn't stop smiling. It had me good, great in fact.

We took it outside and had our meal on the table which we all fitted but now everyone was just scattered around the yard. The music was blasting through the speakers, some were even dancing and my eye has been trying to locate that man with no success. Sigh.

The ladies were nice Thabisa just fits in with the vibe perfectly. Nwabisa was a bit shy, she didn't talk much and the word for her type of personality was observant. She took a few pictures with us and has been quiet since but everyone was just happy.

I walked up to her and stumbled a few times but laughed it off as I sat next to her on the table.

Me: "Hey,"

Her: "Hello," she smiled faintly

Me: "Are you okay? You've been quiet nje almost the entire time we've been here whatsup?"

Her: "Oh don't worry I am okay, please enjoy your party and don't think I am not enjoying myself. I am enjoying myself like this," she smiled gulping down her glass of whatever was there.

Thabisa: "She's lying, she has a thing for Bhut Wandes and she thought they'd hook up here or something but bhutiza didn't even notice her,"

Thabisa comes in, already hugging me.

Her: "Thabisa shut up, don't listen to her Bulie I am okay and she is just drunk,"

Me: "Thabisa no man, Okay sweetie please don't hold yourself and just enjoy okay,"

Thabisa: "Fine, Bulie come let's leave her to sulk. Zama is asking for you,"

Her: "Please don't worry about me, I am fine," another smile.

Me: "Okay,"

We laughed and walked to the fire area, Zizi was sitting on Luzuko's lap on the camp chair and Zama was tangled up in her fiancé by the wall, the other guys were cracking up jokes and I still couldn't find that man. Maybe he left.

Zizi: "Bulie get another glass my love, don't be sitting there smiling to yourself like a crack addict,"

Me: "No, I am actually good. Can you believe I am already feeling the heat? Driving back will be a hassle,"

Thabisa: "You should sleep over here,"

Zizi: "I tried too Thabi, she is not having it,"

Luu: "Don't worry, we will drive her mami. I mean Wells estate is right next to truck-in, so sizakubeka peto,"

Zama: "Who will drive who?"

Zizi: "You done kissing you man there sisi!"

we laughed

Me: "Drive me back home my love, they're talking about me,"

Zama: "Oh okay, kanene a wife doesn't sleep without her husband,"

Thabisa: "You got it sana!"

We laughed

Me: "Let me go to the bathroom,"

My bladder was full. I walked back in the house to the toilet and released. The music was not as loud as it was outside and the song by Mlindo - Emakhaya was playing as I washed my

hands. I admired myself in the mirror, moved my head a bit feeling the vibe. I couldn't stop smiling and the wine was to blame.

I walked out of the toilet as I looked up. I saw him, suddenly at loss with my breathing pattern.

Mawande: "Madlomo,"

I blinked multiple times, my brain going all fuzzy like there was a malfunction, the noise got louder outside as this other song came to play.

Me: "Hello,"

I couldn't help but smile

Him: "You really should stop looking at me like that,"

Me: "How am I looking at you?"

Him: "like you want me,"

oh straight like that.

Me: "I am married, and besides I just got off a phone call with my husband which is why I still have a smile pasted on my face, it's not for you," yes, that'll put him off.

He chuckled and shook his head.

Me: "What!?"

He took both my hands and held them, took a step closer leaning over to reach my ears. I inhaled his scent, it was not a perfume or cologne it was something of nature, herbs. It was refreshing and calm, I loved it.

Him: "You are wearing a dress without pockets and your hands are not holding a cellphone like a person who just got off a phone call,"



Oh busted! He moved back still holding my hands and looked at my flushed face

Me: "It doesn't prove that I want you,"

This wine was making me weak.

Him: "Still, stop searching for me with your eyes okay,"

Me: "I wasn't,"

Him: "Don't lie,"

I just shook my head,

Him: "If you were not lying, your body would stop getting tense. You are a bad liar too,"

Me: "I am not tense,"

He smiled again

Him: "Madlomo, I am holding your hands and I can feel you. I wouldn't be able to explain it to you but I feel a lot of tension in you, I easily connected with your soul or that is a big word, let's just stick to energy,"

Me: "Maybe the tension is caused by the pain inside me. Let's say you easily connected because you ought to heal me,"

Him: "That depends on you and your belief,"

Me: "Meaning?"

Him: "If you believe I can heal you then it will be that way but for now stop drooling over me,"

Me: "Stop saying I am drooling over you, I was just amazed to see you here,"

Him: "If you say Madlomo,"

He let go of my hands and smiled, he walked away from where we were standing. Leaving me in-between thoughts and smiles of what had transpired between him and I.

## SEVEN

I snapped out of those thoughts and went to fetch my bag in the kitchen and walked back to where everyone was seated. Mawande was seated on the table with Nwabisa, which was good for him. Who was I kidding, I felt a little Jealous.

I took out my cell phone and it had about six missed calls from Siyabonga, I called back and it rang unanswered, I tried two more times and same thing.

I switched my cell phone off and poured another glass of wine. I looked around and everyone was in their own mood, they were enjoying the party without holding back.

I smiled, the music volume was lower but not off.

I placed my glass down on the table and took my purse and turned my cellphone on again, the time was just after nine o'clock. I got up and I couldn't see Zininzi nor Luzuko. I walked to Zama,

Me: "My love,"

Her: "Babe,"

Me: "I am going to go back home now, I cannot find Zizi but please say my goodbyes to her,"

Her: "Are you sure you can drive back?"

Me: "Yes babe, I am not that drunk,"

Her: "No Bulie, request an uber at least or a cab,"

Me: "Uhm..."

I was cut off by his deep voice.

Mawande: "We can drive with her, we are going to KwaMagxaki and it won't be an inconvenience to drop her off at her house, at least neither Luzuko nor am I drunk,"

Zama: "Yes, good idea, we can't let you drive alone,"

Me: "I have a car and I can't leave it here, who'll fetch it tomorrow?"

Mawande: "I'll drive you, Luzuko and the others can drive behind us,"

Nwabisa: "That's if we can find Luu,"

Zama: "Where did he disappear to khona?"

He cleared his throat behind me,

Luu: "I am here,"

And Zizi appeared too, her hair a bit out of place.

Zama: “Bulie is going home, you’ll drive with Nwabisa and where is Thabisa?”

Zizi: “That one is already off, she’s sleeping in the spare bedroom,”

Luzuko: “I will drive with Nwabisa and Wandes here is driving Bulie to her house right?”

Zama: “Yes,”

Me: “Great, can we go people?”

They laughed. We hugged and said our goodbyes.

Me: “Adjust the seat,”

I said as I stumbled to get to my side of the car. I drove a Renault Captur.

Him: "Your car smells like you,"

I closed the door and fastened the belt and he did the same,

Me: "Well it's mine,"

Him: "It was just a comment,"

I rolled my eyes and he drove out of the yard.

Me: "I am so tired I need my bed,"

I leaned back and closed my eyes,

Him: "You went heavy on the glasses,"

Me: "You were not even there half the time,"

Him: "I was, you just didn't see me,"



Me: “Wow, and you say I was drooling over you? Pshh”

Him: “Madlomo, you were and we are not going to discuss that again,”

I opened my eyes and looked at him for a brief second and then looked ahead.

Me: “You should tell me about you,”

Him: “What do you want to know, Madlomo?”

Me: “Everything, you said your niece is into art, maybe I could meet her and see her artwork,”

Him: “Would you really do that?”

Me: “Yes

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and I'm opening another gallery so we could work something out if she's really good. My aim is to bring in new talent,"

Him: "She would really love that, I think I'll call you when you are sober tomorrow,"

Me: "You think I'm too drunk to make an appointment now?"

Him: "I didn't say that,"

Me: "But you are implying it,"

He looked at me for a brief moment and chuckled,

Him: "You are overthinking it Madlomo,"

Me: "If you say so,"

Him: "I like you, you aren't intimidated by me,"

I liked you too.

Me: “Why would I be intimidated by you?”

Him: “Because I’m a healer, I see beyond the naked eye. Many think we are demons as we can communicate with our ancestors. Maybe that?”

Me: “Well, not everyone sees you like that. You are not a demon but are spiritually gifted and have the powers to communicate with those in the spiritual world. You are the bridge between life and death which we use to communicate with our forefathers. Besides, I don’t let my belief in Christ change how I view my own traditional spiritual ways,”

Him: “But, by that wouldn’t you say you are breaking the Ten Commandments,”

Me: "I am not, because I do not worship my ancestors but I acknowledge them as people who have once lived in this earth and they know how it is,"

Him: "So you are not against it?"

Me: "No and I respect your gift, it's powerful."

Him: "Mhh, okay,"

Me: "Yes and I really need to sleep right now, my body is giving in,"

Him: "We are almost there,"

Me: "So I am not at all intimidated nor do i fear you okay?"

He chuckled and then smiled.

Him: "Okay,"

We finally arrived at the estate, then to my yard. He parked in the driveway and Luzuko pulled through too.

Me: "Thank you for driving me,"

Him: "My pleasure, have a good night,"

Me: "You too,"

Luzuko: "It was nice chilling with you guys, I hope we could do it again soon, masembe ndoda sutshela,"

Wande laughed and got in the car.

Him: "Take care of yourself Madlomo,"

I smiled

Me: "Drive safely guys,"

They drove out and I took out the groceries on my car trunk and walked into the house. It was dark, lights were off.

I turned on the lights and packed the groceries in their places and walked to my bedroom after.

I walked in and Siyabonga was seated on the edge of the bed. I almost screamed.

Me: "Jesus! I thought you weren't here,"

He didn't answer and who was I to mind him? I changed to my usual sleeping attire, the way I was tired taking a shower was not on the list. I charged my cell phone. As I turned he blocked my way.

Me: "Can you move? I'm tired,"

Him: "Where were you? And you smell of alcohol,"

Me: "I don't owe you an explanation but I am not looking for a fight, I was at Zizi's house,"

Him: "Kuyanxwilwa kwa Zininzi? We get drunk and hang over men!?" his voice water louder. He couldn't be serious! How dare!

Me: "Yes,"

Him: "We come back late from Zizi's house and have a man dropping us off while our husbands are waiting for us at home?"

Me: "I need to sleep," he tightened his grip around my wrists.

Him: "I am asking you for the last time, Where were you?"

Me: "Are you kidding me!?"

I yanked my hands off his grip and I stumbled back as my left cheek burned in response to the hot hard slap that landed! I screamed!

Me: “What are you doing!?”

Him: “You think I’m a fool Bulelwa!”

I could hardly hear with my left ear.

Him: “Uyondijongisa ngapha! Busy getting drunk and hanging over men fully knowing you are married? Who do you think is doing your wifely duties?”

Me: “What are you talking about?”

My cheek felt numb. He moved away and took his cellphone on the pedestal and he showed me a picture of Mawande and I, when he was holding my hands.. The picture was taken at an angle that might get people to think we were dating. The smile on my face was everything. I gave it to the person who took it. They had a good shot.



Him: "What is this!? Isn't this you hanging over men?"

Me: "Even if I was, it doesn't give you any reason to be mad. You brought your mistress into our home! You told me straight in the face that you met someone else. It was you who accepted ilahla lishushu and now uzondixelela ikaka yoba I'm hanging over man? Because of a mere picture you are threatened! Don't joke here,"

Him: "Bulelwa yindodakho leya!?"

Me: "Mxm,"

I attempted to walk to the door but I was pulled by my braids and pushed so hard that I landed on the floor. I screamed loudly.

Him: "Bulelwa are you cheating on me? Are you sleeping with that man!?" His voice echoed loudly on the room, my head was going all fuzzy.

Me: “Yes I am! Beat me up then! Kill me if you have to Siyabonga!”

I screamed defenseless and then kicks followed. I took it all in, every kick and punch; the walls of marriage we had built over the years came tumbling down without making noise. My tears and blood certified my divorce to this man. Each insult slowly pulled him out of my soul. With each time he twisted my arm, my heart smiled as it finally got its closure. I took all his beatings lying down defenseless, the pain slowly became my comfort.

Come tomorrow, I'd be leaving him.

I was done with him

God knows I tried but this was the last straw.

## EIGHT

I woke up the next morning my body in pain, the events of last night flooded my mind. How I went from having the time of my life to having the worst time of my life -it was funny and sad. My whole body was in pain. I could barely feel my left arm.

I winced and got up from the bed, my ribs gave me a hard time. I slowly made my way to the bathroom. I took off my clothes and I looked at the reflection of what's supposedly me, my nose had a faint color of dark, I had missing braids, my scalp was burning and my left arm was swollen.

He didn't do much on my face, it was just my nose. My body; he wrecked my left arm and my ribs were sore. My thighs had marks, which I prayed they'll fade away in time.

With each step I took,.excruciating pain ran through my body.

I got in the shower and Allowed the water to soothe me.

After what felt like forever I got out of the shower, dried myself, lotion and settled for a hoodie and track-pants. I took my cell phone out of the charger and made my way downstairs to the kitchen.

Him: "Hi,"

He greeted as I walked in, with him already making breakfast. From what I made out, it was breakfast for two.

I didn't answer him.

Him: "We should talk about what happened last night Bulie,"

Me: "And say what?"

Him: "That I am sorry, I lost it when Mncina sent me that picture of you with that man, and then he dropped you off. I just couldn't hold it,"

Me: "You couldn't hold..? I can't believe you,"

Him: "I am sorry Bulie, I am really sorry please find in your heart to forgive me,"

Me: “Who is this Mncina you mentioned and what relationship do you all have?”

He looked down

Him: “She is Sisanda’s friend, her name is Nwabisa,”

Wow. Why didn’t I think of it?

Me: “Wow,”

Him: “Again, I am sorry. I also found out that the child Sisanda is carrying is not mine, she lied and played me and I fell for it. I am sorry I took my anger out on you. You didn't deserve that,”

I just looked at him with pity.

Him: “Please give us another chance so we can work on our marriage,”

Me: “How can I know that you won’t run to another skirt when I am not here again? How can I be sure that when we try again we can have children? We can work on our marriage but know that my scars are deeper than you think,”

Him: “Just forgive me Bulie and we will work on the rest as time goes, I promise to be a good husband this time,”

I’ve heard this line many times.

Me: “You know what? I forgive Siyabonga, I forgive you for everything that you had done but you should know that I am tired of you, I am tired of this marriage too and this is the last straw,”

Him: “What do you mean?”

My cellphone rang before I could answer him. An unnamed number.

Me: "Hello,"

Him: "Mrs. April,"

It was Mawande's voice.

Me: "Yes, this is her,"

He chuckled on the other end.

Him: "Mr. Dlamini here, I would like to know if it would be possible for us to meet today. It's strictly business of course,"

Me: "Today you say?"

Him: "Yes, the thing is I would like to invest in your gallery,"

Me: "You know, I'm not the right person to call for that,"

Him: "Well you are the the only one I know,"

I needed to get out of the house anyway.

Me: "Can we do a lunchtime meeting, I have to go see a doctor first,"

Him: "Okay, but if you are not well then we can reschedule, maybe tomorrow?"

Me: "No! uhm, I can do today,"

Him: "Okay, I'll send the location to my office, I'll see you then,"

Me: "Definitely, bye."

Him: "Bye,"



I hung up and Siyabonga looked at me, his eyes inquiring who I was on the call with.

Me: "Can you take me to the doctor? I won't be able to drive myself,"

Him: "Dr. Philips does house calls, I'll call him for you,"

Me: "Okay,"

Him: "Who were you on call with?"

Me: "Someone who is interested in investing on the art gallery,"

Him: "I didn't know you handled investments,"

Me: "I am the owner of the business, I handle everything,"

Him: "It was just a joke,"

He handed me a tray with my breakfast and we ate in silence.

Me: "I'll be in the painting room should the doctor arrive,"

Him: "Okay

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I walked from the kitchen to the basement. We have turned it to my art room. This is where the magic happens, every art piece from what I've exhibited to what the world hasn't seen of me. It is filled with color and every time I come here I am reminded of where I come from and where I am heading. It is where I escape reality and create my own.

Dr. Phillips and I go way back. He has treated most of my bruises and cuts. Yes, it had happened before, Siyabonga had laid his hands on me before and it always ends with the Dr. Coming to me. This may be the last time he is doing so.

He arrived an hour later and I moved from the basement to the lounge.

Dr. "When are you leaving him?" He asked randomly as he examined my bruises.

He is a 50 year old man with grey hair and his face was showing wrinkles already.

Me: "Anytime from today, I am tired,"

Dr. "I am too, of seeing you like this, I pray every time I am called that I don't find you half way dead or already rotting,"

Me: "I thank you for that, praying for me. I also think that it is now time for me to leave, he has caused enough pain and I cannot bare anymore,"

Dr. "I thought what happened in Cape Town would've opened your eyes but I am not blaming you, love is blind," I felt a shiver

down my spine as a memory of what had happened in Cape Town a year ago crossed my mind.

Me: "Can we please not talk about that incident,"

Dr. "I understand, I am sorry,"

We decided to keep quiet and he continued with his examination.

Dr. "No major damage done, the bruises will fade as time goes. No broken ribs or broken arm. The swelling on your arm will go down too just drink the pills I gave you and rest, you are still young and beautiful Bulelwa, you don't deserve this. I pray this is the last time I treat you for beatings,"

I nodded.

Me: "Thank you very much Dr."

He smiled, packed his equipment and walked out of the house.  
I drank the pills and laid my head on the couch.

I must've passed out because I was woken up by my ringing cell phone, Siyabonga's name flashed.

Me: "Hello,"

Him: "Hey, the driver is there to drive you to your meeting today,"

Me: "Uhm okay, that is very thoughtful of you. Thank you very much,"

Him: "I'll see you later today,"

Me: "Sure,"

I hung up and the pills indeed helped with the swelling on my left hand. The pains subsided on my ribs but I can still feel it when I bend over. The plan was to not bend over.

I walked to my room for a change of clothes and did a little make up on my face to hide the fading color of my nose.

The driver knew the place when I gave him the coordinates to the location.

We arrived at the building, it was just outside the North End and it was a law firm.

I walked in and I was greeted by a nice receptionist, who led me to the office of Mr Dlamini.

I knocked once and entered. There he was looking cute, yes he was cute with his glasses on. I smiled.

Him: "Mrs. April, welcome,"

We shook hands and I took my seat.

Me: "You do know that my name is Bulelwa right?"

Him: "Yes,"

ME: "Please address me by it then,"

Him: "Okay, How are you Bulelwa?"

Me: "I am very well thanks, how are you?"

Him: "I am okay too,"

He looked at me like he was reading me, like he was searching for something in my eyes.

Me: "Uhm, you said we were going to discuss to business and not stare at each other,"

Him: "I am sorry, it's just that there's something on your face,"

Me: "What?"

Him: "The makeup, what are you hiding?"

Me: "And how is that related to what I am here for,"

Him: "It's not at all related but I can't help the tension you are giving away. Madlomo I can sense it all, the hurt, the pain and the deep scars. This doesn't usually happens with other people but with you I feel connected and I can't control it,"

Me: "I don't have an answer for you but it might be because you are a healer and you ought to sense these kind of things,"

Him: "Might be, would you like anything to drink? coffee, water or..."

Me: "No, no I am okay, let's just get down to business,"



he nodded.

We discussed why he was interested in my gallery and he told me it's for his niece. He was buying a portion for her as a present for her 21st birthday which would be in three months' time. After graduation he will then transfer the shares in her name as of now; he'll hold on to them. Of course he had to, I loved the idea that he is actually looking after her future. Rather than getting her a car, I am not saying there's anything wrong with getting a car for a 21 year old but what he was doing was quite remarkable.

Me: "I will contact my lawyers and draw up a contract and get the shares transferred in your name,"

Him: "Awesome, I will contact the bank too on my side. Uhm another thing,"

Me: "Yes,"

Him: "Can we have lunch together? There's this place that just opened and they sell some mean food,"

Me: "Lunch? Uhm I don't think..."

Him: "Please Madlomo," he pleaded

Me: "Okay, Just lunch,"

Him: "Yes, just lunch,"

He smiled revealing his dimple.

## NINE

We found this nice intimate restaurant just across the road from his building that sells mean food. We sat on this table that's next to a glass wall, which fed us the view of the beautiful North end. Cars passed and people were busy walking up and down running errands, others working and most importantly they were minding their own business.

Him: "You seem distracted,"

Me: "No, I'm just thinking of how everyone seems to be in their own worlds and enjoying life,"

Him: "You could be in your own world too, you do know that?"

I smiled faintly.

Me: "I do, in fact when I was in Tanzania I lived in my own world, yes I had worries but I was so carefree,"

Him: "What changed?"

Me: "The geography of the place of course,"

He laughed,

Him: "Of course Madlomo, but what's holding you back from being carefree here again?"

Me: "A lot of things, here it's hard to escape reality. I've got to face demons head on!"

Him: "I hear you, then you need to face your demons and move on. Get it over and done with and stop delaying the process,"

Me: "How do I do that?"

Him: "Forgiveness first,"

Me: "I'm not even sure I want that,"

Him: "Meaning?"

Me: "It has been holding me back since day one, I forgive and then still stay with the same demon,"

Him: "That means you don't know how you can move on,"

Me: "Exactly that, and I feel like when you forgive someone, you are accepting what they did as if it was okay, rather than forgiving as a way of accepting that it was wrong and that it shouldn't happen again. I don't know, it's all confusing,"

Him: "I hear you. You should accept that it has happened and that it was not okay. Then you move from it so that it doesn't affect you in the future. I think that is what you should've been doing,"

I looked at him and smiled.

Just then the waitress brought the food we ordered to the table. We thanked her.

Him: "How did your appointment with the doctor go?"

Me: "It went okay, he helped,"

Him: "I'm glad,"

Me: "So tell me about you,"

Him: "Well what's there to tell about me...? I am a healer, a corporate lawyer and a nice person nje,"

Me: "You really don't know how to describe yourself?" I laughed,

Him: "No, just stick around and you will know me,"

Me: "I guess I will,"

We smiled at each other, but I backed out first.

Me: "On other news, how do you know Zizi?"

Him: "We met through Luzuko, they have a thing and Luzuko's girlfriend would call me to check him since he is my friend. Then this one time they had a clash, I had to come in defense of Zizi and claim her to be my girlfriend because Kea is a mental case and Luzuko can't handle her"

I laughed

Me: "Wait what? Zizi didn't even touch that story!,"

Him: "She's yet to tell you about it, it was hilarious, and Kea wasn't convinced at all. But we managed to get through that day,"

Me: "Bethuna! Things have been happening whilst I was away,"

We laughed and enjoyed our lunch, had a conversation about everything in the world. It was refreshing and great.

Him: "Thank you for the lunch, I enjoyed chatting with you,"

He said as we walked back to the building parking.

Me: "I must thank you too, it was nice indeed,"

Him: "So when will I see you again?"

Me: "I don't know about that,"



Him: "I guess we will talk on the phone,"

Me: "Yes,"

We both smiled and he enveloped me in a hug. I inhaled the scent

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the sage smell and herbs! Comforting and peaceful. I loved it and I held on a little longer taking in his scent and warmth.

We let go at last, a smile formed.

Him: "Take care of yourself Madlomo,"

Me: "I will,"

We said our goodbyes and I got in the car and the driver drove out of that building back to my house.

A text message came in as I walked in the house through the front door,

*“Thank you for Lunch, I enjoyed it, Madlomo.”*

I smiled and made a mental note to get back to it. I walked to the kitchen and there he was, busy on the stove.

Me: “Hello,”

Him: “Hi, you are back,”

Me: “Yes,”

Him: “How did it go?”

He walked to me and gave me a brief hug,

Me: "Well, Okay,"

Him: "Unuki mpepho," (You smell of sage)

Me: "Uhm, what are you cooking," I jumped his statement.

Him: "Dinner, I hope you are hungry,"

Me: "I am," I blatantly lied.

Him: "Good,"

There was awkward silence.

Me: "I'm going to go shower,"

He just looked at me and said nothing.

As I walked out of the kitchen he called my name

Him: "Bulelwa!"

I turned,

Me: "Yeah,"

Him: "You were with him, weren't you?"

Me: "Uhm..."

Him: "The smell of sage, coming back at this time whereas lunchtime has long passed and now you want to take a shower? A shower Bulelwa what for?"

Me: "I am not doing this right now,"

Him: "Did you sleep with him?"

Me: "I can't believe you,"

I turned and ascended the stairs to my bedroom, he walked in right after me.

Him: "Bulelwa," he said ever so calmly

Me: "Yes,"

Him: "I need us to work on this marriage thing, for that to happen we need to be honest with each other,"

Me: "I am tired of trying to work things out! why don't we just divorce?"

Him: "So you opened his legs for him and now you want a divorce?"

Me: “You know what? I have now reached a point where I am tired of fighting with you because it always ends with a doctor coming for a visit. Siyabonga I am tired of you and I am moving out. Not tomorrow but today, now!”

I took off my wedding rings and threw them on the floor.

His eyes darkened!

Him: “That is not going to happen Bulelwa,”

The calmness in his voice made my heart beat faster than normal.

He walked closer to me

Me: “I have his number on speed dial, should you try anything! I mean anything one click can end you,”

I said in a low voice but stern, fully knowing that I was bluffing.

I stepped back and he walked closer until my back was against the wall.

Him: "I loved you, took care of you, and made you who you are! Today this is the payment I get,"

Me: "You didn't make me, you don't own me Siyabonga!"

He snatched my cell phone and he threw it aside and it landed on the bed.

Him: "Even with your weight I managed with you, with your infertility I loved you. When everyone left you I was there for you, now you are spitting all that back to me! You ungrateful little!!"

He cursed and choked me so hard I couldn't breathe, my screams became silent cries.

Him: "You smell like him! You slept with him! You lied to me about a meeting yet you know you are going to a booty call,"

his grip tightened and I tried hard to gasp for air. I felt my own soul was leaving me.

He loosened his hand but turned me so quick and twisted my right arm this time, my face was pinned on the wall. I gasped hard and coughed.

Him: “No man will ever love you like me! No man will put up with your bullshit and definitely no man will want a fat pig like you! You think he likes you by sleeping with you!” his voice loud in my ear.

Me: “Let me go! Please,” I begged.

Him: “So that you can go to him!? If I am not having you then he is not either!”

After that, he pulled my braids and threw me across the room. I landed flat on the floor, coughing and crying. My heart was torn. I laid there in pain, he walked out of the room and banged the door.



I slowly made my way to the bed, pulled my cell phone and called the first number on the dial log.

Me: "I need help!" I said immediately it went through. My voice was barely audible.

Him: "Lelwa!"

Me: "He is going to kill me, I need help!"

I cried and the door flew open again. I threw the cell phone across the room without ending the call.

Anger was written all over his face. My heart sank! Right there and then my fate was decided as I saw a rope in his hands. I closed my eyes and prayed.

TEN

Abuse takes all of you, it sucks you up slowly and when it pulls the last straw you are left empty and without meaning. It's like a vampire that slowly sucked your blood and left you lifeless. It leaves you with scars that no one but you can heal.

Siyabonga broke me, he tore me apart and succeeded at making me feel empty and worthless.

I woke up to a song playing. It was this lovely one from Mariah Carey and Brian McKnight

“I won't ever be too far away to feel you

And I won't hesitate at all

Whenever you call”

It was playing in a not too loud volume, but enough to set the mood.

I got up from the bed and walked to the bathroom to pee, as I got out Mawande walked in. I should be thankful to this man, he saved my life from a monster that wanted to end it. He called the security of the estate to come help me, they got there in time before I was hanged. Yes, Siyabonga wanted to hang me and it was bad that I suffered bruises because I fought with him.

It would be a lie to say I am unshaken, it was trauma. Mawande only got there after an hour and found me seated on the couch with a throw and shaking.

I threw myself at him and he hugged me so tightly I cried in his arms. He took me with and I found myself on this 6th floor, two bedroom apartment, I only showered and drank painkillers that knocked me instantly and I slept peacefully.

Him: "You are awake,"

Me: "Yes," I smiled

Him: “good, I cooked something for you, I hope you don’t have any allergies”

Me: “No, I don’t have any allergies. What did you make?”

Him: “Mutton stew and pap,”

Me: “Great! I could do with some warm food,”

We walked out of the bedroom, down a little passage and we were in the kitchen, which was an open plan to the dining and the TV area. It was beautiful. The kitchen door opens to the balcony outside, and through the kitchen window you can see the beautiful Port Elizabeth lights.

We sat on the dining table and he dished up for me.

Me: “What time is it?”

Him: "Way past dinner time, it's nine o'clock,"

Me: "Wow, I slept that long!"

Him: "You needed to rest,"

We indulged in our food in comfortable silence.

Me: "Why are you doing this?" I asked as we finished washing the dishes and sat on the couch,

Him: "Because your mother asked me to," he said it like it was nothing!

Me: "My mother?"

He just smiled and looked at me,

Me: "Don't smile man, just answer,"

Him: "Well she told me to take care of you and I'm doing just that,"

I shook my head.

Me: "Okay,"

Him: "You'll stay here until you feel the need to move, it's not my apartment. They'll bring your clothes tomorrow and you know you can call me anytime right?"

Me: "Okay, Thank you. Can you please sleep in, just for the night and you know that it's late to drive back to your house now,"

I could do with some company. To go crazy is something I don't want.

Him: "That is very thoughtful of you. I will sleep in the other bedroom but I might wake you in the morning. Seeing that the shower is in your room only,"

Me: "I don't mind that,"

Him: "Okay, can we maybe watch something or would you rather we talk?"

Me: "We can do both,"

He turned on the TV to the movie channel. The movie 'Sky fall' was playing.

Him: "How are you feeling Madlomo?"

Me: "I don't know, empty and exhausted. I'm still shaken but I will get through it,"

Him: "Do you want to talk about it?"

Me: “No, thank you

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Him: “Well that’s okay if you don’t want to talk but don’t bottle up. I’m always here to listen,”

I nodded and smiled.

Him: “Maybe you can tell me about your family,”

Me: “Well, I grew up in Grahamstown. Raised by a single mother with me and my two brothers. I am the middle child, the young one died after mom, the eldest is in Australia pursuing his dreams. We don’t talk often, but when we do, it be like a reunion,”

I smiled as an image of him crossed my mind.



Him: "You miss him?"

Me: "Yes, he's the only person I'm left with in my family. My father, well I've never met him. I don't even know if he exists or not,"

Him: "You never tried looking for him?"

Me: "I was dismissed harshly whenever I asked about him, no one told me anything. Tell me about your side,"

Him: "I grew up in King williams town, raised by both parents. I'm the first born child followed by two sisters. My father was not the kindest parent, he was an abuser, alcoholic and just a dead person walking. My mother endured his abuse for years until she was tired and decided to let go of him, we then moved to mom's home in Mthatha, and that is where I spent most of my teenage years,"

Me: "Mhh, and when did you discover you had a calling?"

Him: "Well. I always knew I was different from when I was growing up, but my ancestors revealed it when I was doing my final year in varsity. I would have dreams and nightmares some days of me drowning or in a room full of elders singing and beating drums. At first I was in denial, even though the signs were there from growing up I just couldn't understand it. Eventually, I went to thwasa and accepted my gift as it is but it was not easy at all. But that's a story for another day,"

Me: "Your life has been eventful, you survived it all and now you are here strong as ever,"

Him: "It's a life of a hustle and survival, we all go through things and we come out stronger,"

Me: "We do, we definitely do," I nodded as I thought about my own situation...

Him: "I want to know more about you yaz, there's this thing with you, I can't pin it down but you are..." He smiled and looked at me

Me: "What?" I chuckled

Him: "You are easy to talk to and behind this broken lady I see an amazing person,"

Me: "I am amazing? I don't think so,"

Him: "You just don't see it Lelwa,"

Me: "I've been hearing you call me Lelwa whilst everyone calls me Bulie,"

Him: "Well I am not everyone am I?"

Me: "No you are not, I think I like it,"

He smiled and our eyes locked for a while. He backed out this time.

Him: "I should go and sleep,"

Me: "You sleep early,"

Him: "I have an early meeting with a client tomorrow, don't stay up too late try and get some rest okay?"

I nodded as he got up from the couch and I held his hand and looked at him.

Me: "Thank you,"

He nodded and walked to his bedroom.

## ELEVEN

A loud knock woke me up, I must've fallen asleep on the couch while watching the TV. I got up and went to open the door, to my shock Siya walked in.

Him: "So this is where you are hiding huh!" he pushed inside

My heart pounded against my shirt, I was almost breathless.

Me: "I am not hiding, what do you want here?"

I was shaking.

Him: "I want you,"

Me: "I don't want you please leave before I call security,"

Him: "You are my wife, you are coming back with me,"

Me: “No! You don’t own me!”

Him: “I paid lobola for you! You are coming back to the house we both live in!”

Me: “Never!”

He forcefully pulled me to go with him, I screamed and kicked crying!

From there I jumped as I felt someone shaking me hard! I was dreaming.

“Wake up!”

My heart was beating faster, I was crying.

Him: "It was just a dream Madlomo breathe please, slowly in and out. You were just dreaming,"

He pulled me to his chest and I sobbed lightly as I recovered from the panic.

Him: "You are safe here, shh," He reassured me, lightly brushing my back.

Me: "He damaged me,"

I said after a long pause and silence from the both of us.

Him: "He didn't, do not let him get to you,"

Me: "I don't know how I can go on,"

Him: "You need to keep pushing, know that you have people who care deeply about you,"

Me: "It's hard, I am tired of living like this,"

I removed myself from his embrace and rubbed my face as I got up from the couch.

Me: "I am tired of fear of not being able to live my life again, I am tired from the abuse and right now I feel so useless and worthless. I hate how he holds so much power in my life,"

I paced up and down and I kept looking at the door.

Him: "He is not going to come here. Lelwa you need to mentally get yourself out of that house,"

Me: "This is all draining me,"

I felt a huge lump down my chest.

Him: "You'll be okay,"



Me: "I should go and sleep in the bedroom, I'm sorry I woke you,"

Him: "It's okay,"

He smiled. I walked to my bedroom and got under covers. I was still shaky and thrown off by that dream.

Morning came and everything felt dull and dead. It was drizzling outside and a foul mood already set.

I got up from the bed and went to the bathroom to brush my teeth, I stared at the reflection in the mirror. That man messed me up. No, I am not talking about my external bruises but internal scars. His words still echoed in my head, so loudly that I couldn't shush them.

I moved from the mirror and walked back to my bed.

I don't have to do anything today, I can get away with taking a break from everything for the day.

I reached for my cell phone and as I expected, I had dozens of messages from Siyabonga. What caught my eye was a text message from Mawande and Gcobisa. I read Mawande's first. Nothing much just him letting me know that I was asleep when he left.

Gcobisa being the lady who is in-charge of checking how things are going at the art-gallery, from deliveries to the interior design and to who I am meeting if I am meeting someone, essentially everything that happens when I am not in. She is my assistant and she is the best at her work.

I called her back and she told me of my husband who was looking for me, asking if I had come in yet. I just felt my stomach turn as she said that.

Me: "Please do not take his calls Gcogco, should he call again,"

Her: "Okay ma'am, I will do just that,"

Me: "Thank you,"

I ended the call. I logged in to the social networks and there's nothing interesting there either.

I slept on my back and looked at the ceiling and exhaled.

"You have been through a lot Bulelwa," I said and pulled the covers to my face. I need to rest my body, we've gone through so much the past few days.

....

I've settled in well in this apartment, today is Sunday and I didn't go to church. Not that I was lazy, I just did not feel like it.

It has been three days since the whole debacle with Siyabonga and I was still trying to come to terms with what had happened, I also had not gone out of the apartment too, I had been avoiding everyone and everything. I did not feel like I was ready for the world again, I'm too broken for that.

A loud knock made me jump from the couch I was resting in. I lazily got up and went to open the door and I was welcomed by Mawande- this man, I had not seen him since that day too.

Him: "Good afternoon Madlomo," His scent filled my nose, I smiled faintly.

Me: "Hello, uhm come in," I moved out of the way, feeling a bit nervous.

Him: "You've been quiet,"

Me: "I needed some time away from people,"

I led him to the kitchen area and he sat on the high chair.

Him: "How are you?"

Me: "I am getting there, fine. How are you?"

Him: "I'm okay, I was around the area and I just thought I should come in to check on you,"

Me: "That's sweet of you, as you can see I am trying to get myself back up. Should I get you anything to drink?"

Him: "Uhm no thank you, and I can see you removed the braids too,"

Me: "oh yeah, I had to," I said touching my kinky afro.

Awkward silence followed.

Him: "Uhm, okay I will be on my way then,"

Me: "No, I mean just stay and I'll go freshen up then I'll prepare lunch. I could do with talking to someone"

Him: "I actually was here for that,"

Me: "Okay,"

We laughed and I walked to my bedroom

I cleaned the room

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showered and settled for a dress and sandals, I combed my afro and looked at myself in the mirror. The bruises were fading.

I walked out of the bedroom feeling a bit more energetic than I was before he got here. To my surprise, he cleaned the living area, everything spotless, the windows opened allowing light to come in, refreshing. I felt a little guilty.

Him: "You are done?"

Me: "Yes, and you also cleaned, it smells fresh thank you,"

Him: “No worries, I think you need to do grocery shopping. I couldn’t find anything I could cook,”

Me: “I’ve been dreading to do that,”

Him: “They should stop delivering food, these delivered takeouts are going to kill you,”

Me: “Haibo! and anyway it’s Sunday now to go to the shops but I do have a beef lasagne I prepared earlier,”

I walked to the oven and took it out, the warmness was still there.

We sat on the dining table and we had our lunch.

Him: “When did you find that you love art?”

Me: "I've always loved drawing, painting and sketching. The love grew even more when I attended high-school. I was bad with math but good with literature and art. From there I just kept on going,"

Him: "And you are so good with it, oh and I have a little something I want to do with you"

Me: "What is that?"

Him: "Come outside with me,"

We walked outside to the balcony, and there were two sketch pads and paint brushes, pencils and drawing utensils

Me: "What is this?"

I asked, amazed.

Him: "We are going to draw Madam,"



Me: “We?”

Him: “Yes, I can draw you know?”

Me: “Okay, what’s the inspiration?”

Him: “Just draw whatever,”

I chuckled and shook my head. I can’t believe this.

Me: “Okay,”

We both sat down on our respective chairs and I laughed at how random it was. After an hour of silence we both finished.

Me: “So you go first, what did you draw?”

Him: “Why don’t you go first Lelwa?”

Me: "Okay," I revealed what I painted. It was just a landscape with golden grass and birds flying. Simple.

Him: "Wow, this is beautiful,"

Me: "Well thank you, show me yours,"

Him: "Okay but first I have to confess. I didn't do it myself, I got an artist to do it for me, well that artist is my niece. But the whole idea was mine,"

Me: "I knew it! Show me anyway," we laughed

He revealed it, and It was a beautiful portrait of me smiling. The happiness in my eyes and formation of the smile in my lips portrayed contentment.

Him: "This is how I want to see you everyday, look how high spirited you are,"

Me: “Wow! I had never had a portrait of me done before, It’s really beautiful. Your niece is talented I have to meet her,” It had her signature beneath

Him: “I am glad you love it Madlomo,” The Madlomo always made my heart smile, there's this thing that a clan name carries.

Me: “Look at how she did my eyes! And what were you doing for a whole hour whilst I was drawing,”

Him: “I was watching you, observing your movement from how your eyes twinkle when you draw the curving parts, the frowning when you do the detailing, oh the movement of your hand? Magical Lelwa,”

Me: “You are something else,”

I couldn’t help but smile at him

He held my chin up, making my eyes land on his eyes.

Him: "You see right here? Is what I want to see you in everyday!  
You are beautiful Madlomo,"

He lowered his head and I slightly closed my eyes taking in his scent and warmth, our lips met and I was taken to this beautiful world, our tongues danced! So soft, so lovely and it felt good. For a moment I was in heaven, lost in this marvelous world. He pulled me closer to him and my hands found their way to his torso. I was taken by him, I could feel the tingling in my stomach, the fuzziness in my head.

He pulled back and he looked at me, I was confused and taken at the same time.

Him: "I am sorry, Lelwa,"

I stood there trying to make sense of what I just felt. The air suddenly became thin and all I could breathe was him. And why was he apologizing?

Me: “No!”

Him: “It shouldn’t have happened Lelwa, uhm I think I should head home. Thank you for lunch,” he walked back inside and I followed in too, he grabbed his car keys,

Me: “Wande wait... listen we are both adults here, we are not teenagers who run after a kiss? I enjoyed it as much as you did, what we could do is to just be civil with each other and talk,”

He smiled! I felt tingles in my stomach. He walked closer to me and held my hands.

Him: “I don’t want to mess this whole thing up Madlomo,”

Me: “What do you mean?”

Him: “I don’t want the broken you, right now you are vulnerable and yes I care deeply for you. But you still need to let go and give yourself time before we can do anything together,”

He squeezed my hands as reassurance and smiled, then left me frozen on the spot. Confused and with mixed feelings

## TWELVE

I had felt everything in that kiss, it was heated and so welcoming. For a moment there I had forgotten everything, it swept me off my feet.

I thought to myself as I was seated outside on the balcony taking in the beautiful sunset of Port Elizabeth, so beautiful that it allowed me to think about everything with a clear mind. I took my cell phone and searched for Dr Philips' contact. I dialed and he answered after a few rings

Him: "Dr. Philips here,"

Me: "Hello Dr. its Bulelwa,"

Him: "Hello Bulelwa, how are you?"

Me: "I am okay Dr. I finally left but it wasn't easy,"

Him: "Oh thank you Lord! He didn't do any damage? Did you get him arrested?"

Me: "It was not going to go anywhere, the police who came were his friends. They just told me that they are going to take him to go clear his mind. But I couldn't care less about him, all I needed was me to get out of there,"

Him: "I am happy you finally left Bulelwa! It was not doing any good to you. Right now how are you?"

Me: "I would like to think of myself as okay, but the problem is that there's another man. Which is why I need you to forward me to any good psychologist I could talk to,"

Him: "You know that you still need to give yourself time after going through such hardship. You don't want to find yourself using the man as a rebound,"

Me: "Yes, that is what I fear too,"

Him: "I know a few, I'll email you their contacts and then you can decide which one you'll go to,"

Me: "Okay, thank you doctor,"

Him: "All the best in your new life Bulelwa, I am proud of you,"

I smiled and said my goodbyes after. I actually need to talk to a professional about this. The other one that once helped me relocated to Sweden and I lost all contact with her.

A message beeped, it said I should log-in to the socials they are talking about me.

I quickly logged in and the first thing that came up were pictures of me and Siyabonga and then a picture of me and Mawande, I didn't even read the article because I knew what it entails. Someone leaked the pictures, another video which is quite disturbing of Siyabonga popped up too! Apparently he suffered a severe seizure last night at a club and according to



the people who don't mind their own business, I caused him to be like that because I cheated on him! The nerve.

My mentions are going crazy, people are calling me all sorts of names, dragging my name to the mud! They don't even know half of the things I had endured from that man. It is upsetting how a person could come out of nowhere and insults you without knowing the full story. The direct messages on my page are on another level too, mostly journalists who want to know my side of the story. I logged out without even bothering with people who are bored.

I dialed Zinzi. And she answered after a few rings.

Me: "Zizi,"

Her: "Bulie, how are you?"

Me: "I'm okay darling, have you logged into any socials today?"

Her: “No, and right now I’m in the car driving back home, what is up?”

Me: “My separation with Siya, apparently I cheated and last night he had a seizure at a club. That video is trending too, quite disturbing I must add,”

Her: “Suxoka!!” (don’t lie!)

Me: “I’m serious, and you know people are already insulting me! The famous artist cheated!”

Her: “And wena friend you are not even famous but your art is!”

I laughed. Zizi and always finding humour in everything.

Me: “You know! I just don’t understand all this. I am going through the most right now and media is the last thing I want to deal with,”

Her: "By tomorrow people will forget all about it my friend, don't even let it get to you,"

Me: "I'm trying not to, anyway we will talk some other time friend,"

Her: "Okay, Take care of yourself Madlomo,"

Me: "I will Zizi, bye"

I ended the call and went back inside, I closed all the windows and locked the door. I took a bottle of wine and a glass and placed it on the coffee table as I sat on the couch. I read a scripture from my bible app

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said a little prayer and opened the bottle of Dry red wine. I played some music on the player just to get into the vibes.

“To the future Lelwa. Siyabonga’s chapter is closed. We are done with him,” I gulped down the glass without pause. It felt so cool against my flaming throat. I sang along to Keyshia Cole’s Trust and believe.

The wine was reaching my head slowly but surely, I was feeling hot and smiling a lot. I danced, sang along, shed tears! I was closing the book I had been writing for over 8 years. Not at all easy. The scars, the hurt, the nights of torture and I also appreciate the days he had showed his love, it was not all bad.

I laughed as I stumbled whilst walking to the bathroom to pee, I made my way back and grabbed my cell phone from the table and sat on the couch and dialed his number, yes.

It went through right away.

Him: “Madlomo,” I smiled like an idiot, my body already doing foreign things.

Me: “Uphi?” (Where are you?)

I giggled.

Me: "They say I am with you and now you aren't even here!"

Him: "I am driving home, you need so.... Wait Lelwa?"

Me: "Mhh,"

Him: "Did you drink"

Me: "Just a glass," I was halfway the second bottle

Him: "What can I bring to the party?"

Me: "I don't know, yourself?"

Him: "You are really drunk, I'll be there just now,"

I giggled and dropped the call. I went to change into pajamas and came back to the couch and sang along to more old school RnB while enjoying the glasses of the wine.

After some time, a knock came to the door and I slowly made my way to the door, opened and his scent filled my nostrils. I smiled.

Him: " I am here,"

Me: "I can see," I moved out of the way and he walked in and I closed the door. I tripped and almost fell but I held on to him and he laughed,

Him: "We are drunk, aren't we?"

Me: "I am not drunk,"

Him: "Have you eaten?"

Me: "Yes, I even prayed,"

Him: "Okay, let's sit down Madlomo,"

Me: "I love it when you call me by my clan name, and when you say Lelwa too! It makes me smile,"

Him: "Oh, is it so?"

I nodded. We sat on the couch.

Me: "But I don't know Wande, I am confused with my life at this point. I still need to heal and be whole again at the same time I don't want to lose you, I like you and your energy but I am not sure if I am at a space where I could say I really do or maybe It's that you've been good to me so I need someone to lean on,"

Him: "You know we don't have to rush into anything, we can remain good to each other without expecting anything above or beyond that, I want you to fully commit yourself to me, trust me completely before we can get into anything. For now Madlomo we are two people who are good to each other,"

He pulled me closer and I snuggled closer to him, rested my head on his chest. Breathing in his earthy, herbaceous scent. So cooling.

He burped and excused himself. I just laughed.

Me: "I think idlozi liyavuma,"

He laughed too and we remained in that position with me rumbling everything until I felt sleepy.

Him: "Iza Madlomo," He reached for my hands and pulled me to stand up,



We walked to the bedroom, I went to release a pee in the bathroom first and then walked to the bed, he handed me water to drink and I did.

Me: "Can you please sleep next to me or just hold me until I fall asleep,"

I was almost drifting to sleep but he got in too and laid my head on his chest and he kissed me goodnight. I felt at home and his warmth was everything I needed.

## THIRTEEN

I was awakened by blinding light coming through the window, I closed my eyes and then slowly got out of the bed stretching my arms. My mouth was dry and scurfy, I've got a headache and my stomach was cramping.

I went to the bathroom and did my business then brushed my teeth. I walked out of the room to the kitchen, and found Mawande preparing breakfast.

Me: "Good Morning,"

Him: "Madlomo, Uvuka njani?" (How are you?)

Me: "I'm okay, just a mild headache and I am hungry," I reached for the glass and poured water.

Him: "There's soft porridge, bread with peanut butter or apricot jam, you choose. I've also made a cup of coffee for you,"

I sat on the dining table and got served with everything.

Me: "Thank you,"

Him: "I have to leave for work, I am sorry I cannot join you for breakfast, but I am inviting you to dinner at my house tonight!"

Me: "I'll be there!"

I smiled.

Him: "Thank you! Ziyanda will be thrilled,"

Me: "About yesterday..."

Him: "You were drunk Madlomo, I understand,"

Me: “No... I want to tell you that I meant every word and Thank you for coming to my comfort,”

Him: “It’s no problem, you should stay away from the alcohol,”

I nodded.

Me: “I will, no more for me.”

Him: “Okay, I’ll be on my way.”

I nodded and smiled. He took his things and then walked out of the apartment. I exhaled a breath I didn’t even know I was holding, I finished my breakfast, cleaned the place and then went to take a shower.

My cellphone rang as I stepped out of the bathroom. I reached for it and it was Zama.

Me: “Zamacirha,”

Her: "Bulie, how are you?"

Me: "I am okay Zama, how are you?"

Her: "I am well, I tried calling you last night but your cell phone was off,"

Me: "Oh yes, it was low on battery. I take it you saw what's happening on the socials too?"

Her: "Yes and that's the reason why I called you, Please don't mind it my friend. Don't even entertain it, you owe no one explanation,"

Me: "But my name Zama, I feel like answering every claim and just clear my name,"

Her: "The media has a way of twisting your words Bulelwa. Don't even bother doing that. You just need to keep it moving and focus on your work,"

Me: "Okay, and anyone who wants to work with me will do regardless of the scandal,"

Her: "Good! so are you going to go see him?"

Me: "Who?"

Her: "Siya?"

Me: "Hell No,"

Her: "That's harsh," She laughed.

Me: "My love I closed his chapter, I don't even have to bother,"

I pulled my dress, shoes and earrings out of the closet.

Her: "Okay, anyway I met with Gcobisa on Friday to see if we are ready for lights on the gallery..."

Me: "Yes and what do you think,"

Her: "I think we can install them

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even better news is that it might be ready to open in two months time if that collection is ready,"

This was great news.

Me: "I also think on my side I have been neglecting the gallery, Oh! And now is the great time to market it! I think I'll announce that competition, at first I was going to look for young and upcoming artists to feature on the launch but I'll have to ask for those who would like to feature to submit their work,"

Her: "With the headlines going on! Everyone will be in anticipation for the opening, and they'll forget about the scandal. You are smart!"

Me: "Right, and with the upcoming art festival! I can foresee everything going well,"

Her: "Everything will go according my friend! Just brace yourself for the busy weeks and sleepless nights,"

Me: "I will darling,"

Her: "Okay, I have to go. We are having lunch at Zizi's place tomorrow! Bless us with your presence please,"

Me: "I am definitely going to be there,"

Her: "Good, take care sisi,

Me: "Bye,"



I ended the call and dressed up.

I loved the idea of having many artists submitting their work. That way I would also find some that I could get to work with in the future.

I walked out of the bedroom to the balcony. I took the portrait Mawande's niece painted for me. I took a picture of it and posted it on my page, writing a caption of how I am looking for young artists to submit their work and they might get featured on the opening of the gallery. I also recognized and complimented the girl who did the portrait, Ziyanda that's her name. Posted and logged out.

I called Gcobisa asking for heads up on everything happening and everything was coming in well. I made a few calls to my other business associates and the last person I called was my lawyer, whom I discussed filing for the divorce and the transfer of shares to Mawande.

I also checked my email and made an appointment with one of the therapists for next week Monday. I hope I can make it through this week so I can go talk to her.

I went to town and bought groceries and everything that I'll need for the month.

I found myself parked in front of Mawande's office building as I was done with my shopping. I walked in and the receptionist led me to his office again.

There he was, focused on the paper he was reading or analyzing, his eyes fixed on the inked words written down. I smiled to myself as he did not even feel someone just walked in.

I closed the door and that's when he raised his eyes looking at me and smiled too. He got up from his chair and walked to me.

Him: "To what I owe the world to be blessed with your presence?"

His scent filled my nostrils and I felt that familiar tingle that happens when only he is present.

Me: "I thought I should bring you lunch since you didn't have breakfast and I know it is a little late for Lunch,"

He led me to the sofa that situated the corner of his office which had a wooden coffee table.

Him: "It's never too late to have food, especially when you are the one who brought it,"

We sat down and I placed the takeaway bags on top of the table.

Me: "I'm flattered,"

Him: "Oh thank you for what you did for Ziyanda. She was so happy when she called,"

Me: "I'm glad,"

We had lunch and talked about things, mainly me who was talking and him listening. He had that; sitting and listening to you talk without losing focus and making you the center of attention. I liked it.

I do not know how and when but I felt his warm hands caressing my face, I slightly pushed myself to him and our lips met yet again, I never felt such warmth and peace for someone. He teased and moved back forcing me to look at him. His hands still cupped my face.

Him: "I don't want to push you away but Madlomo it's you! I know, I can feel it everyday,"

I saw it in his eyes, they had opened a door that made me see through him. I sensed it in his aura that it was pure. My fear overpowered me, I failed to reciprocate the feeling.

Me: "Wande, You know we can't do it,"

Him: "With you it feels right, I do not know how I can fight it anymore,"

He shifts closer and his hand moves from my face to my hands. I felt the warmth and the connection, I knew it was him too but I fought it.

Me: "It's too early,"

Him: "No! It is never too early for love,"

Me: "I feel pressured,"

Him: "I am sorry," He let go of my hands and I saw him closing off again as he moved back.

We remained silent for a minute.

Me: "I don't want to give you half of me, I want to offer you the full me and before I can do that I need to pick up what has been broken from me and fix it. Please understand,"

He nodded, we shared a brief hug before I got up and left his office.

I felt like I left a piece of me with him.

I had to do something.

## FOURTEEN

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“Please leave him alone, he has a wife”

The text message read as I laid back on the bed after a long two days from viewing the dozens of art portfolios sent to me and going from meeting to meeting after I decided to show up at my business in means to forget Mawande. It felt like I haven't spoken to him in years, it felt like a part of me was missing and I do know how I can get it back but I'm hesitant. I had called my therapist yesterday and we talked for long hours on the phone, I could not wait for Monday any longer.

I replied with a question mark at the text sent by someone who was not on my contact list.

I jumped and sat up as the name popped up gave me chills.

“Mawande” the text read.

I almost choked at my own saliva after reading it.

“Who are you?”

I replied in need to know who would send such a text at this time of the day.

“It is you who he talks about everyday. Please leave him alone Bulelwa. I am his Wife.”

I felt my organs flush to my stomach and the ribs compressed my heart in realization that it happened again. I replied with a simple 'Okay' and placed my cellphone on the bed pedestal.

Another disappointment I thought to myself. I failed to believe because it had been so pure and simple with him, yes I told myself it was still too early but what I had not noticed is that; I had grown so much to his presence that I sometimes feel like I can smell his scent around the house.

I took my cell phone and dialed his number. while I got up from the bed and dressed.

I needed answers.

He answered after a few rings...

Him: "Madlomo,"

Me: "Where are you?"

Him: "At my house, do you need something?"

Me: "Yes, you!"

I demanded.

Him: "Okay, I'll be there just now,"

Me: "No! I am driving to your house,"

Him: "Did you see the time? It is very dangerous to drive at this hour Madlomo especially for you,"



Me: "How quickly can you get here?"

Him: "Give me half an hour,"

I ended the call and changed back to my pajamas. I went to sit on the couch and turned the TV on. I sat for what almost felt like an hour and a knock came to my door. I opened and I was welcomed by his scent, it is one thing that no one can ever take away, the way he smells just takes a part of me and it is always the herbaceous smell with a touch of naturalistic plants, it was refreshing.

I invited him in and we sat on the dining table. With him drinking the water he had asked for. His dreadlocks were neatly tied on his back, his red and white cloth made me want to pull it and cover myself too with it, so we can be one without any negative force. My hands yearned to run through his body and have him call me by sacred names. I longed for his touch that always made me tingle in places I never thought a touch would.

I smiled to myself as I looked at him.

He was barefoot too. I wondered how he drove here without shoes, or maybe he took them off when he walked out of his car.

Him: "Nkosazana,"

Something in me moved, I smiled inside.

Me: "I first have to say I am sorry for making you drive all the way here, I just received a text message and I could not speak to you through the phone,"

Him: "What is it?"

Me: "A woman sent me a text telling me that I should stay away from you because you are married

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she actually begged me to leave you alone,"

He laughed

Him: "Madlomo I am not married! Yes I was once but a divorce happened and I haven't had any woman since then,"

I looked at him, a part of me relieved.

Me: "You are not?"

Him: "No! That person who sent you that was playing with you,"

My face flushed as I realized how embarrassing this was! I called him all this way to ask a question I could've simply asked over the phone.

Me: "Wow, uhm Okay,"

He chuckled and got up from his chair, I thought he was leaving but he pulled it so he could sit facing me without any barrier. He rubbed my knees and smiled

Him: "Madlomo," he said my clan name and looked at me with a grin.

Me: "Why are you smiling like this?"

Him: "Because I cannot believe you called me for a mere text that you could've forwarded to me,"

Me: "I am sorry, I needed to hear it from you and see you,"

He fixed his gaze on me and remained so for a while...

Him: "Give me the half of you, I am not asking for all of you, just the half,"

I looked at him for a while trying to process his request...

Me: "Half of me?"

Him: "Yes,"

We had been going back and forth with this and I realized that I could lose him, I can't afford that.

Me: "Only the half," I whispered as he came closer.

Our lips met again and this time it was different, this time it was assurance, new chapter and feelings. It had taken me to a space

filled with possibilities and love. There was no point in prolonging everything.

I had closed Siyabonga's chapter when I moved out of his house.

I was not giving this man my half, but I was giving him the Me that longed for warmth and begged for happiness while I healed the hurt Bulelwa: The naïve little girl that had thought it would be forever. I was handing him the 'self' that was ready to be loved and kept away the 'self' that was hesitant and doubtful.

His hands found their way through my bare skin under the clothes and he pulled me up and walked to the bedroom with me. I was placed gently on the middle of the bed and he climbed in too.

Touching and stroking my body in ways that gave my body the tingling sensation. He kissed me again and instead of us having sex right there and then, he pulled me to his arms and kissed my forehead.

Him: "We can sleep now Madlomo,"

He whispered near my ear and ran his fingers through my Afro as my head rested on his chest.

It felt okay.

## FIFTEEN

It was time for lunch with Zama and Zizi. They had called me twice already asking where I was, they clearly do not understand how traffic gets during the lunch hour in Port Elizabeth.

I finally arrived at Zininzi's house and they were seated in the lounge talking.

Me: "Hello Ladies,"

Zama: "Finally you are here!"

Zizi: "Hello Bulie,"

I threw myself on the couch and exhaled.

Me: "Yes I am here, traffic was something else,"

Zizi: "You should've drove out of your house earlier than lunchtime,"

Zama: "Exactly! but what matters is that you are here,"

Me: "And I am here ladies,"

Zizi: "And what is that glow I am seeing on your face! You are gleaming sisi,"

Zama: "I thought I was the only one seeing that,"

I laughed.

Me: "It is the 'I am finally happy glow!' darlings," I smiled and they laughed.

Zama: "Look at you blushing!"

Zizi: “Uyambona uyamomotheka,”

I looked at them with a smile on my face,

Me: “No stop please!”

Zama: “Anyway whatever is making you this jolly then keep up with it darling! It looks good on you,”

Zizi: “She should keep up with it, I love to see you like this,”

Zama: “We thought what’s trending would affect you but No! we thought wrong,”

Me: “Yes it did affect me but I also realized I owe people nothing about what is happening with my life, and yeah I am here glowing and happy now!”

Zizi: “And we love to see it,”

We then moved the topic around Zizi and her affair with Luzuko, to Zama and her coming wedding. Which would be in September, a spring wedding she said. I did mention the kiss between Mawande and Me, they gasped as we were having the lunch Zizi prepared for us.

Zama: “What do you mean you kissed?” she was half smiling, half gasping.

Me: “Exactly that Zama,”

Zizi: “You have feelings for Mawande?”

Me: “I don’t know, I cannot tell you how I feel, but there’s something,”

Zama: “Bulelwa don’t you think you are rushing it?”



Zizi: “Rushing what? My friend love will always come when you least expect it! Forget about Siyabonga and jump on the ship with Mawande. He is a good person I know,”

Me: “I too feel a little guilty Zama but on the other hand Zizi has a point, I’ve closed the chapter with Siyabonga and why wait when God decided to bless me with a person I feel content with almost all times,”

Zama: “Do not get me wrong my friend, I think you should take a break from everything and just focus on you first. If he loves you he will wait for you,”

Zizi: “But Zama why wait when your heart and mind tells you this is the person, imagine Bulewa waiting all to come back from that wait and find him gone? Life is too short for that. Bulelwa take this as another chance in love and run with it! Do not torture yourself with waiting and all that, plus we all can see that you are really in with this man

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”

I smiled.

Zama: “Just make sure you put yourself first in this one! Do not do things that will make you lose yourself, you’ve been through hell to do that again. If it feels like it is taking your all then maybe it is doing just that, I wish you nothing but happiness my love,”

I smiled and we shared a hug.

I spent the lunchtime with Zama and Zizi talking about work and other unimportant stuff.

My cellphone rang as I was driving to Spar to get a thing I could cook. It was Mawande.

Me: “Hello,”

Him: “Madlomo, How are you,”

Me: "I am well and how are you?"

Him: "I am good, what are your plans for this evening?"

Me: "Right now I am driving to get something I will have for dinner and then head home and bury myself on these art portfolio, call a few people and then sleep,"

I laughed as I finished listing the things I'd do.

Him: "I would love to see you again, you should come over to my house this weekend. The last time I invited you for dinner you did not pitch up"

Me: "Don't remind me of that day, I was lazy to drive, and I am sorry"

That afternoon I arrived at my apartment already tired, I showered and got ready but it was too early for me to drive to his house, I then decided to take a nap on the couch only to wake up after midnight.

Him: "It's Okay, so will you come over on Friday, tomorrow let me just say,"

Me: "Okay, I'll be there,"

Him: "Great, Ziyanda will also be home, I'll also let her know even though she won't believe me,"

Me: "Don't tell her, let it be a surprise. Just make sure she's in the house too,"

Him: "That's great yazi,"

Me: "Yes and I think she will be happy,"

Him: "She will, okay I should head back to work right now, we will talk again later okay,"

Me: "Okay, Bye,"

Him: "Take care Madlomo,"

I nodded as if he could see me, then ended the call.

I smiled to myself and exhaled, at least there's that silver lining...

## SIXTEEN

It was as if the universe could not wait for Friday evening. I was wearing an olive green dress with tan sandals. My Afro was washed and styled. A little make up here and there, oh I smelt heavenly.

My car was parked at his driveway at KwaMagxaki, this is the part of Port Elizabeth known to be the suburban hood. There are children playing in the park and different aromas coming from the different houses as they prepared dinner. It is full of life as the sunset brought an orange glow to the ending day. I looked myself on the mirror one more time,

I stepped out of the car holding my purse, car keys and cellphone. The yard is clean and filled with beautiful flowers that seem taken care of. I walked up the porch stairs and knocked on the door, He opened with a smile already pasted on his face.

Him: "You are here, welcome,"

He stepped aside and I walked into this beautiful living room which went all the way to the dining area and extended to the lounge that led to the backyard garden. That smell that always comforted me was mixed with the aroma of spices that came from the kitchen.

A song by Thandiswa Mazwai “Ingoma” was playing on the music player, it already connected with the in-depths of me.

Me: “Yes, I am here,”

He closed the door and then enveloped me in a hug, a soft kiss landed on my lips. He smiled

Him: “yho! Awusemhle,” (You’re so beautiful)

Me: “Enkosi,” (Thank you)

He took my things and placed them on the wooden console table on the side, which when I looked up I noticed a very familiar painting.

Me: "That piece was so close to my heart you know,"

He turned and looked at me as I stood in front of it admiring it.

Him: "I'm honored to have a piece of your heart in my house,"

I chuckled. Right there and then a young lady with long dreadlocks came down from the stairs; slim body, brown skinned with beautiful hazel eyes which bulged out as she was shocked from seeing me.

Her: "Oh my God!" she was astonished.

Mawande laughed and I smiled.

Him: "This is Ziyanda, My niece,"



Me: "Hello Ziyanda," I said with a smile as she couldn't hold her excitement.

Her: "Hi... hello Oh my God Malume why didn't you at least give me a heads up,"

She extended her hand, but instead I welcomed her in a hug,

Me: "If he had told you then it wouldn't be a surprise, I am so happy to finally meet you. Your uncle here doesn't close his mouth when it comes to you,"

Her: "This surprise I love, Can I get you anything to read?"

Me: "Water please,"

Her: "Coming right up,"

She disappeared to the kitchen and Wande led me to the dining table.

Me: "I didn't know I had that effect on people!"

I said as I sat down.

Him: "You do, she wont stop talking about it ke,"

Me: "Oh wow,"

I laughed

Him: "Thank you for coming, she really is happy,"

Me: "I can see that," I smiled

Him: "How was the drive to here,"

Me: "It was okay, there wasn't any hassle and the traffic was light,"

Him: "Great,"

Ziyanda came back with the glass of water and we then engaged in a conversation about art and her amazing talent, she also told me she had been receiving calls from multiple artists asking to work with her and I was glad I was able to get her that exposure.

She left us in the middle of dinner, talked about an event she was attending. Young people and Friday evenings. We cleaned the table and washed the dishes.

Him: "What would you like us to do on this Friday night?"

He asked as we walked to the living room, with him holding my waist.

Me: "A movie and then talk, or the news. I don't know either."

I sat on the couch and he joined too, pulling my legs to rest on his lap.

Him: "You should smile more you know, your eyes do this little sparkling thing when you smile,"

Me: "You notice even the tiniest of things  
"

Him: "You are easy to read Madlomo,"

Me: "Oh really?"

Him: "Yes,"

I shook my head as I laughed

Me: "You are something else,"

Him: "Tell me about what makes you happy?"

Me: "Well a lot of things make me happy, simple things. Us sitting like this talking is what I love, painting of course and many other simple things. But never take me to a snake park! I hate those with my everything,"

Him: "Okay, snakes out of the way,"

We laughed.

Me: "And what makes you happy?"

Him: "Everything makes me happy, I am a simple person but I come off as intimidating to others and you were unfazed!"

Me: "You are not intimidating sir!"

Him: "Oh really?"

Me: "Yes, you are this soft, gentle and caring person! I think people are intimidated by your gift rather than you,"

Him: "You make me soft, with you I feel like I could rest without worries, that is why I told you that you are for me,"

Me: "I am your weakness, never let your enemies know that!"

He nodded and we shared eye contact.

I smiled.

Me: "I feel content too with you,"

I shifted closer to him and his hands wrapped around me, holding me in position.

Me: "I think I know what we can do this evening," I ran my fingers up his arms.

Him: "Are you sure about that?"

I haven't slept with anyone in three full months. Of-course I was thirsty.

I nodded.

Me: "Yes,"

I whispered.

I kissed him and He kissed me back. It was passionate, slow and heated like we were finally giving each other what we've been looking for. His hands lifted my dress up and I felt that tingling sensation in my stomach, the butterflies and vibrations.

He slightly pulled me up and rolled the dress up to my waist, my thighs exposed and I felt his hands move up, all the way up that I stiffened, he broke the kiss and looked at me for a brief moment before reaching for my neck, A moan left my mouth involuntarily, I loved the heat it caused between my legs.

Him: "Don't hold back please, don't overthink it Madlomo,"

He whispered.

I felt that vibration between my legs.

I exhaled and right then he carried me in his arms up the stairs to his bedroom, he took off my dress and placed me in the middle of the bed, removed his clothing and climbed on top of me. He parted my legs with his knees and slowly kissed his way up.

I could not even get the chance to look around as he was already making me lose my morals with his touches and kisses. I felt the fabric of my panties rip and a moan followed as he



sucked on my bottom lip. I felt his finger teasing over my entrance down there, he groaned light at the touch of it and he slid in his forefinger and his thumb rubbed over my clitoral hood, my back arched in response to his touch and I moaned even louder in his mouth.

His finger went in and out rubbing my lady part making me want him even more

“Please...” I whispered, unable to take the pleasure that was coming over me! His fingers rubbed, touched, played and flickered with it and I couldn't hold it anymore. I released right there on his fingers and moaned loud as a wave of pleasure showered on me, leaving me trembling!

I heard the wrapper tearing as I was still recovering

He pinned both my hands over my head, with his other hand he parted my legs even more, he rubbed it on my entrance and I reacted with a soft moan. He then went all in, filled me up in a way I never thought was possible! My legs went over his hips closing him in.

My moans slowly turned to screams of pleasure and his groans on my left ear made me build up faster.

His body rubbed onto mine, the heat was something else! He quickened his deep thrusts that were slightly painful and pleasurable at the same time. It was without any doubt that he was larger and thicker than my ex husband, One more thrust and we both exploded to this new world filled with pleasure and happiness! Heavenly and sweet.

I wanted us to remain in that position for a little while, Sleep was taking over me. I don't know when he got up and walked to the bathroom for a warm towel but I felt it when he wiped me clean, then joined me on the bed and pulled me to his arms, I felt a duvet covering us.

I was taken, claimed and chosen for him.

My love.

## SEVENTEEN

“Lelwa, Open your legs a bit” he softly whispered as his hand ran through my thighs, I felt the tingles and vibrations again.

We had been at it the whole night, he had me in the most incredible way ever, my lady part was hot and my whole body was floating in a sea of pleasure. I had been devoured and enjoyed in a way I could never describe, it was heavenly.

Him: “Lelwa, your cellphone has been ringing non-stop,” He said nudging me to wake up

Me: “Who is it?”

I mumbled and pulled the covers off my my face

Him: “It’s unnamed,”

I sat up and he had already freshened up. Wow this man.

Me: "You are clean already, what time is it?"

Him: "Time for breakfast, it is past eight Madlomo,"

Me: "And you didn't wake me because?"

Him: "You were sleeping peacefully, tired and you needed the rest,"

He handed me the cellphone and caressed my face, planting a soft kiss on my lips. That scent again, the one that had taken me the first time we came close to each other.

Him: "I've taken out a few things for you to wear, and breakfast is also ready downstairs,"

I smiled.

Me: "Thank you, even though I was not planning on getting out of this bed,"

I said running my fingers down his left arm

Him: "oh really?"

Me: "Yes, the weather is also allowing,"

I could see the rain through the opened curtains, it was one of those famous windy and rainy days of Port Elizabeth.

He laughed and kissed me,

Him: "let's first feed you and then we can be in each other's arms the whole day,"

Me: "Mhh, Okay. I really enjoyed last night,"

Him: "I did too Madlomo, every second of it,"

He kissed me again.

Me: "I should get up and go freshen up," I removed the blanket and my cellphone rang as I got up and walked to the bathroom. I answered the call as I stepped in and closed the door.

Me: "Hello,"

Caller: "Bulelwa mntanam,"

I recognized the voice, it was Siyabonga's mother. I sat on the toilet and urinated.

Me: "Eweke Ma,"

Her: "Unjani sana lwam" (How are you?)

Me: “Kuyaphileka Mama, unjani wena?” (I’m well mother, how are you?)

Her: “I’m well mntanami, I will not make this longer Madlomo, please will you come see me,”

Me: “Come and see you? Where Enceberha?”

Her: “I’m in Port Elizabeth sisi, I have something very important to discuss with you,”

Me: “Uhm, I don’t know,”

Her: “Please my child

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please you have to know this before I can accept you being out of the April household,”

Me: "I will try and see when I can come,"

Her: "It would be better if you'd come today sisi, this is really important,"

Me: "Okay, I will be there,"

Her: "Thank you sana lwam, I'll see you then,"

Me: "Okay,"

I ended the call and got up from the toilet seat, I was about to flush when I noticed blood, my lady part was a bit sore from the all night sex but to get my periods early is something else.

I flushed then walked to the shower to freshen up.

Some parts in my body were sore as I bent and applied body lotion, especially my legs.



I walked out with a towel wrapped around my body.

Wande was changing the bedding.

Me: "I stained them too?"

Him: "We did Madlomo,"

Me: "No, I mean with the other thing..."

Him: "Yes, and check on top of the dresser, Ziyanda unfortunately uses the other type of these things you guys use,"

I laughed

Me: "What other things Wande?"

Him: "You know what I am talking about,"

He meant the tampons.

Me: "You can't even say them," I laughed and he just shook his head and continued with making the bed as I got myself ready for breakfast.

We went downstairs and I was met by this beautiful thick lady who was light in complexion and had long straight hair. She was setting the table and was introduced to me as Nelisiwe, a family member.

Me: "Nice to meet you sisi,"

Her: "Same here,"

I could tell she did not like me one bit. I sat on the dining table and Wande handed me a cup

Him: "Drink, it'll help with the pains and cramps,"

Me: "What is it?"

Him: "Milk and some herbs, it's not bitter at all,"

I was hesitant

He took a sip and then gave it to me again

Me: "You better not kill me," he chuckled and sat next to me,

I drank the cup and it was tasteless,

Him: "If I wanted to kill you I'd have done it a long time ago,"

We had our breakfast under a light conversation. My mind kept on drifting to what Siya's mother needed to say urgently to me.

I told Wande the Woman wanted to see me and he said I should just go and hear her out.

Me: "I really do not want to go to that house,"

Him: "But you do want to hear what she has to say?"

Me: "Unfortunately,"

Him: "Then you should go and hear her out,"

Me: "Those weren't the plans I had for this weekend you know,"

Him: "Sometimes things don't always go according to our plans,"

Me: "I'll go see her tomorrow or Monday and the weather is bad anyway,"

Him: "Okay, just make sure you go see her,"

I cannot believe the weekend went by that fast, I enjoyed every second I spent in that house. My body has experienced things I never thought it would. My soul intertwined with his and we also had a moment where we sat down with him burning the sage.

I got to connect with me and face the spiritual side of me, it had been so different and at first scary, I almost went out of breath but I recovered and let him guide me to connecting with my God. He told me kukuphahla and it helps with connecting with your spiritual self and getting rid of all bad omens.

It had been such a great experience and rewarding because I felt like I am even more connected to God and can communicate with him without any doubt. He also said something about me holding something so powerful within me but I didn't even mind it.

I was now parked in the driveway of the house that I almost left with a coffin. The man; from what I have heard, was still hospitalized. I said a little prayer and stepped out of my car, bracing myself of whatever will be said there.

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The cold breeze and a familiar scent filled with good and bad memories hit my nostrils as I walked in the house.

I walked in and I was welcomed by Nontlantla, she is Siya's relative.

Me: "Good morning sisi,"

Her: "Good morning, mama has been waiting for you all weekend,"

Me: "I had gone somewhere for the weekend and I could not come and see her at the time,"

We walked in and she offered me something to drink, I politely declined.

I went and sat on that same sofa that used to be my favorite. The house has not changed, not that I had expected it to but for it to still be the same is something that amazed me.

Our wedding pictures were still hanging from the wall. I wanted to puke as I saw them. A sound of cough pulled me back from that train of thought as I looked up to see this old woman.

She was looking her age but filled with more life in her. We shared a brief hug and sat down with her looking at me like I sinned.

Her: “Unjani sisi?” –how are you?

Me: “Ndisaphila ma, unjani wena” –I am well ma, how are you?

Her: “Ndiyacenga sanalwam, khawundichazele kwenzeke ntoni?” –I am well too, tell me what happened?

Me: “A lot happened mama, a lot that made me realize I could not go on anymore?”

Her: "Couldn't you report the matter to us and then deal with it as a family?"

Me: "I couldn't, I was tired of fighting and dealing with matters,"

Her: "tsi! Bamosha oSiyabonga, I hear you sisi,"

I nodded and she sipped on her tea

Her: "I called you here sisi because we have an important matter to discuss,"

Me: "Ndimamele,"

Her: "I do not know how I can let you know this sanalwam. I don't even know where I can start,"



Me: "You can just say it out ma,"

Her: "eh Bulelwa, we had done a terrible thing to you. As the family; we thought it was best for you and Siyabonga,"

Me; "I am listening,"

Her: "let me just start by saying; we are so sorry, had we known better we wouldn't have done it,"

Me: "What Ma?"

Her: "As Siyabonga's mother, I thought you not having a child was something I had to do to protect my son. We as the family thought It would be best to protect his assets without the worry that one day he will have a child,"

Me: "please get to the point," I was getting impatient.

Her: "Bulelwa... we had someone tie your womb so you and Siyabonga never get any children,"

I laughed and then immediately stopped as I realized that she was serious. My heart started beating fast.

Me: "What do you mean?"

Her: "Enceberha when you were getting married, something was poured on your bed. I went to this herbalist and got you tied so you never conceive,"

She was shaking as she said this, it seemed as if she was being forced to talk.

Me: "Nandivala isibeleko?" –You tied my womb?

I was still trying to make sense of what she said.

Her: "We are sorry Madlomo, that is why I am asking you to come with us and we can perform a ritual that'll solve all this now that you have left my son. It wasn't by bad means, sixolele mtanam,"

I kept on shaking my head. This was unbelievable!

Me: "You did something evil! I hope you all rot and burn in hell!"

Her: "Forgive us sisi, it wasn't something we wanted to do but what was needed during that time. I am old Bulelwa and as the family we have decided to let you go and for that to happen we need you to agree and perform this ritual, so we can untie you womb and let you go in peace,"

Me: "Do another ceremony so you can do more of your evils? I'd rather die rhaa! Nithakatha kangaka!"

Her: "We did it for you sisi! Susithuka when all we did was help you!"

Her voice was getting loud

I furiously got up from the couch and walked out of the house.

Nontlantla walked out of the house too trying to talk to me but I couldn't stay another minute, I got in my car and drove back to my apartment.

I needed to rest, I was tired.

My cellphone rang as I threw my body on the couch , it was Wande.

Me: "Hi

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"

Him: "How did it go?"

Me: "I heard some really disturbing news,"

I sighed.

Him: "Where are you now?"

Me: "At my apartment,"

Him: "I'm on my lunch break, I'll be there just now,"

I didn't answer back.

I laid my head on the arm rest. I couldn't cry nor feel the pain. I was just numb, like I've disconnected my soul from the body.

His scent hit my nostrils first before I felt him taking my legs to rest on his lap

Him “How are you?”

Me: “I’m numb, no pain or anything just numbness and confusion. No I’m not angry or anything like that,”

Him: “What did she tell you?”

Me: “That my womb was tied when I got married to her son, and to reverse the curse, I have to let them do some ceremony for me which I’ll not be part of,”

Him: “That’s all?”

Me: “Yes, was there anything else?”

He plainly looked at me

Him: “You don’t have to perform any ritual with them, have the periods subsided?”

Me: “No,”

Him: “you are bleeding not on your periods, I knew you were tied but it was not my place to tell you. I just had to make sure it doesn’t affect us,”

Me: “What did you do?”

Him: “I had sex with you,”

I chuckled

Me: ‘Stop speaking hear and there Wande,’

Him: “You won’t understand it, but as a healer I noticed it, Madlomo you are tied with him and not me, whatever they did to you was for the benefit of their own son. When I had sex with you, I broke it. It might sound superstitious or magical but

it is true and the bleeding you are experiencing is to show me that whatever they put in you was now out,”

Me: “So your penis was the answer,” He laughed

Him: “You are so raw, but you can take it like that. And the herbs I gave you that morning helped with cleaning you, the spiritual connection we did was for you to strengthen your faith and trust,”

Me: “There’s still more to come isn’t?”

Him: “You are stronger than everything that will come,”

Me: “Why are you doing this for me?”

Him: “Because I love you and the elders chose you for me,”

I smiled and looked at him



Him: "I should get going,"

He got up and pulled me to stand too, his arms wrapped around my waist

Him: "take care of yourself okay,"

I nodded

Me: "I will,"

Him: "I'll come fetch you later today,"

Me: "I have to go to the gallery tomorrow and look how things are going,"

Him: "Okay, I'll come check on you then,"

Me: "I'll cook,"

He smiled and then we hugged. I didn't want to let go, I wanted to hold on forever.

Me: "I love you," I whispered

He let go, looked at me with a smile and a kiss followed.

Him: "I'll see you later okay,"

I nodded and smiled.

## NINETEEN

A knock hit my office door as I was busy on the computer checking the portfolios sent by everyone around the country. The talent was on another level.

Me: "Come in,"

Gcobisa walked in followed by a lady whose face was very familiar, I had seen her somewhere.

Gcobisa: "Morning Bulie, lady here insisted on seeing you, I had to let her in as she was disrupting the guys at the front,"

Me: "Uhm, Thank you Gcobisa I'll take it from here,"

Gcobisa: "Okay sisi,"

Gcobisa walked.

As soon as I gave her a second glance, I remembered her name; Nelisiwe.

Me: “Morning, uhm please take a sit, I am sorry my office is a bit clustered up with things,”

Her: “I am not staying Bulelwa . I just came here to warn you about the man you’re involved with. My husband,”

I almost choked.

Me: “What do you mean your husband?”

Her: “Mawande, he is my husband”

I shook my head

Me: “I'm not following,”

Her: “We are married, I am not some family member sisi. And he is definitely not who you think he is! He is an evil person! A murderer at that!”

I was confused and my jaw was hanging.

Me: “I don’t understand.”

She pulled the chair and sat down

Her: “I know right now you are confused and shocked. Mawande and I are married, I am not some family member from somewhere, he is a manipulator who hides behind love and manipulation! He’ll make you drink things you don’t know and then make you his doormat. He is not the person you think he is!”

I still shook my head!

Her: "Don't be naïve sisi, run while you still have time. That man is not a saint, he uses human blood and remains for his things! runaway from him Bulelwa,"

Me: "But you are still with him, you stay with him. Why?"

Her: "Because I have no way out! Leave that man whilst you are still alive. You don't want to be one of them!"

She walked out leaving me puzzled with lots of questions.

What a start to a Tuesday morning!

I couldn't work for the rest of the morning! I needed answers and there was one person who could give them to me.

I dialed his work number. The receptionist directed my call to his office phone.

Him: "Good morning,"

My heart started beating fast,

Me: "Dlamini,"

My voice was firm

Him: "Madlomo, how are you?"

Me: "I am okay, can you talk?"

Him: "Yes, my first client just left,"

Me: "I had an unexpected visitor this morning,"

Him: "Who?"

Me: "Nelisiwe,"

He sighed

Him: "I'll be there just now,"

Me: "Okay,"

My anticipation was short lived as he arrived at my office and the space suddenly felt small.

Him: "Madlomo,"

Me: "Hello,"

He pulled the chair and sat down.

Him: "Are you mad at me, you seem uneasy,"

My palms were starting to sweat,



Me: "What is there to be mad about?"

Him: "I'll take it as you are,"

Before I could utter another word, Gcobisa came budging in the office

Her: "Oh sorry to have interrupted you Bulie, we have someone very important on call right now! Mrs Banda would like you to quickly get to her office right now,"

Me: "Uhm, okay can I finish here first..."

Him: "You can go Lelwa, I'll wait for you,"

Me: "Okay, please do."

I walked out with Gcobisa and down the passage to Mrs Banda's office.

Gcobisa: “We have the Chieneka family on a conference call, they would like to invest in the art gallery and like you to auction some of the paintings you’ve done, the one that are your ‘rough work’ as they call it. If we close this deal we might be able to take even more of those young fine arts graduates to showcase their work in the opening. It looks promising,”

Me: “Oh great! Finally some good news.”

I was excited.

We got to Banda’s office.

Zikhona Banda; she takes care of the communication aspect of the gallery, she knows people in high and low places. The team member who makes sure we get sponsorship and everything runs smoothly.

The meeting with the Chieneka family went really well, they are the family that own multiple art galleries across Africa

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they are from Nigeria and it is every painter's dream to get their work exhibited on their galleries, oh Leonardo da Vinci might beg to differ, anyway they are the A-list of Africa.

The deal was an investment in the art gallery, me selling a few of my 'old' paintings at one of the Auctions they will be part of in France the coming year. They will come to the launch of this gallery too. Everything will be big.

At least Something positive came out of the dreadful day.

By the time I was out of that office; 2 hours had already passed and Mawande had left a message saying he'll see me after work.

...

The day went on smoothly, calling business partners left and right. As much as painting is the main thing; the business is the backbone of it.

I drove from work to the apartment after knock off time.

Approximately thirty minutes later a knock hit my door, I walked to the door and I tried smiling as he walked in.

Me: "Hey,"

He came in

Him: "Madlomo,"

Me: "I was about to cook,"

I said as I closed the door and he took a seat on the couch.

Him: "I won't be staying the night,"

That stung a bit.

Me: "Okay,"

I sat opposite him and he looked at me, his eyes piercing me.

I held the gaze and backed out first, he released a chuckle.

Him: "Bulelwa, what did she tell you?"

Me: "I do not want to repeat the things she said,"

Him: "When you look at me what do you see,"

I looked at him and I saw a man I fell in love with blindly, a man who has been good to me.

Me: "I see the man I bumped into at a shopping mall unknown to that you'd play such a role and love me,"

Him: "When I look at you, I see a woman I love without any doubts. I know we agreed on you giving me a half of you but what you've been is more than that half. Bulelwa I am not my past,"

I exhaled loudly,

Me: "What do you mean?"

Him: "come sit next to me and I'll tell you everything,"

Me: "You know you don't have to tell me anything,"

I didn't move from the couch.

Him: "Either way you have to know,"

Me: "Okay,"

Him: "Nelisiwe and I were once married but that didn't last long because I was abusive towards her, I was obsessed and when I found her with a man in our bedroom things went south, they took a sharp curve and I lost myself in the process. I forgave her and it was around the time I was still ithwasa, the man who was to train me used my gift for his own benefit, he used my powers for only bad things, we started by using dead bodies to make some medicine, then moved on to using blood, as that was not enough we needed warm or hot blood! He had a snake to feed and it enjoyed newborn baby blood, so we started taking newborn babies, even unborn ones. I was lost and that changed me for the worst. Nelisiwe got pregnant around the time things were falling apart, to add on the abuse... I also killed my first child and that damaged Nelisiwe even more.

When the trainer's house got burnt down! I lost everything too and I went back home. I was down and out, my ancestors had turned their back on me. When I went back to the village I would sleep by the river because I would hear someone calling me, the sound of drums and music sent me there. Months

after, I was taken by another spiritual leader who helped me with everything. I was the trained well, I did multiple ceremonies to appease the ancestors, I finally found my peace and I became a better person,”

What a reveal!! My body was cold and I felt no emotions, I was glued to the seat with no movement.

Him: “After getting myself back together, I worked on being me again. I received therapy from my spiritual leaders, I connected with my roots and found myself again. Unfortunately it was not the same with Nelisiwe, she’s still battling with anger issues. I reunited with her again last year in January, she was down and out. Life had hit her with the worst. I took her back and we tried again but it did not work, we divorced and agreed to her staying with me until she finds her feet again.

You are the first woman I brought to my house in her presence, that is why she came to you and said what she said,”

I didn’t know how to react to the bombs he just dropped!



I remained in that same position for a moment,

I felt his warm hands touch my knees, he had knelt before me  
and then moved His hands to touch mine

Him: "Please say something," he begged

I couldn't, I was frozen. I was shocked and confused.

## TWENTY

I had nothing to say to Wande, I had a lot inside me but the words failed me.

He was still kneeling with his head buried on my hands, I thought I felt something wet on my hands. It confused me on why would he cry? But then again, he told me some of his deep darkest stuff.

At church we always preached about forgiveness and not being judgmental as we are not God, and this man needed me not to be judgmental and accept him with all his flaws.

At the same time, I could not help but be scared. His past is terrifying.

Him: "I am not that monster anymore, Nkosazana,"

Me: "I don't know what to say,"

I became still for a minute and then he got up and took his keys that were on the table.

he looked at me in the eye,

Him: "This is me, naked. I am not a perfect man Madlomo, I am far from it and now I have told you everything there is to know because I love you and I trust you,"

I remained quiet for a second and returned the gaze,

Me: "Can you stay for the night?"

Him: "I cannot, I have to go home,"

Me: "Do not go please,"

I stood up and faced him

Me: “I do not like that you are staying with her, but I think it is good what you are doing for her. My only problem lies with her. I won’t lie and say your past isn’t terrifying but who am I to judge you? I love that you were honest and trusted me with your deep stuff,”

Him: “I am sure I can work something out for her. I just don’t want you to be uncomfortable with me Madlomo, I am no longer that man okay?”

Me: “I understand, please stay the night. I've even stopped bleeding you know,”

I saw a little smile forming in his lips.

Him: “I have to...”

I did not wait for him to say any more words, I tiptoed reaching for his lips. He gladly accepted me and we went in slowly and sweetly. It was a kiss of acceptance, a kiss of welcome.

My clothes were all over the room and he had buried himself deeper and thrusting in and out of me, my moans were too loud -I'm sure the neighbors could hear the noise,

It was deep, fast then slow and then rough! My arms were behind my waist, my face laying flat on the bedroom floor, my butt high up and my knees were hurting but the pleasure suppressed it. The high pitch I reached with my moan; the deeper and more intense the thrusts were.

It was majestic yet commanding and I had submitted to his sex. For a moment everything had stopped, there were no worries, just two of us banging and melting into this world we had created for each other.

In no time, I felt the warmness of his shoots inside me and he was groaning as he released more and more holding and pinning my face even more on the floor.

I cried in frustration as I couldn't reach my climax in time, I felt him go soft inside me, my knees weakened and I laid with my stomach on the floor as my body loosened too.

His hand cupped my lady part, I tried shifting

Me: "It's okay love," I whispered

Him: "I'll take care of it, Let me,"

He slipped his other hand underneath and made me raise my butt.

His soft feathery kisses down my back buried me in ecstasy, it's like he had studied my body and now it was his temple. He knew which parts to touch and stimulate, I no longer belonged to the real world but to this world of him and I devouring and connecting even deeper.

He used his fingers and palms, in making this moment last even longer for my self, I knew it was about me as his whispers of ungodly things that sent me straight to a quick heaven

"Ahhhhh!! mhhh!"

I screamed as a wave of pleasure showered me, I felt the warm salty liquid down my face, he went in again using his forefinger and the second wave made me release my tears and cries,

Cries of fully handing myself to this man, cries of euphoria and bliss.

Tears of attachment and submission.

He turned me and looked me in the eye, a wave of light fear of losing this man came and I shook my head.

Him: "You are so beautiful Madlomo," he smiled

My ice cold heart melted and I fully handed it to him.

He pulled me to the bed, laid on his back and asked me to be on top of him.

I chuckled at his request,

Me: "I have never done it before,"

He smiled

Him: "Just follow my lead okay,"

I nodded and he slightly sat up, using the continental pillows for his comfort and support.

He held my waist up and then I slowly took in his full erection, filling me up in ways that hardened my nipples and my stomach went in a sudden vibration of pleasure.



I exhaled as I took in all of it, my eyes closed enjoying the feeling of him being completely in,

Him: "Don't think too much about it, enjoy and let your hips guide you okay?"

Me: "Mhh,"

Him: "Slowly move with me sweetie,"

I went into circular motion first, slowly then forward and back allowing the hips to sway and the pleasure to lead, he held on my waist and followed my rhythm. A lot of trust, taking charge and full responsibility.

We went in again getting lost in our own world, The heavy breathing, groaning and moaning, being fully in charge and changing from sweet and slow to fast and feisty, it went on for some time and I released a loud moan as I came even hard, leaving my legs shaking and my face colliding with his chest as

he held my butt up and worked from his side until he shoots his warmness inside again....

Him: "We need to get a morning after pill"

He said right after our shower session, the two of us tangled up under the covers.

Me: "I'll get them tomorrow when I'm going to the gallery,"

We remained quiet for a while, listening to each other breathe.

Me: "I am thinking of visiting Grahamstown one of these days, I haven't been there for a while,"

Him: "When are you thinking of going?"

Me: "I first have to try and make sure things are okay at work and then I can go, but it will be a week visit,"

Him: "Don't do it because you feel like you have to move from me,"

How could I, after the connection we had that left me not wanting to even shift from him

Me: "No! Don't think it like that, it's something that has been on my mind the last few days,"

Him: "Bulelwa, I want you to communicate with me okay? If there's something you do not like please let me know please,"

Me: "I understand,"

....

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I thought scaring Bulelwa will make her move away from Mawande, with all the shit that man has put me through I still have feelings for him, I love him deeply and it will always be like

that, I Just have to make sure this relationship of theirs goes nowhere.

My cell phone rang, it's my friend.

Me: "Hello,"

Her: "We are outside the gate, you're ready?"

Me: "Yes, I will just grab my coat and I'll be there okay,"

Her: "Time is not on our side Nelly, Bongani is waiting for us,"

Me: "Nwabisa, chill I'll be there just now,"

Her: "Hurry,"

I took my coat and purse. Passing by the big mirror on the passage and I looked hot, tight dress, make up, hair on point even the red bottoms shoes made me look even cute.

Ziyanda was resting on the couch watching T.V, next time she'll be curled up like that; would be on a container that'll ship her far away from home.

The clock on the wall as I walked by read 09:15 pm, I am not surprised that her uncle stayed out today too. He has been doing a lot of that.

I walked out and spotted the red VW Polo

Nwabisa got out too looking too plain for my liking.

Her: "Finally, you decided to brace us with your presence get in the car the guests won't be pleased with you arriving this late,"

Me: "Good things come to those who wait, where's Melissa?"

Her: "Already at the club serving drinks, that is what she does best,"

Me: "Okay,"

The drive to central was filled with nothing but laughs and preps for the night. The driver stopped at one of long streets filled with clubs, the vibe is everything.

We were welcomed in the club by warm steam with strippers all over, the red and green lights, people dancing their sorrows away. Drinking and smoking their freedom away! We walked to the bar and Melissa was with Bongani. Who was not looking very pleased?

Me: "I am here,"

Melissa: "Oh you are looking hot,"

Bongani: "You are late, the team isn't happy at all,"

Me: "Thank you Melz, They'll be happy with what I'll propose,"

Bongani: "You love wasting time, let's go,"

Me: "I'll see you just now my friend,"

We went up the stairs to the quiet section of the club, there are different booths here, walk in the wrong one and you'd regret it forever. The smell is a bit hygienic up here and quieter with sweet smoke all over, the lights are dim only the ultraviolet lights give color to the skin.

We walked into Bongani's office and my eyes were feasted to four gentlemen. I scanned and there was Beast, Addi, Lukka and Mr Isaac Brown. The team.

Isaac: "We've been waiting for you,"

I put on my sexiest smile and took off my fur coat hanging it on the chair.

Me: "I am here now and that is all that matters,"

Bongani: "Gentleman, this is the diamond of our club, Madam Black,"

I pulled my chair and joined the round poker table.

Bongani: "Let us get down to business,"

Lukka: "We only need twenty girls from the auction, the best in the business will be a bonus,"

Addi: "My friends, half a million is what we are bringing to the table for this Auction,"

Isaac: "And make sure you get your best girls, 16-25 is our best here,"



Bongani: “The twenty girls you gentlemen need are worth more than the money you are offering,”

Me: “Including a virgin or two that is a whole lot of money you'll make from this,”

Addi: “If it pleases the table, I would like the two virgins for myself,”

Isaac: “We would have to talk on splitting there Addi my man,”

Beast was the quiet one, he observed and talked less.

Lukka: “if half a million is not what Bongs here needs, how much are we talking about?”

Me: “Taking that the operation is very risky and transporting...”

Isaac: "As the minister of transport in this country, leave the transportation issue aside,"

Me: "I love to see you take charge, 20M in Rand is what we need,"

Beast: "That is a lot of money Nelly,"

My head quickly turned to his side, I was shocked at the way he gently said my name. He winked and maintained eye contact. In this operation; no one should know your name and this man called me by my real name.

Me: "What do you mean?"

Beast: "You will need to clean the money, and that will not be easy,"

Me: "Gentlemen, you will make a lot of money from these girls, and a million each girl is what we are offering, it is not even a quarter of what you will make,"

Isaac: “Beast here is telling the truth, it is a lot of money because we are not sure if this Auction might even happen,”

Lukka: “Gentlemen do not be stingy, they are rating in rand not in dollars, that is not a lot of money,” his Russian accent is ever so strong.

Bongani: “We have our own way of cleaning the money beast, we are not moving from that 20M,”

Lukka: “Addi what you say?”

Addi: “We take it, the 20 Million rand is not what we can complain about,”

Isaac: “I think we will take it,”

Me: “Wise decision gentleman, everyone is happy?”

They all nodded and agreed. Beast could not take his dark eyes off me. I felt it even when my eyes looked at the other direction.

Me: "I think this is us finishing the meeting, Thank you gentleman for making time, the VIP booth is all ready for you to go enjoy, and a private show from our girls,"

Bongani got up too and shook hands with the men, I stood up and felt a warm hand on my back, the dress is bare back.

He held on tightly on my waist and whispered to my left ear

"I would love a private show from you Nelly,"

Me: "I no longer do private shows Beast,"

Him: "come on! It will be worth your while. Sanctuary hotel, room 111 top floor,"

He grabbed my butt so hard I squirmed a bit and he slipped something on the pocket of my coat before he gently moved me to the side and walked to shake hands with Bongani.

They all walked out and Bongani gave me a death stare as soon as he closed the door.

Me: "Don't even dare!"

Him: "Stay away from beast,"

Me: "You will not tell me what to do,"

Him: "Keep that attitude and you'll find yourself in a fruit truck crossing borders without your knowledge,"

Me: "Fuck-off Bongani,"

Him: "Who are the two virgins, I did not think we have them here,"

Me: "Oh wait, you'll see for yourselves,"

I pulled my coat from the chair and took out the envelope with picture,

I ripped it open and gave him the pictures, his jaw dropped

Him: "Nelly you are not serious!"

Me: "I am dead serious,"

Him: "This is Minister Mthiya Daughter and what! Your ex's niece? Are you kidding!"

Me: "Ziyanda and Khanya are our showstoppers! We are going to cash in a lot from the two,"

Him: "Does Isaac know you want to sell his wife's daughter?"

Me: "He was the one who suggested it,"

Him: "And that Sangoma of yours? I bet he is not aware of this,"

Me: "No! This is payback for him killing my child. I would say we should also take that girlfriend of his but we don't want to risk it with her. She's April's acquaintance,"

Him: "Ex-acquaintance, she's divorcing him,"

Me: "What? When did you hear that? That cannot happen,"

Him: "From Her lawyer, he was telling April about it, that's what sent the big boss to the ER"

Me: "He will be okay, let me go check on Melissa, keep those photos,"

Him: "Sure,"

I held my coat on my hands and walked back to the bar. I fumbled in the pockets to take out what Beast slipped in and it was the hotel room access card. I smiled.

## TWENTY ONE

Nothing can ever measure that feeling of waking up tangled to the person you love dearly despite his flaws. I inhaled and exhaled him throughout the night, I felt as a part of him as my legs were closed in with his.

I kissed his neck a few times and he wrapped his arms tightly, I felt the vibrations again in my stomach

“I love you,”

I murmured as I buried my head in him. I could hear the rain outside, it was a heavy one that had cold weather too. The room was chilly but in this bed; it was warm.

Him: “Are you going to work today?”

Me: “I don’t think I want to move from here, are you?”

Him: “It is my off day, but I have to go to one of the graduation ceremony of the other initiates,”

Me: “When is it?”

Him: “Later today,”

Me: “Okay... I would love to come with you,”

Him: “You cannot my love, this one is strictly reserved for family and other healers that were invited,”



Me: "Mhh, anyway I love it when you wear the full attire,"

He laughed, I smiled and inhaled him again.

Me: "Serious, you hold this power and it's fascinating! I fall even deeper for you,"

Him: "You want to know when I fall deeper for you"

Me: "Tell me,"

Him: "Every minute I fall deeper,"

I smiled and closed my eyes.

I felt loved and my heart taken care of. I still had fear of his past somewhere in me.

Later in the day after he left, I cleaned the apartment and called my friends over for lunch.

We hardly talked, everyone was busy.

I prepared food and they arrived right after I turned off the stove

Me: "Hello ladies," I gave them a hug as I welcomed them inside

Zama: "What a nice place you have in here,"

Zizi: "kanti this is where you're hiding yourself,"

Me: "Welcome, welcome,"

We laughed as they walked and threw their heavy selves off the couches. Poor furniture.

Zama: "Why would you call us over, so random in the day?"

Me: "Oh Now I need a reason to call my friends over,"

Zizi: "Sisi, you've been hiding yourself from us, so we have to be concerned,"

Zama: "Are you sick or dying? So you need someone who'll inherit your paintings,"

I laughed and walked to the kitchen area to get their drinks.

Me: "Ladies, I am fine, never been better"

I rinsed the glasses and poured juice,

Zizi: "The man must be taking good care of you, you're brightening up sana,"

Me: "Oh yes he is, I have never been this happy. Actually everything is just good, but except for one thing,"

Zama: "Tell us about one thing, we will deal with it!" We laughed as I placed their drinks on the coffee table

Me: "He's living with his ex-wife,"

"What!"

The both shouted.

Zizi: "But Luzuko said to me he is not married, how?"

I pulled my cell phone and paged through the pictures I had found on her facebook page. Yes, I had stalked her, right after wande left. I had to...

Me: "He was married mntase, it's actually a long story that I really do not have time to tell you about. But to sum it up this lady (I handed the phone to Zizi) stays with him,"

Zama: "Bulie! Are they...?"

Me: "According to him; she's there to..." Zizi cut me

"Zizi: "I know her, I've seen her multiple times. Mawande used to complain about her a lot- well he'd complain to Luzuko and he would tell me about it. They have some kind of dark history but I don't think she's someone you have to worry about. She's also friends with Nwabisa- the lady who was all over him at the braai?"

Me: "Oh! How can she want to be with her friend's ex though?"

Zizi: "She's weird like that and you should check her Instagram account, she goes to all these creepy night clubs in central,"

Zama: "She's a hooker?"

Zizi: "No! Well I don't know but she doesn't miss a good weekend to a club,"

Me: "If you say she's at all these clubs, you mean to say she's just using Wande as her shelter and food person?"

Zizi: "I wouldn't put it past her,"

Zama: "We can disagree on many things but she's hot!"

Me: "I know right? And she had the audacity to come my office and tell me to stay away from Wande,"

Zizi: "The Liver! I think she's still up for him. But don't even worry about that my friend,"

Zama: "That man loves you Bulie, She won't take chance,"

Me: "You say?"

Zama: "Yes he called me the other day asking..."

She placed her hand on her mouth realizing she said too much

Me: "Mawande called you? When? And what did he want?"

Zama: "I am really not supposed to tell you this Madlomo,"

Zizi: "Hayike, Tell us sisi,"

Me: "He really did call you

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" I laughed

Zama: “He just needed a little information on you, nje random things man,”

Me: “Random things?”

Zama: “I won’t spoil it any further chommie, just know that he called to know random things about you,” She took a sip of her juice and handed my cell phone.

Throughout the lunch I couldn’t stop thinking about what Wande called her about. We laughed and talked about everything. It was nice to relax and catch up with my friends about things.

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The mixture of the different aromas of evening food hit my nostrils as I closed the door of the uber and walked in the house, finding Ziyanda and her uncle sitting on the couch watching some documentary I couldn’t care less about.

Me: “Molweni,”

Him: “Where have you been?”

Me: “I do not report to you,”

Him: “Nelisiwe, you live in my house,”

Me: “So? I am not a teenager please,”

Him: “Go freshen up and come back here,”

Me: “mxm,”

He mumbled something under his teeth as I walked to my room

I took off the tight dress and grabbed my toiletry bag and towels

Walked down the hallway and took a warm shower, letting the water calm my nerves and cleanse me. I had an amazing time with Beast. I wouldn't have come back to this house, but I had to. I need a place to stay, my money is still not enough to buy me a good place and maintain me.

I finished and walked back to the bedroom and was startled by this man sitting comfortably on my bed, I tightened my towel – not that I had to.

Me: “Shouldn't you be calling your girlfriend or with her?”

Him: “Andithi wena you went to her and told her stuff that she wasn't supposed to hear from you. Nelisiwe what were you thinking!?” His voice scolded

Me: “Don't shout at me, I had to do what I had to,”

Him: “This jealousy of yours that I don't know where it comes from, has to end!”

I bowed my head and played with my fingers,

Me: “You don't understand and that's your problem,”

Him: "What don't I understand?"

Me: "That I am hurting too! That I still haven't healed. No matter how hard I try to move in, I can't. I still see her tiny face in my dreams,"

We had named her Nkwenkwezi, she was our... my star. I spent only a week with her but her face is still as clear as daylight. I thought over the years the memory would fade away but it hasn't.

Me: "I sometimes hear her crying, it's hard for me to forget her. And seeing you with that lady; I feel like you have forgotten about us and what we've gone through over the years,"

Him: "Siwe, I thought we had agreed to moving on with our lives, my relationship with Bulelwa doesn't mean I have forgotten about what happened, I am moving on with my life. Can you at least respect that?"

Me: "I am sorry, I will find another place to stay this week and leave you," I was still looking down, and the crocodile tears left my eyes, I sobbed a little.

Him: "You don't have to do that, I will find a place for you... please wipe your tears,"

I felt him standing in front of me, his hand held my chin and I looked at him,

Him: "It'll mess with your eyes,"

I reacted to his touch. No matter how bad things are; his touch will always be my weakness.

My hand held on his waist and pulled my-self closer.

I looked at him and he pierced my soul with his eyes, he pushed himself closer and our lips met...

Our tongues slowly danced in the rhythm of our souls, I felt welcomed back at home,

He broke the kiss midway and left me catching my breath

"Lelwa" I heard him whisper and he tried to take a step back

Me: "She's not here, please"

My voice was low... almost begging.

Him: "This is the last time something like this ever happens Siwe, I will make sure you move in to your new place by the end of the week,"

Me: "Let it be the last time please, let's do it one more time and I promise I will never again. Just touch me for the last time Dlamini... please,"

I moved closer to him, and my hands unbuttoned his shirt,

Him: "No! I have moved on Siwe, this has to end,"



Me: “She is not here Zizi, forget about her Zitha and just touch me one last time,”

His lips smashed unto mine and soon the room was filled with heat as I called him by name, I was close and he stopped! I cried

Me: “What the fuck? I am so close Please don’t stop!”

He looked at me and rammed in so rough I came hard instantly!

Me: “With you it will always be good,”

I said as he rolled off, taking the condom off and cleaning himself.

He pulled the duvet and covered me.

Me: “You are not joining me?”

Him: “No, I cannot Siwe! I have to be somewhere,”

Me: “With her?”

Him: “Yes,” he pulled his trousers up

Me: “Fuck you Mawande,”

He walked out and slammed the door as he walked out, I pulled my pillows for cuddles and dosed off to sleep.

## TWENTY TWO

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He was shocked as he saw me seated on the couch with Ziyanda, his face was not expecting me.

Him: "Madlomo,"

Me: "Hey," I smiled and he smiled faintly back.

Him: "Why didn't you call? I would've fetched you,"

Me: "No, I wanted to surprise you"

Him: "And what a nice surprise," He walked and gave me a perk.

Me: "I can't stay away from you for a long time,"

Ziyanda: "That's my cue to leave,"

Her uncle looked at her.

Him: "Are you not sleeping over?"

Her: "I have to be on campus early tomorrow and waking up here is a No, No!"

Me: "I would've loved if you would stay too,"

Her: "uhh, I really cannot,"

Me: "Then who's driving you?"

Her: "My friend is here to fetch me,"

Him: "That friend of yours better be not a boy,"

Me: "Wande," I laughed and Ziyanda joined

Her: "I'm driving with a girl uncle, I will see you when I visit again."

They shared a hug, and she gave me one too.

She walked out and he smiled at me pulling me up to stand on my feet and he hugged me. Taking deep breaths as he did.

I smiled as he broke the hug, the scent was mixed, sweet and herbaceous.

Him: "I missed you too Madlomo,"

Me: "Can we go to your bedroom?"

Him: "Have you eaten?"

Me: "Yes don't worry, I am full,"

With each step we took up to his bedroom, I could still hear her moaning his name and calling his clans. I heard the cry she made when she climaxed. I didn't stand for too long to hear him cum.

Her bedroom is downstairs, I was looking for the bathroom Ziyanda directed me to when I heard voices moaning.

I closed the bedroom and threw my bag on the bed, I had no rage inside me, it was numbness and disappointment. I should've known it was a bit too good to be true.

Me: "I need to take a shower first, can I borrow one of your shirts?"

Him: "I will join too, I'll take out a few you can choose from," He smiled...

We showered together, he gave me a few kisses here and there, they were kisses guilt, I know. Siyabonga used to do the same too.

We got out of the shower, I tied my hair in knots and wore his t-shirt. I smelt his real scent, the undiluted one that reminds me of herbs.

I brought an overnight bag but it remained in the car.

I got under the covers and he turned on the TV and threw the remote to my side, the rain outside poured again as he closed the curtain and switched off the light, making the only light in the room the one given by the TV.

He got in the too and my head rested on his chest

Me: "How was your day?"

Him: "It was okay, the graduation went really well. And yours?"

Me: "It was good, Zama and Zizi came over for lunch and we spent the day talking and catching up,"

Him: "Great! It's good to know that you're still keeping up with your friends,"

Me: "Right and it did me good,"

The silence sat in the room.

Me: "How's Nelisiwe?"

He tensed up

Him: "She's okay, moving out this weekend,"

Me: "mhh-mhh"

We remained silent and I felt myself drifting to sleep nicely.

Me: "I heard you two..." I said absentmindedly

Him: "You heard who?"

Me: "You and she, the two of you were having sex,"

He suddenly shifted,

Him: "What are you saying Lelwa?"

Why did he have to move?

Me: "Lie down please, I was resting,"

He did.

I placed my head on his chest again. His heart beat had changed.

Me: "I do not want to fight right now, I came here to be in your warmth and not fight, don't ruin it for me

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I took in his scent, inhaled it and his warmth. I blocked everything just to enjoy this one last moment with him. I had no regrets over how we started this relationship, my mind blocked everything and I couldn't even react to anything even if I wanted.

I held on to him for the night, taking in his scent and feeling his warmth.

The next morning, he lightly brushed my arms and caressed my face.

Him: "Good morning,"

Me: "Morning," I sat up

Him: "How did you sleep?"

Me: "Like a baby, you?"

Him: "Hardly,"

Me: "Oh, Sorry."

I looked at him and I felt my emotions coming to play,”

Him: “I am sorry, from the bottom of my heart Madlomo,”

Me: “I am not hurt you know, I am numb at everything and it is weird because I am the kind of person that yells and shouts at people but now it’s different.

Him: “Allow yourself to feel,”

Me: “I think it is better this way, because I am able to talk,”

Him: “Can I explain?”

Me: “No! Please do not. Tell me this; was it ever real with me or you were just sorry for me?”

Him: “As real as it can be Madlomo, still is,”

Me: “Thank you so much for the couple of weeks, showing me what love really is about. I appreciate it very much Dlamini.”

Him “Lelwa...”

Me: “No, don’t say anything okay, I am leaving Port Elizabeth for a few weeks. Whatever we shared together will always have a special place in my heart, what I heard yesterday was a reality of things, I am letting myself go,”

Him: “No! Madlomo it was a huge mistake, please try let me explain,”

I got up from the bed and went straight for my clothes. I wore them and untied the knots.

Me: "That's where the problem lies sthandwa, I don't want you to explain anything,"

He got up from the bed and walked to where I was standing

Him: "Madlomo,"

I shook my head

Me: "You have an unfinished business with her! For the fact that you easily got under her thighs right after you told me straight in the face that nothing between the two of you was happening! You need to deal with it and unfortunately I cannot be here for that, whatever we had; it ends here,"

Him: "Sthandwa sam please, last night was the last time, and she is moving out this weekend. Madlomo please don't do this,"

Me: "I have to go,"

Him: "At least sit with me for breakfast, you can't drive on an empty stomach,"

I chuckled! I held his hand and he pulled me for an embrace, I inhaled for the last time and broke the hug.

Me: "We don't have to fight, bye,"



He shook his head and tried to hold me,

Him: “No! Lelwa don’t do this to me,”

I turned and yanked my arm off him

Me: “I am leaving your house without causing any fights with you! Let me leave in peace, our chapter here is closed. You disappointed me, I feel nothing, I am numb and... and right now what you can do is just leave me alone please. Do not come to my house nor do any sort of communication with me. Let me be,”

Him: “Can’t we talk? Madlomo I swear it was a mistake! None of it meant anything, please!”

I wore my shoes and took my purse. I walked down the stairs and he kept calling my name behind me. I felt the tears slowly burning my eyes, my vision became blurry and I kept going. I opened the front door and walked out to the driveway.

My chest felt like something was pressing it, I took a second and did the breathing exercise. I started my car to warm and placed my head on the steering, the tears left my eyes... I revved my car and drove off to my apartment.

## TWENTY THREE

.

I managed through the morning traffic, walked in and locked the door. Dropped on the couch and everything came back, I cried... The anger, the disappointment and the hurt.

I had expected far better from him, I thought he was different and I was playing myself.

After what felt like forever,

I switched my cellphone on and got up from the couch to my closet.

I packed all my clothes and the necessary things I will need for this trip, I have to get away from this town. It's causing a heartache.

My cell phone rang just as I was about to take a shower, an unnamed number.

Me: "Hello,"

Caller: "Bulie,"

My body went into amber mode instantly! I froze on the spot as his voice registered on my mind.

Me: "April, what do you want?"

Him: "Auw baby, you are not going to ask how I am,"

Me: "I don't care how you are,"

Him: "Mhh-hh-hh you've gotten feisty after you let him in your pants,"

Me: "Mxm, go kill yourself,"

Him: "Bulie, I need you back my love. That jerk came here delivering those papers and I didn't sign them. I know you wouldn't do that to me, I love you baby please come back home,"

I felt like vomiting, I ended the call and went to take a shower.

I fixed myself and got ready for the trip.

Everything was ready as I heard a knock on my door. I went to open and his scent hit my nostrils first. His eyes were bloodshot red! He looked horrible for someone I saw in the morning.

Him: "Can I come in?"

Me: "What do you want?"

Him: "Can I come in please?"

I moved away and he got in, I crossed my arms and looked at him as he leaned on the couch

Me: "Mawande what do you want?" My voice grew a little louder but it was delivered as more of a cry than a question.

Him: "I cannot do it anymore, I messed up but please give me another chance,"

Me: "I know that song, it has been replayed time in and time out, I'm no longer interested,"

Him: "I am not him and I will never be! Please stop comparing me to him,"

Me: "Mawande I don't need this, find your way out please,"

I went back to my bedroom and did the last bits and pieces of things. I fixed my hair and did a little make-up. I made the bed and closed the windows, checked the taps and everything I used during my stay here.

Everything was okay in the bedroom.

I pulled my suitcase and other bags out of the room and he was still seated on the couch

Him: "You're leaving?"

Me: "Yes,"

I checked the kitchen and everything was Okay.

I grabbed my keys and looked at him

Me: "Please leave,"

Him: "Bulelwa... I love you and I will always will. I am sorry for what you heard last night, it was a huge mistake and it meant

nothing! I will respect your decision and I am sorry again for hurting you,”

He walked closer and I stepped back, I could not bring myself to him because his touch will send me to a place I don't want.

My back hit the wall and I knew it over for me

He held my hand and looked at me with his stressed eyes, I saw him vulnerable and weak...

His touch first made me let out a deep breath

Him: “You don't have to leave,”

My eyes closed as I tried blocking him out of my thoughts,

I felt his lips on my neck, ever so soft

He pushed himself even closer to me, I felt his bulge and I instantly reacted

Me: “We can't” I whispered

Him: “Yes we can...” he said too close to my ear and damn me for wearing a dress.

His hand pulled it up and softly rubbed over my underwear and my arms went around his shoulders as a moan escaped my mouth.

His lips smashed against mine and he kept rubbing lightly making me moan in the kiss, I felt hot and he ripped the piece of clothing

his hand rubbed against my clit.

One... two... three.... Four... as I was about to hit my climax he moved his fingers to my behind, I cried in frustration!

“No... I am close,”

I cried and held on to him.

Him: “Don’t go please,”

Me: “I have to,”

He sucked on my neck and made me go crazy, he knows that it’s my weak spot.

I tried humping but he wouldn’t budge!

I unzipped his pants and it came out to play, hitting my skin warmly I almost exploded.

His hands unzipped my dress and it went over my head, straight to the floor.

I moaned and held on to him as my legs went over his waist and he immediately let himself in my cookie, I gasped hard at the fullness of it.

He went in so fast and rough I was bouncing up and down, I held on tightly on his back as I enjoyed the pleasure! My head fell back as he went in and out, hard and hitting the right spot

I cried as I came in a way I had never before! I felt the anger as he continued shooting himself warm inside of me.

Tears left my eyes as my body was weak and my limbs couldn't move

"I love you, I love you Lelwa,"

He was still inside

I buried my face in his neck and cried, wetting his t-shirt

He walked with me to the couch and held me in his arms whilst rubbing my back

Me: "You see how you're hurting me,"

Him: "I can see sthandwa sam and I will never again!"

Me: "I need some time away from you,"

Him: "I understand, just know that I love you and I will never stop okay,"

Me: "I do not know about that,"

Him: "Why do you feel the need to move?"

Me: "Because, I realized that I haven't gave time for myself ever since I came back from Tanzania, I need to find me again and that means being away from people, especially you,"

Him: "That's a bit harsh,"

Me: "What's hash is you sleeping with someone I thought you were over and done with! But I've been the biggest fool of all time,"

He remained silent

Him: "You know we don't have much time together? These weeks you're going to be away from me will hurt,"

His eyes have changed to a faint color of red, they were slightly getting clearer.

Me: "What do you mean we don't have much time?"

Him: "Exactly that. I love you, never forget that,"

.....

Me: "I called her earlier today mother and she still doesn't want anything to do with me,"

Her: "Siyabonga you have to do something, we cannot lose that girl,"

Me: "Then you should've thought of that when you went to tell her she was tied,"



Her: "Do not tell me what I should've thought! What's done is done! Wena find a way to get back to her,"

She paced up and down the hospital ward

Me: "What's Dlamangwe saying?"

Her: "That useless man said that Bulelwa is protected, she is now seeing that Sangoma and she's no longer tied to us. Nothing will work unless you revoke her feelings yourself,"

Me: "I still don't understand why we should be doing this when we could easily kidnap her and take her to the village,"

Her: "She's of royalty mntanami, and we need her for you to take on the spot of being a King!"

Me: "And how do you know that?"

Her: "Umuncu kanene! You think her marriage with you was only because she loved you? No Dlamangwe worked to soften her cold heart! So you could be the next king of that place! King yabathembu is one rich man! And all that richness will fall to you! Bulelwa's time has come for her to take the throne as she is the first born daughter, and in my knowledge the king has no sons!"

Me: "So Bulelwa will be queen, and every kingdom needs a king?"

Her: "And that is where you come in my child!"

Me: “Wow! That would be great,”

Her: “Find a way to lure her back in ke nyana,”

Me: “We’ll need to cross the Crocodile River for that!”

A smile emerged from her mouth in agreement.

## TWENTY FOUR

It has been four months since I last saw Wande and in those months it has been nothing but a bumpy ride, I am always tired and I don't like certain smells. I threw up the other day at work as they were painting the walls of the gallery. I threw out most of my perfumes and shower gels because the scent was too much for me to handle. At first I suspected pregnancy but when I had my periods and the home test came back negative, I relaxed.

My thoughts would be I am sick because I have not seen him for a long time but that would be childish.

I moved from the apartment two weeks after I got back from my mother's house in Grahamstown. I got a cute house in Algoa Park, not much of a yard but the big kitchen, sitting area, lounge and three bedrooms, two baths sold me. The rates aren't much higher and the neighborhood isn't filled with much noise as the town apartment did. Things are much better this side.

April has also been a nerve, I had to block his contacts from everything. I can never go back to that jerk.

Mentally; things have been rough but coping is the deal.  
Emotionally; strong but there are days.

The grand opening of my gallery is tonight, I cannot help but be happy and joyful of everything we have been through the past few months as a team.

My cellphone rang as David –hairstylist- was busy making my nappy hair look cute and ready for the big night.

I answered

Me: “Zamacirha,”

Her: “Sthandwa, everything is ready for the opening, journalists and photographers are ready, covering the things that happen before, how far are you?”

Me: “Well, Dave is doing my hair and then he’ll help me in my dress, we should be there in an hour or so,”

Her: “Okay baby, I cannot wait to see you, how’s the sickness?”

Me: "I still feel cramps in my lower abdomen but I am there,"

Her: "Babe you are pregnant! Don't take any painkillers! It'll die down,"

Me: "Zama the pregnancy test came back negative, my stomach is still flat and nje things are still okay,"

Her: "Your stomach isn't flat! Your brain is messing with you,"

Me: "Zama I'll see you in an hour,"

Her: "I cannot wait! Drink water and take care of my baby there,"

Me: "Dave can take care of himself,"

Her: 'Oh no darling I am talking about the one in your womb! Bye Madlomo,"

I laughed

Me: "Bye sthandwa,"

I ended the call and looked at Dave through the mirror.

Me: "David be honest with me; do you think I'm pregnant?"

Him: "Well sweetie you've gained some kilos and I wouldn't be surprised if you were, I mean look at you with your obsession with unscented things!"

Me: "So you do think I'm pregnant?"

Him: "Bulie, don't put words in my mouth darling, wena tomorrow go visit the doctor and see for yourself,"

I took a deep breath and kept quiet as he finished with my hair.

Half an hour down, everything was ready.

My dress looked all good with the pencil heels that complemented the dress, my afro was styled well and made up looking great!

The jewelry was not too much, I looked elegant, classy and arty.

My driver arrived and thank God my house is a single story, no need for stairs.

I took my purse and Dave helped with locking the doors and making sure the alarm is set.

In no time we were at the venue announcing the opening, everyone happy and jolly...

I saw him right after the doors opened and everybody walked in gasping at the beauty of the gallery, admiring the paintings and some already putting down a price.

He was wearing his well ironed trousers with a t-shirt and his Sangoma cloth over his head and over his body, the beads came out to play too and I couldn't help myself but smile at his presence, I inhaled his scent from a distance and my eyes closed. Opening to see Ziyanda behind him looking gorgeous with that body hugging long dress, accompanied by stilettos and her makeup well done, her dreadlocks styled perfectly.

I moved from where I was standing as I saw him approaching, I mingled through that crowd only to feel warm hands stopping me it was Gcobisa.

Her: "Slow down, you might fall!"

Me: "Sorry!"

Her: "Half of the paintings from the young artists are sold out, we had to add others to display, yours and Ziyanda-we'll need to have an auction because there are fights!"

Me: "You mean they are in demand?"

Her: "Yes! Your collaboration with her is much appreciated by people and oh here she is; you can tell her this yourself,"

As I turned his herbaceous scent hit my nostrils first! I could've sworn something in my stomach moved

Me: "Hello,"

Ziyanda: "Sis Bulie, I heard the news and all I can say is we make a mean team!"

Me: "And it is all because of you young lady! Mrs Mbatha in the national arts festival would like you to display some of your work there!"

Ziyanda: "Mrs Mbata? As In thee Lulu Mbata?" Her eyes were sparkling in excitement,"

Me: "Yes darling, you should expect her call tomorrow,"

I smiled as she jumped up and hugging me,

Ziyanda: "Thank you very much sis Bulie,"

Me: "you deserve it baby,"

Wande: "Ziyanda, won't you please get me something to drink,"

She looked at him, then me and then back to him and nodded as she pulled Gcobisa with her, leaving the two of us looking at each other.

Him: "You look beautiful,"

Me: "Thank you. You aren't too bad yourself,"

Him: "Oh don't play with me, congratulations on pulling this off too,"

Me: "We all played our roles for the success of this gallery,"



We remained silent for a moment, our eyes wondering off in the crowd.

He walked closer to me and my eyes slightly closed as I took in his scent again! I missed him so much I felt like hugging him.

Him: "How have you been?"

Me: "Good," it came out more of a plea than an actual answer of 'good'

Him: "I've been coping, I can't get over how beautiful you look,"

Me: "Well thank you,"

Him: "Okay, let me leave you then and check out the rest of the gallery,"

He smiled and revealed that dimple, I did not want him to move but I avoided awkwardness.

Zama walked to me holding a glass of water.

Her: "here, for my child,"

Me: "You should stop hallucinating, I am not pregnant,"

Her "Wait until you go to the doctor!"

Me: "You love dreaming wena! And the lighting you did here came out perfect my friend, where's Zininzi? She disappeared on me"

Her: “Probably shagging Luzuko in the toilets, they’ve been tongue and the mouth these days,”

Me: “But isn’t Luzuko here with his girlfriend?”

Her: “Her girlfriend is not the type that vibes in galleries, she left the scene,”

Me: “Umhlola! Hay as long as people are enjoying themselves! Then everything is good,”

The night went really well, the event was more than I had expected! People came out to play with their gowns and wallets, and right now going to the nearest club for the after part of the gallery.

Unfortunately for me; I felt sick again with the mixed sweet and sour scents of many people! Funny enough, I couldn’t stay too far away from Wande, his scent was always trying to lure me in.

April also came but I was sick with him the moment he walked in I wanted to vomit.

I got in my house and went straight to the bath, I had a warm long one. Got into my pajamas and slept immediately my head hit the pillow.

## TWENTY FIVE

“I am taking your ass to the doctor! There’s no way in hell you can be sick like this!”

Zama’s voice echoed as I couldn’t even move from the sleepiness and the pains in my back, she’s also been part of the ‘Bulie is pregnant’ gang and I cannot believe them.

Me: “Zininzi I am sick like everyone, I am not pregnant! And what are you doing in my house so early in the morning?”

Her: “You don’t remember calling me saying I should come, you are scared and in pain? And I am Zama not Zininzi!”

Yes last night, I felt the pains but not to a point I could take my cell phone and call her.

Me: “No!”

Her: “Then your problems are many, you’re even forgetful!”

Me: “Zama, I am okay. Just tired, let me sleep please!”

Her: "It's either I drag you to the doctor in your gown or you get up from there and go freshen up! I'll make porridge for you, since it's the only thing you can stomach,"

Me: "I am feeling really sleepy right now, okay"

Her: "Zininzi will check on you later, she's been busy with Bayolise,"

Me: "Okay,"

I went to the bathroom and took a shower, I wore my casual clothes. Made my bed and walked to the kitchen to find Zama dishing up for me.

Her: "Good!"

Me: "I so want to sleep right now,"

Her: "The doctor's appointment is in an hour, better hurry sthandwa sam,"

Me: "My purse is on top of the bed pedestal and my cellphone too, what time is it vele?"

Her: "08:45 am, we are leaving at nine, the traffic is a nightmare this side,"

Me: "Okay,"

.....

“Congratulations Bulelwa, you are 13 weeks pregnant!”

Dr. December’s voice said joyfully, I sat there on the bed looking at her, my mind trying to register what she just said.

Zama: “I knew it! Doctor can you do a scan?”

Her: “Yes of course, Bulelwa please lie down on the bed and be comfortable,”

I did as told, still in shock from the news said by the doctor, I came to realize as I laid back that my stomach was indeed more hard and round, the line down my stomach was more visible than usual.

She pressed on this cold gel and a remote like thing over it.

She made me look at this little screen next to me and I saw a tiny thing in my womb, then a sound came. A beautiful sound thumping like little feet stomping. My heart melted.

Dr. “That’s the heartbeat there,”

Zama: “Oh God my friend!! Dr. can you print pictures?”

Dr. “Yes of course, congratulations again Bulelwa. You’re going to enjoy this! Try booking monthly check ups with your doctor, I’ve taken your blood for testing. I’ve recorded everything in your health book, he or she should find it easy to continue with

the rest. Try eating healthy, exercise. Do not stress and enjoy the period mommy,”

A smile formed as I wiped the gel off me and got up from the bed

Zama: “Zininzi is going to be so happy. Uhh doctor another thing; Bulelwa has been getting sick a lot, also forgetful at times,”

Dr. “The first trimester is very tricky, there’s a lot of unusual things that may happen, for instance the mild pains of the womb stretching, sleeping a lot because of development purposes. A lot of things happen and sometimes the pain comes with being a little forgetful, hence the stress is something we must try and limit her from,”

Me: “And I can’t stomach anything except fruits and porridge,”

Dr. “As I’ve said, things get a lot tricky, I will prescribe some multivitamins for you and it is essential for you to start those checkups with your doctor or go to your nearest clinic. For first time pregnancy, try mingling with other moms and attend antenatal classes okay,”

I nodded

Zama: “Thank you very much doctor,”

Dr. “Congratulations once again Bulie,”

I smiled and we walked out of the surgery, passed by the chemist for the pills and the head straight to my house.

Zama hugged me as soon as we walked in

Her: "You should let him know,"

Me: "I am not sure,"

Her: "He deserves to know baby,"

A wave of fear showered me as memories of his past came to my mind...

Me: "No!" I said in a rather too loud tone and she looked at me

Her: "Is there something I am missing? You also never said what happened between the two of you,"

Me: "I really need to rest Zama, my whole body is tired,"

Zama: "I'll make you fruit pieces, at least you can have something in your stomach, so you can take your pills,"

Me: "Thank you very much Zama,"

I laid my head on the couch and instantly dozed off!

I woke up to an annoying noise of the alarm

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I got up from the couch and took my cell phone and switched off the annoying sound.

Zama left a note saying my fruits are in the fridge because by the time she was done, I was already gone and she just set the alarm so that I would wake up after half an hour.

I moved from the couch to the kitchen, opened my fridge and indulged.

I drank the pills and went to take a warm bath that soothed my body.

I wore track pants with kicks, a long sleeved vest and a warm coat, the weather isn't fair in PE.

I took the envelope with scan pictures and car keys.

I drove my car to his house, the sun was starting to set. Winter season doesn't wait for anything, at four o'clock it's already dusk.

I parked on his driveway and knocked on the door.

Ziyanda opened smiling and then enveloped me in a hug.

Her: "Sis Bulie,"

Me: "Hello Baby, how are you?"

Her: "I am okay, how are you?"

I walked in as she closed the door.



Me: "I am trying, is he in?"

Her: "Yes, his bedroom,"

Me: "Okay, uhh..."

Her: "Sis Bulie you can walk up to the bedroom, I'm busy cooking too,"

I smiled and she laughed

Me: "Thank you baby,"

Her: "I hope you'll join us for dinner right?"

Me: "Most definitely,"

Her: "Great! Let me go back before I burn the food,"

She quickly disappeared to the kitchen,  
up the stairs I walked.

I didn't bother knocking on the door, I walked right in and there he was on the bed, slowly focused on what he's typing away on his laptop

Me: "Hi,"

I said and he looked up, smiled as my face registered on his mind.

Him: "Lelwa,"

Me: "Hey," I walked in and he closed his laptop and placed it aside.

Him: "Wow, this is a surprise, how are you?"

Me: "Okay... can we talk,"

Him: "Yes sure,"

We sat on the bed and I handed him the envelope.

Him: "What is this?"

Me: "Open and see for yourself,"

I took off the coat and he smiled at me, not even bothering with opening the envelope.

Me: "You knew, didn't you?"

Him: "Yesterday; the dress sold you, I had my suspicions but I wasn't sure,"

Me: "Great,"

Him: "You don't seem too happy,"

I remained quiet for a moment...

Me: "I want to... I want to terminate, I am not ready,"

Him: "You are not ready? What do you mean?"

His voice almost shouted.

Me: "You see how complicated both our lives are? Do you think we are ready for a child?"

Him: "I don't know about the complications you are talking about! But I won't have you terminate this pregnancy because you are so selfish to let me into your life again! The months we've been apart have been nothing but hell to me!"

My blood boiled

Me: "Selfish? Mawande I am selfish now when you were the one who slept with that girl whilst you had just confessed your love to me? You basically cheated and you think that is easy to take while you had me drowned in your love! You think I'm selfish by staying away from you? I shouldn't have even come here,"

Him: "How many times can I say I am sorry Lelwa? I know it was wrong of me but trust me I have learnt my lesson and I need you back! We need each other Madlomo."

I paced up and down the room trying to keep calm.

For a while, silence sat in the room.

I stood and looked at him, he pulled me to stand in front of him, and he was seated on the bed.

He pulled my vest up and rubbed my stomach

Me: "It's still a tiny thing, you won't feel any movement yet..."

Him: "I need you back in my life Madlomo, we need each other. Look at this magic we've created together,"

Several kisses landed on my tummy.

Me: "Don't call my pregnancy magic wena,"

He laughed.

Him: "So what do you say? Should we try again, I promise you this time it's for real,"

I nodded and he smiled. He pulled me to sit on his lap.

Him: "What happened with Nelisiwe was a huge mistake, a moment of weakness and fear of being too much for you. I can assure you that these months we've been apart; a lot has changed. I have let go of her, not because I was doing it for you – well in some way I was too, but it also made me take a step back and look closely at my mistakes, I am over and done, that book is closed forever. I'm with you now,"

Me: "You'll never be too much for me. And what did you mean we don't have much time together?"

He shifted uncomfortably holding me in position.

Him: "You'll soon find out, it is not my place to tell you,"

Me: "You're worrying me, how much time do we have?"

Him: "Don't worry about it, let's just enjoy the time we have now and forget about the rest okay?"

I nodded and his hands caressed my face and our lips kissed, passionately and sweet.

His hand kept on brushing my tummy.

Him: "We will make great parents,"

I laughed

Me: "I think so too,"

Him: "Thank you sthandwa sam, for this chance again,"

I smiled and in no time I was sent to heaven and back with multiple orgasms and sweet love making. The steamy sessions were back and I was in his hold and warmth again.

## TWENTY SIX

“We need to go down for breakfast, mother wants to see the person who was making noise all night,”

He laughed and I cringed under the covers.

He pulled the duvet off my face.

He didn't even mention that he was expecting his mother, how could I get up and gather the strength to face an elder woman right after I screamed his son's name all night long!

Me: “No!”

Him: “What do you mean no?”

Me: “I'll have to miss breakfast, I cannot, and it's actually the first time I'm meeting your mother. What kind of a person

meets his partner's mother the morning after such noise!  
Wande you didn't even warn me,"

I shook my head and gave him the stare.

Him: "Majola probably heard nothing, she arrived whilst you were sleeping nje,"

Her: "But still, we were too loud,"

Him: "Bulelwa, this is my house. Anyone who comes visit here must expect anything, now stop being a baby and get up,"

He said removing the duvet and pulling me to get up

Me: "I should've gone back to my house last night yazi,"

Him: "I'm glad you did not and she's a very nice lady, you'll love her,"

Me: "I don't know about her loving me,"

Him: "She loves you already,"

He told her about me? Doesn't sit well with me.

Me: "Wow,"

Him: "Go Bath, I'll make the bed,"

I dragged myself to the bathroom.

Elderly women are known to see pregnancy very early, I hope she doesn't notice mine, well who am I fooling, the lady probably smelt pregnancy the minute she walked in the house...

Him: "Stop feeling so anxious, loosen up,"



He said leading me to the dining table for breakfast,

Me: “You’re making me anxious,”

Him: “I would leave if you want,”

Me: “You wouldn't dare,”

He laughed as we placed the plates on the table, his mother and this other lady – told to me to be someone who takes care of Wande’s mother, appeared with their loud voices, laughing at something I don’t know.

I looked at his mother, she’s like a version of him, she’s aging well and her face tells she was the most beautiful lady in her times- still is, but not the same.

She smiled in my direction and I nervously returned it too.

Her: "Molo sisi,"

Me: "Eweke Ma,"

She smiled and offered her hand, I took it and she gratefully pulled me in a hug. This family and warm hugs-

Her: "How are you?"

Me: "I am good, how are you Ma?"

Her: "Ndiyacenga nam sisi," – I'm getting there.

Him: "Can we sit down and eat?"

He broke the moment, we laughed and sat around the table.

Her: "I am happy to finally meet you Bulelwa sisi, hayi he doesn't shut his mouth when it comes to you but I can't help but wonder where I have seen you, your face is so familiar,"

Him: "You probably saw her on TV

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she's famous,"

He said it absentmindedly and couldn't help but chuckle, his mother gave him the look-

Her: "Inenee, it is true sisi?" she turned to me

Me: "Not entirely, but yes my art work does get media exposure and I sometimes do the interviews but I am not always in the limelight,"

Her: "Ohh I hear you sisi, but no man Thotyiswa, doesn't this girl look familiar?"

The lady turned her direction and smiled, weird...

Thotyiswa: "Hayi sisi, what I see is just beauty tyhini intle lentombi Mawande,"

Him: "She is beautiful Makazi,"

I noticed very strange brief eye contact between Wande and his mother.

I shifted nervously, that look could mean a lot of things but I hope it is not disapproval..

Ziyanda walked in high spirits.

Ziyanda: "Molweni Makhulu," she hugged the two ladies that responded with the same energy as her. The table felt warm being surrounded by the matriarchs of the family.

Ziyanda: 'Sis Bulie Kunjani?'

Me: " I am good baby, how are you?"

Ziyanda: "I can't complain," She smiled and sat down

Wande: "So you don't ask me how I am?"

Ziyanda: "If Sis Bulie is okay, then so are you,"

Laughter erupted around the table.

We had breakfast under a light conversation. With the mother asking about my background and where I come from. Hard thing to talk about but we live and move with the waters.

"Tyhini Mawande, unzima nje lomntana," – Mawande she's pregnant

I heard the mother whisper as I walked back to the dining room, but I remained positioned on the passage, making sure they didn't notice me.

Him: "She is,"

Her: "Does she know?"

Him: "Yes, she went to the doctor yesterday and they..." she cut him halfway

Her: "Nxaa marn, I'm not talking about that!"

He remained quiet for a moment...

Her: "Thiza akayazi!" –My goodness she doesn't know

Him: "She will soon know Ma, just let me enjoy this time with her,"

Her: "I don't like this Dlamini! It is not gonna end well for the both of you, especially now that she's expecting your child! Hayi nawe, I knew she looked familiar,"

I frowned as a wave of worry shadowed me.

Him: "Just don't say anything to her,"

Her: "I don't like this at all," silence fell after and then a chair shifted,

I moved back to the kitchen and stood by the sink to wash my hands, acting like I was...

His scent welcomed him first as I felt his hands sneak behind me holding my waist.

He wrapped them around me as I closed the tap and dried my hands.

Him: "You have work today?"

Me: "Yes,"

Him: "Don't go,"

Me: "What?"

I turned and looked at him, placing my hands on his torso,

Him: "People are there to take care of things and they'll call you if something comes up,"

Me: "I just opened the Gallery and you're already deciding things, anyway I have to go back to my house, I'm expecting people,"

Him: Okay...so.. Mother knows simithisene,"



Me: "Elders see everything, it was expected,"

Really not surprised...

he chuckled and I flinched at the sudden sharp pain below my abdomen, I pushed him aside and almost screamed.

Him: "Lelwa!"

I rubbed as I bent over...

He brushed my head and held me for balance as the stabbing sharp pain sent me straight to the floor

I pushed him again and winced at the intense abdominal pain

My surroundings began to fade and I felt being pulled away from reality and my legs began to cramp.

I cried and tried praying as everything drifted far and far, until I could not feel anything anymore...

I fell into unconsciousness.

## TWENTY SEVEN

“You have to tell her yourself Mawande!”

“Her brother is coming home, He has to be the one to tell her,”

“I still don’t like this Dlamini, this won’t end well,”

The silence fell as I moved my head, trying to open my eyes.

I felt his hand laying me down as I tried to get up.

Him: “Hey, take it easy,”

The pain I had felt earlier was now gone...

I opened my eyes and scanned the room. His bedroom not a Hospital. I sighed relieved.

Me: “What happened?”

Him: “You fell,”

Her: “Mawande!”

Her mother warned and I directed my attention to her.

Mawande moved from the bed and she came closer and sat next to me

Her: “Unjani sisi? Awuva zintlungu?” –How are you sisi, aren’t you feeling any pains?

I shook my head

Me: “Nothing, except not knowing how I ended up here,”

Her: “Uhm, we will talk later about that sisi, here drink this (she handed me a cup)

It’s for the pains sisi -turmeric milk,”

Him: “It’s safe Madlomo,”

I nodded and had the awful drink.

Me: “Thank you,”

I said after taking the whole cup.

She got up and eyed Mawande as she left the room.

Strange..

Me: “What is happening between you two?”

Him: “What?”

Me: “The eyes you are giving each other,”

Him: “It’s nothing... I have to take you home,”

He stood far from the bed, at a safe distance. Awkward.

Me: “Mawande what’s happening?”

Him: “I can’t tell you Madlomo,”

He briefly looked at me.

Me: "Something is wrong isn't it?"

Him: "What would you like to eat?"

He moved from where he was standing, to the direction of the door, he's trying to run from the question.

My mind came to light on what happened in the kitchen and he needs to explain!

I threw the bed cover on the side and got off the bed.

He must not even dare!

I walked towards him and pulled him by his hand to the bed.

Me: "What's wrong?"

He was stunned by my action as he sat on the bed and I stood in front of him, my arms folded.

Him: "Don't come too close Madlomo,"

Me: "What do you mean?"

I took a step back

He looked at me with eyes filled with worry.

Him: "They are fighting me through you,"

Me: "I am not following,"

Him: "My elders, do not worry nothing happened to-" he eyed my tummy

Me: "I'm still not following,"

He remained quiet and just kept on looking at me.

He won't say anything.

I sighed and moved to find my shoes and things.

I grabbed them and he moved from the bed and walked out. I followed and I turned on my cell phone.

Thotyiswa: "Heke! Sendigqibe ne Lunch," –Good timing, I've already prepared lunch.

Me: "I won't be staying for Lunch Ma, I'm sorry,"

Thotyiswa: "Oh Okay, uhm nawe Ndoda?"

She turned to Wande who just looked lost

His mother talked first before he could.

Her: "I don't think they are both staying sisi,"

Thotyiswa: "Oh okay,"

I said my goodbyes to the ladies and Mawande walked me out of the house. He pulled me in a warm hug, so tight I flinched.

He must not think I am happy with how he decides to shut me out of whatever is happening with me, what he talked about with his mother earlier is still bothering me.

Me: "You're acting weird,"

He smiled and his hands sneaked around my waist

Him: "It will be okay soon, just... I love you and thank you for this,"

He brushed my tummy and moved even closer. I took in his scent without hesitation and my hands held on to him

Me: "Should I be worried about us?"

Him: "No... no...."

My heart can't help but beat in fear, the conversations I heard around the house are enough to make me worry. How all this will fold out is still a mystery to me.

Him: "Don't look so confused iyho," He chuckled

Me: "You are not making any of this easy for me,"

Him: "I am sorry,"

I looked at him and then he brushed his lips against mine. I welcomed him and we kissed, slowly and sweetly with a message... Love.

Him: "I'll check on you later today Okay,"

He said softly and I nodded...

He hugged me once again and I got in my car...

The drive back to my house was long because traffic during the lunch hour is hell.

My cellphone rang as I walked in the house,

I answered to a screaming Zizinzi

Her: "I knew it!!"

I laughed

Me: "You knew what?"

Her: "That you are pregnant dear! Oh congratulations my friend. Have you told u man?"

Me: "Yes, I did, he's happy,"

Her: "I am happy too my friend we should thank God for this Bulie! Getting something you've always wanted and especially with someone you love!"

Me: "It is a blessing friend,"

Her: "We should do lunch this weekend. Oh I have to go darling take care of yourself,"

Me: "Kiss Bayolise for me, Take good care of yourself too,"

Her: "I will Mommy, Bye,"

I ended the call and threw my heavy self on the couch and exhaled... Brushing my stomach.

How god has blessed me with such a beautiful gift is still something I cannot digest. After years of trying and trying with fights and challenges of being tied without my knowledge, God came through for me eventually.

“I can't wait to meet you my tiny person, I still cannot believe that you're here with me in-spite of it all. The tests, the humiliation, the insults. Finally meeting your father; he's the most amazing person in the world. I hope whatever is going on we'll survive it my baby,”

“You will,”

A deep familiar voice startled me and I looked up to see the most unexpected person in the world.

I shook my head and looked again, he had this big smile pasted on his face, I jumped and threw myself at him.

Tears approaching and everything feeling like it's spinning. After it all, he still smells the way I remember him.

My big brother- Thulani. Who flew to Australia months after we buried my mother and younger brother? Five years ago...

Him: “Sisi,”

He held me tight as I sniffed almost teary



Me: "You're here,"

Him: "Don't cry sisi... I am here,"

Me: "I'm not crying just happy,"

I said, stepping back, giving him a good look. He hasn't changed much except for the beard. He's still his big headed tall person.

Him: "You've grown yho," I chuckled and he walked past me to sit down, taking in the surroundings.

Me: "How did you find me?"

Him: "I can find anyone I want in this country, and that little device on the table helped. How have you been sisi?"

He's still boasting about that.

Me: "You're asking recently or maybe since we last talked,"

He chuckled and I joined him on the couch

Him: "Rather tell me about recent news,"

He smiled, I cannot believe he's here...

Me: "Well I opened another gallery recently, I got pregnant recently and I'm in the midst of a divorce, life these past few months has been eventful. You also missed the grand opening,"

Him: "My flight was delayed and I had to be..."

His cell phone beeped loudly like an emergency sound.

Me: “Wha..?”

He raised his hand to shush me and got up from the couch, he moved around the house.

I got up too and whatever he had, led him to the kitchen, He took a few plates out of the cupboard and pulled out things and placed them on top of the counter. Tiny black devices

Him: “It has not been an hour since I arrived,”

He pulled a plastic out of one of the cupboard drawers and placed the tiny devices in there

Him: “Did you know about these?”

He looked at me

Me: “What are they?”

He chuckled!

“The bastards,” he murmured under his breath

Him: “Listening devices,”

Me: “What the...!”

April...

I walked back to the TV room and took my cell phone, fuming. How dare he think he can spy on me where I've left his arse for a reason!

Him: "Don't!"

Me: "Why not! Where does he take the audacity to plant things in my house?"

Him: "That will only excite him! They are off right now, he won't notice we found them,"

Me: "Thulani you are not making sense!"

Him: "'Calm down you'll stress your child,"

I just stared at him blinking multiple times...

Me: "What do I do then?"

Him: "I will take them with me, your car probably has a tracker too! Anyway, didn't you cook anything? I'm starving,"

Me: "I just came in the house too, but I can quickly make something,"

Him: "Please! I will search the house for more of these, then we can talk about life okay,"

Me: "Okay,"

Him: "Don't worry about him, I'll sort him out,"

I nodded and walked to the kitchen to prepare food.

TWENTY EIGHT

My cellphone rang as I finished dishing up.

Me: "Hello,"

Him: "Madlomo, unjani?"

Me: "I'm still okay,"

Him: "Haven't experienced any pains?"

Me: "No, after the milk, none,"

Him: "Good, Okay. I was just checking how you are,"

Me: "Wena Unjani?" –How are you?

Him: "I am good Madlomo,"

His voice was firm-

Me: "Okay, Thulani is home- my big brother,"

Him: "Oh really?"

He didn't sound convincing...

Me: "You knew didn't you?"

Him: "Lelwa..."

I felt betrayed... and how do they even know each other? I have never introduced them to each other.

Me: "And how do you... actually, I don't want to hear it,"

Him: "Don't be like that Madlomo,"

Me: "Like what? Feeling lied to?"

Him: "Don't get mad, yes we know each other because... it's actually a long story,"

Me: "Mxm,"

Him: "Bulelwa!!" his voice warned.

Me: "What?"

I heard him sigh on the other side

Him: "I will call you later,"

I dropped the call without even saying goodbye, I switched it off and placed it roughly on the counter as Thulani walked in.

I'm fuming at this point! How dare he?

Thulani: "And now?"

I looked at him

Him: "I don't want to hear it, just snap out of it,"

He placed bunch of devices on the table

Me: "What are these?"

Him: "Trackers, listening devices and some other devices you won't know about! But someone has been keeping tabs on you, I found two under your tires,"

Me: "What! How, when?"

April better pray we don't cross paths. I wouldn't hesitate to kill him any day...

Him: "They had time too! They weren't planted in a hurry,"

Me: "I don't even have visitors around here! I just recently moved in here a few months ago,"

Him: "They probably planted them whilst you were putting in the house offer,"

Crazy to know that all these months they were listening to my conversations, spying on me!

Me: "What does he want from me?"

Him: "I don't know but I'll soon find out

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Me: "Okay, I'm going to sleep,"

I hate these men doing me like this, treating me like an egg that will break and not be able to take whatever news they have to tell me.

Him: "Who upset you?"

Me: "All of these man in my life,"

He gave me a look and then pulled his tray of food

Him: "Thank you sisi, you can go rest then,"

I shook my head and walked to my bedroom and called Mawande.

He doesn't pick up.

I tried two times more and still the same. Ndiyalingwa...

I laid my head on the pillow as I drifted to sleep...

“Let him help you, stick with him in every way ntombi,”

I heard the voice but I cannot see the face, I know the voice- my mother.

I turned my head and the surroundings are foreign, it's a waterfall, the banks are muddy and I'm just standing looking for someone

“I'm over here,”

I turned my head and she was wearing a white dress with a white headscarf, her eyes gleamed with happiness and joy filled my heart.

I opened my mouth to speak but words couldn't form

"I'm saying do not let him go, and I am here at this river if you want to see me, I know you will come here. Don't look for me in the graveyard, that place is not pure. Phahla mntanam.

She placed her warm hand on my cheek and slowly went down to touch my tummy.

"This one will protect you, I communicate with you through them. Don't let anything happen to them,"

I looked down to where her hand is and I felt something warm between my legs

I pulled the dress up and blood filled my legs, a stab in my heart caused tears in my face. I couldn't speak or move, I felt

paralyzed and forced my voice to open but my mouth was heavy! I looked up and I was no longer in that space I had been. It was now dark and my dress was filled with blood. I felt someone pull me hard by my stomach and I kicked and screamed as my body loosened.

“Bulelwa!!”

I jumped from the bed and took deep breaths

Him: “You were screaming and kicking! What’s wrong?”

I looked at him and I couldn’t say anything but held my tummy and sat up.

Me: “I had a bad dream! So bad that...”

Him: “You need water? I thought someone came in, It was just dream sisi don’t worry,”

It felt so real

My cell phone rang and let it be, I can't talk to anyone at this point.

Me: "I will get up once, I cannot sleep again"

Him: "Okay, I also need to talk to you sisi,"

Me: "About?"

Him: "Our family and it is important for you to know this. It has been long overdue,"

Me: "Okay..."

I guess everything is unfolding itself now...

I sat down on the couch with my glass of water and he sat on the one opposite me, evident that it was time for confessions and confrontations. Never have I ever been this fearful of what someone is about to say to me except for the time I was in that doctors office waiting for bad news to be delivered about the death of my mother and brother. Dark time.

Now, with Thulani; the exact same atmosphere transpired in the room.

TWENTY NINE

“This is weird,”

I said fixing the cushion on top of me.

Him: “It’s serious Bulie,”

He said looking at me, I shifted and gave him my attention.

Me: “Okay,”

Him: “I don’t know how to say this,”

Me: “Just say it,”

Him; ‘Well, Remember when you used to ask about father and we would brush it off at home?’”

I nodded...

Him: "Well, right now you have to know now because it will affect you now that you've divorced or divorcing that piece of trash,"

I nodded again following him.

Him: "Well, the man is alive, he has been alive it's just that... family happened. See... He is a King back home, at the village. Where mom originates from, they met while they were still young and they were very much in love but mom being not of royalty, their love was tested back and forth, mother fell pregnant at a very young age and that was a shame in the village! There was a belief that if someone with royal blood got you pregnant and you are a commoner that is nothing but shame and bad luck and it could result in being banished and worst case; killed. They were trying to control the royal bloodline,"



I listened attentively my mind taking in the story that is made up and waiting for when He will say 'It's a joke.'

Him: "So, grandmother took mother to one of her friend e Mission, outside the village but the friend then moved to Grahamstown with her, that's where she found peace. Father again; he was still being groomed to be king, traveled from the Transkei to Grahamstown for his lover, they lived in a bubble again and she got pregnant with twins..."

I gasped! The story became more and more interesting, so I decided to play along. Surely this is a joke because the lady who raised us was a single parent with no help or whatsoever from the family. Well the friend he's talking about in his story might be the woman who'd stay with us when mom had to work night shifts at the hospital.

If mother gave birth to twins, then...

Me: "Does that mean...?"

Him: "Yes, you're a twin Bulie, I was four years then and the image of him is quite blur but mom said he would come every now and then, checking her and even staying with her at times but his father was against this arrangement, as he found out that his son had children, unfortunately the other twin died when she was a year old because of heart issues. Mother never went into detail into what happened after that death but they stopped seeing each other with our father. Mother then met Mazande's father, who was also involved in a mysterious car accident years after Mazande's birth,"

The story being told by Thulani has an element of truth, Mother was devastated after that man's death and after that she never got herself involved with anyone ever again. She did an

awesome job at raising three children, the story being told by Thulani- is hard to take in.

Me: "Is what you're saying true?"

Him: "Every single word"

How could she hide such a big thing from me, her only girl child... the river she told me about, how?

My mind went into full investigation trying to join the pieces of this huge puzzle.

Me: “How could she be so selfish... she told me I’ll meet her at the village river if I want to talk to her because the graveyard is full of evil spirits,”

Him: “She means back at the village, where she came from,”

Me: “I will never go there,”

Him: “You have to, the thing is father -as I’ve heard, is on his deathbed, the kingdom is falling and he’s calling for you because you are holding things. Major drought struck the village and livestock is dying. His wives are fighting and you are the one needed,”

Me: “Kukunya ke oko!” –That’s bullshit

Him: “Bulelwa!”

Me: “What!? I am not the one to save some falling kingdom! Let it fall, I don’t even care! Why even care for people who never even bothered to reach out to us! And you

are all selfish marn. Why tell me this now? Of all times, now?  
Now that I am at the peak of my career, have someone that  
finally loves me and I am now expecting my own child. I am not  
a savior, they can all die for all I care

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Him: “Madlomo calm down!”

Me: “I’ve been calm my entire life! Maybe had you and your  
mother told me about this earlier in life, then maybe, just  
maybe we could’ve tried and resolved issues. Now I am old,  
what bond do I need with that man? Mandingagezelwa rha!!”

Him: “I don’t know what more to say to you. I’ll leave you to  
think about all this on your own,”

He got up from the couch and left me pissed off.

I heard his engine roar as he drove off the yard...

Now that someone is in dire need of my help I must jump at their tune! They can all go hang themselves and die. I do not care at all about them, whether they are dying of starvation they should. I am not one of their own nxaa. I threw the cushion on the other side of the room.

The pain hit hard in my lower abdomen again, this time even more tense than before.

I screamed and got off the couch only to fall on my knees as my feet felt like they were landing on hot coal.

I cried and crawled slowly to the direction of my bedroom.

It became tense with every movement I made, the pain unbearable as my vision became blur and blur! My voice no longer had sound.

I laid flat on the cold tiled floor and listened to the pain as it took all of me, like something was sucking every organ in my body...

Minutes later the pain subsided but my legs felt numb and swollen, a scary feeling because I couldn't move them as if someone placed a bag of cement.

I felt the moaning sound of something like the wind and the breaking sound of a glass... my head getting lighter and lighter. I could feel the warm tears down my face but I couldn't move a limb as that temporal paralysis took over me.

It took all of me to wince and call out to God! It seemed to not work as the intense pain took over again that I couldn't do anything but give in and stop fighting...

After what felt like forever, my body loosened up and gave me room to breathe, I pulled myself up but my head started spinning and my whole body aching.

I slowly walked to my bedroom balancing by the wall...

I reached for my cell phone and laid on the bed as I dialed his number.

He answered immediately

Him: "Madlomo,"

I sniffed and cried

Him: "Sthandwa sam,"

Me: "It happened again,"

It took all of me to reply to him, my voice scratchy and low.

Him: "Where's Thulani?"

Me: "He left... I am scared,"

Him: "How long can you keep on the line?"



Me: "I don't know,"

Him: "I'll be there just now..."

I only moved the cellphone away from my ear and the flood gates opened as tears soaked my pillow.....

I felt his warm hands pulling me closer to him, I've been crying that I didn't even notice anyone coming in. my head rested on his lap. His smell giving me a sense of hope and warmth

Me: "What can I do?"

I said after silence fell in the room, my voice telling my tiredness.

Him: "I'm sorry,"

He's losing me...

Me: "About?"

Him: "What you are going through, it will be over soon,"

I remained silent for a while...

Me: "It will happen again, right?"

Him: "...Yes,"

My heart sank, I can't take more pain like this!

Me: "Until when?"

Him: "We... you fight it... It's complicated Madlomo,"

Me: “When I didn’t know I was pregnant, none of this happened, but now... no wait, (I moved my head and looked at him) you did something?”

He moved his eyes from me.

Him: “I only thanked my elders and... well they are visiting you and you can’t handle it, not you but you are carrying one of their own,”

I shook my head! Impossible, I don’t even-

Wait...

How could I be stupid!

Me: “We had sex...”

I threw my head on the pillow and looked at the ceiling.

Sigh...

Him: "I am sorry, I got over excited with getting you back and I..."

Me: "Talk to them, I don't want this,"

I cut him short.

Him: "You have to communicate with them, allow them in you so that you won't feel the pain,"

Me: "I don't even worsh- I'm a prayer woman Wande!"

Him: "Well it is up to you how you want to do this, it is either you work with them or not,"

Me: "I don't like this at all, I don't. I'm even having Bad dreams!  
Why does it feel like all this will be hard for me?"

Tears formed again and I let them slide down my face, he pulled me to his lap again and brushed my back.

Him: "I am sorry for it all sthandwa,"

Me: "So nothing will help?"

I asked sniffing

Him: "The only way is to allow them,"

Me: "How do I know they are present?"

Him: "You'll sense their presence, with this pregnancy; you'll attract some bad omens, you'll have to be strong in your spiritual faith and them coming to you is a way of communication with the soul you are carrying, they chose you

for me Madlomo, you are joined with them even though you may not know. It will be over before you know.."

I only nodded and he kept on brushing my back and assuring me everything will be okay.

I fell into a deep sleep again.

THIRTY

“Thulani told me about my paternal family”

I said to him as we sat on the table having supper, Thulani still not back from wherever he went to.

Him: “How do you feel about it?”

Me: “Honestly, I don’t know but I know I am angry at Thulani for not telling me about this, my mother and nje everyone who didn’t even bother,”

Him: “So now, what are you going to do about it?”

Me: “I won’t do anything, I’m not obliged to help a falling kingdom I didn’t know anything about,”

Him: “But you do know it will somehow affect you?”

I kept quiet and just went on with eating my food.

What they don't understand is that I don't care about a man who never cared about me, what bond could we possibly have now that he's on his deathbed? What more is needed of me if he didn't bother with me while I was growing up? This sudden entitlement to my help is what I don't fuck with. They can all go to hell and burn...

Him: "I think you have to let go of the anger,"

Me: "You're not my therapist Wande,"

I snapped

He should stop acting like the Dr Phil of my life...

Him: "I was just saying, it will damage you,"



Me: “Nothing will ever damage me again, I’ve been through a lot worse,”

He looked at me then back to the fruits he’s having.

we remained silent for a while...

Me: “Thulani found listening devices around the house, tracker in my car and bugs I don’t know about,”

Him: “He told me,”

I looked at him.

Unbelievable.

Me: “Is there anything you don’t know?”

He chuckled

Me: “No actually, I’m serious!”

My voice grew loud...

Him: “It is nowhere near something like that, He called to ask if I knew anything about trackers in your house and I told him I don’t, see- uhm, Nelisiwe is involved with some bad people, and when I say bad I mean bad! One of my colleagues at the firm had a case of human trafficking to deal with and she was representing this man –Bongani, who is somehow close to Nelisiwe. So, in the past months something happened and it had to do with girls being auctioned right, the boss of this whole operation is your ex-husband, I knew all this because Thulani and his team found a list of names and pictures of these girls that are to be sold and Ziyanda was one of them,”

I gasped!

Me: “What!”

Him: “Yes, and they used Nelisiwe and April as a way of getting close to you, knowing that you’re always with Ziyanda and me,”

Me: “This is bigger than I thought,”

Him: “It is and you need to make sure you’re always aware of your surroundings,”

The thought of always looking over my back sent chills down my spine, I already have a lot to deal with on my plate and things like these add to the stress I don’t need.

I exhaled-

Me: “Dlamini,”

He looked at me as I sat back on the chair tilting my head back.

Him: "Madlomo,"

Me: "How do I do this? Tell me how should I deal with everything? How can I be strong enough to deal with everything thrown my way?"

At this point my heart is slowly giving pieces of hurt, my head feels light and the idea of having to fight demons and angels for my life is one I cannot digest. The dreams and what's to come scares me.

Him: "I wish I had an answer but you should know that I'll always be here for you,"

I nodded and looked at him,

Me: “I had a dream today, mother visited me and told me she’s at the village river, but it quickly changed to me being dragged to this dark room, I saw blood between my legs, and it was scary because I felt someone pulling me. I woke up right after,”

He frowned and maintained the eye contact

Me: “Does it mean I might lose my child?”

Him: “No, it is nowhere near that

”

His cellphone rang disturbing our conversation, I got up and took the plates to the kitchen giving him space.

My head is going through a lot, from trying to stomach the father whose kingdom is in hot waters, to the bugs and now a list, on top of the whole cake, these ancestral visitations that are weird and painful.

My life is nowhere close to getting back to normal, it will only be hectic and challenging.

I thought to myself as I washed the dishes, my mind zoning out and forgetting I am in the house with someone.

I felt warm hands sneaking around my waist, with him pulling me closer to his warmth. I laid my head back on his chest as I dried my hands. I joined his with mine and we stood there feeling his heart against my back, his scent causing butterflies in my stomach. The soft touch of his hands against my tummy...

I appreciate God for this man.

Him: "I love you, have I ever told you that?"

My heart melted and a smile formed,

Me: "You tell me every chance you get,"

Him: "You should know it everyday, I love you so much Madlomo,"

I turned and looked at him, smiling my eyes probably gleaming with tears.

Me: "I love you too Dlamini and... Thank you for always caring for me, yes you did some crazy things that hurt me but overall, the content times with you are the ones I value the most, and for that... I'm looking forward to have you father my... our baby,"

He smiled like a crazy person, his dimple ever so visible,

Him: "I love you for choosing me as I am, or loving me and giving me the world's most precious gift. Madlomo, I cannot describe how lucky I am to have you in my life, I promise you we will be the best parents ever,"

I chuckled, he joined in and held my jaw with his hand and his lips pressed against mine in a kiss.

I felt my body temperature rising as our tongues danced in the tune played by our souls, he pushed himself closer as I hit the sink, I felt his bulge against me. I wrapped my arms around his body and held on his back as the kiss went deeper, my insides getting hot and a new Victoria Falls down there.

He pulled me up and my legs wrapped around his waist, he turned and my butt met the counter as I slowly humped against his bulging groin, the heat was too much and I needed to feel something.

His hand moved to my thighs, brushing them against the light pajama pants.

“You shouldn’t wear pants,”

He whispered as I pulled myself up and he removed the pants.



He brushed my already wet lady part, I felt the heat even more as his kisses trailed down my neck, slowly to my stomach and thighs

He parted my legs, ripped off the tiny fabric and went straight in with his tongue I gasped in amazement.

My legs started feeling numb as he devoured, my body in all sorts of tingles as the wave of pleasure started taking over me

“Wande... Aahhh... I won’t last long,”

I cried in pleasure and his warm hands held on my thighs for dear life, he played with his tongue on my lady part, licking, flicking and teasing it was too much I screamed and exploded right there and then,

His lips moved from my lady part to my lips and I could taste myself in his mouth, he rubbed his fingers on my entrance but it was not enough, I needed to feel him inside of me.

## THIRTY ONE

I woke up light headed, no one next to me... My heart sank as I had thought he would stay over

I remained in bed for another hour thinking about my life and how everything seemed to fold out like a new chapter I never thought was in the book of my life.

I felt the vibration of an unfamiliar wave and the mild pains started.

My heart went into an adrenaline rush as I quickly grabbed my cellphone on the pedestal and dialed his number.

It went straight to voicemail as my soul felt like it was moving out of my body, I held my breath but the shivering didn't stop.

I know they've arrived. They are here...

I dialed again and the call went through this time

Me: "I'm scared, I think..."

Him: "You're feeling the pains?"

Me: "They are not as tense, but I could feel the presence and I'm shit scared!!"

Him: "You shouldn't be on your phone Madlomo, communicate with your elders. Pray or something,"

He ended the call before I could even answer back.

I laid back and closed my eyes and blocked everything out as they would tell us when meditating. I felt the deep silence and I could've sworn to God I saw my mother and brother smiling in that mist of time

The pain was mild and it only lasted a few minutes and my body let loose again as the knock hit my door.

It was Thulani

Him: "I thought you were dead or something,"

I shook my head as he walked in with a tray of food

I sat up as he placed the tray with a bowl of oats, cup of tea and buttered bread and fruit pieces.

Me: "Good morning to you," he hugged and sat next to me.

Him: "How did you sleep?"

Me: "I slept okay, didn't get any weird dreams,"

Him: "Okay, those bugs we found came of great help for the investigation,"

Me: "What are you investigating?"

Him: "Drugs and human trafficking related things and taking down this drug lord together with your husband,"

Me; "Ex-husband,"

Him: "Whatever, but it's unfortunate that we're still looking for more of the girls they abducted,"

Me: "What! So you mean to tell me all this is happening now?"

He looked at me like I am stupid

Him: "Sisi it happens everyday,"

I looked at him as he totally missed the point of what I'm saying

Me: "Wande told me of a list y'all found and I thought they were yet to do this auction of theirs,"

Him: "Oh! No they did their auction and many girls are missing including the Minister's daughter, it's just that the list was found before their auction, Ziyada is one of the five girls that were lucky but they are smart with this, so damn smart I had to go undercover as one of them, I'm still trying to narrow everything down but I am not in any rush as it may mess the assignment,"

I nodded as I took the tray of food and placed it on my lap,

Me: "That is hectic! Thank you for breakfast,"

Him: "It's only a pleasure, have you placed some thought on what I told you?"

I exhaled...

Me: "I... I don't know what to do with all the information you gave me but what I am sure about is that I am never going to that village to save someone's ass,"

Him: "I won't force you sisi,"

Me: "Thank you,"

I said as I indulged in the breakfast

We talked and reminisced about the past and things I have missed in his life... Nothing much has been happening except that his work has been keeping him busy, going undercover at all these drug syndicates. He's very reserved about his love life... his life is work and family...

Me: "Do you find rural chiefs or kings on google?"

I asked Thulani as I was washing the dishes in the kitchen... he made quite a mess...

Him: "I'll give you his files, you don't have to search google,"

Me: "Okay,"

Him: "You're considering this?"

Me: "I'm curious to know,"

Him: "Okay,"

Me: "You've met them before?"

Him: "Yes that was way back and... let me just say I'm good,"

Me: "Why is that?"



Him: "I'm not like you Sisi, I don't... how can I say this, I'm not what they are looking for. Can we drop it please?"

Me: "Fine,"

Him: "Sorry, it's just that a lot of things happened that I don't want to re-visit,"

Me: "Okay,"

I finished cleaning my kitchen and went to sit on the couch checking my emails with a glass of water next to me...

Him: "I'm going out Bulie, I'll be back later on today,"

Me: "Okay, cool,"

He walked out as my cell phone rang,

I took it and answered the unnamed number

Me: "Hello,"

Caller: "Hello Bulelwa, this is Mawande's mother here,"

Me: "Oh hello Ma, kunjani?"

Her: "We are good sana lwam, ehh are you busy?"

Me: "Not after an hour,"

Her: "Okay sis, I don't know how to say this but can you please come to the house

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preferably after lunchtime?"

Me: "Okay, is there something I should worry about?"

Her: Tuu sana lwam, I just need to talk to you about something important,”

Me; “Okay, I will be there Ma,”

Her: “Thank you sis, bye,”

I ended the call and dialed Wande’s number, he answered,

Him: “Madlomo,”

Me: “Your mother just called, she wants to see me and I cannot drive in the state I’m in,”

Him: “Okay, did she say about what? When can I pick you up?”

Me: “She just said we will talk. Come Lunchtime, I’ll get ready so long,”

Him: "Mhh Okay, I'll be there,"

Me: "Bring me something sweet please,"

I chuckled

Him: "I will sthandwa,"

Me: "Okay, bye,"

Him: "I love you and Bye,"

I smiled and schucked

Me: "I love you too, bye,"

I ended the call. Checked my work things and then went to bathe.

I got myself ready for the meeting or the talk...

....

“Do you know what she wants to talk to me about?”

I asked as we stopped at the fill up station, with me crunching on chips and fruits.

Him: “She didn’t say anything to me,”

Me: “I wonder and I am feeling sleepy yho,”

I yawned and stretched my legs

Him: “You’ll sleep at the house, how are the pains?”

Me: “Bearable,”

Him: "We should go to a doctor, to check if the falling didn't do much damage,"

Me: "You'll come too?"

He chuckled at my childishness.

Him: "Yes, I will come this time,"

He took my hand and kissed the palm

Me: "Okay... Something is bothering you?"

He wasn't his bubbly self... he seemed down with a smile.

Him: "Nothing I can't handle, don't worry yourself,"

My heart sank, I felt it rip.. Something is bothering him and he doesn't want to even tell me...

My eyes were burning with tears

I remained silent as the car went back to the road

Him: "Madlomo,"

His arm went to hold my knee, I looked out the window and the tears were streaming down my face.

Him: "Sthandwa are you crying?"

I shook my head and he immediately pulled the car over and held my chin to look at him.

I wiped the tears and avoided looking at him

Him: "Why are we crying now Madlomo?"

I sniffed and rolled my eyes, I caught a smile on his face

Him: “Nkosazana,”

Me: “Don’t call me that!”

I snapped.

Him: “Why are you mad at me sthandwa? What did I do?”

Does he really want to know?

Me: “You never tell me anything, every time I ask what’s bothering you, all you do is dismiss me like I don’t deserve to know how you feel! Why won’t you open up to me? Or maybe there’s someone you’re already telling your thing!”

I knew it came as a shocker to him...



Him: "Lelwa, there's no one okay, it's only you sthandwa sam. It's wrong of me to not tell you everything,"

He wiped my tears and leaned to kiss me, didn't return it... he chuckled and went for my neck and a moan escaped my mouth...

He held my face and smiled at me

Him: "I'm okay sthandwa,"

Me: "No! You're not like this when you're okay, something is worrying you I can feel it, uyandisinda,"

He slightly closed his eyes and Exhaled

Him: "I... I'm worried about us, you... I love you so much Madlomo, I don't want to lose you in any way. I would go mad if I do."

Me: "What makes you think that?"

Him: "We will talk about it later okay,"

He held my chin and then planted a soft kiss on my forehead

The car got on the road again... I must have fallen asleep because in not time he was tapping on my thighs waking me up..

"Wake up, we are here,"

He said as I opened my eyes and adjusted to the light.

## THIRTY TWO

“I’m feeling nauseous and dizzy,”

I said as we walked in the house through the kitchen door. I felt like vomiting.

Him: “I’ll get you a glass of water,”

I sat down as I listened to the spinning of my head,

He handed me the water and I drank it and sat for a while gathering the strength.

Him: “Are you feeling better?”

Me: “Yes,”

Him: “You are getting me worried,”

Me: "It's probably the drive here, I am okay really,"

A woman, whose face was unfamiliar walked in and gasped as she saw me, her jaw dropped. Eyes all out and I sat there confused...

I turned to wande and he just gave me a "You're a woman, deal with her" look and walked out of the kitchen

Me: "Molo Ma,"

She shook her head

Her: "Boniswa!! Boniswa!!"

She shouted and another woman appeared already pissed from being called this harshly.

Boniswa: “Yintoni Nozukile!”

She looked at me and gasped, but she didn’t freeze on me

Boniswa: “Molo sisi,”

Me: “Eweke Ma,”

Boniswa: “Unjani?”

Me: “I am well, just confused by the what’s happening,”

Her: “Uhm, You will find out now sisi, come to the front,”

She turned to Nozukile who was still starstruck

Boniswa: “Bring water for Bukiwe marn, uyeke ube uzijongisa,”

Wande walked back in holding a toddler who couldn't stop babbling as both ladies walked out

Me: "Umithisile?" – did you impregnate someone

He laughed and shook his head.

Him: "The boy couldn't keep his hands off me, come to the front the people here came to you,"

Me: "What?"

Him: "Yes, come see for yourself Madlomo,"

We walked out of the kitchen, down the little passage and as soon as I appeared they all looked at me like I'm some meat.

There's about six people,

The ladies I met at the kitchen, an old man and another female but she was outside on a phone call, Her back visible through the sliding door. Wande's mother and Thotyiswa.

I greeted them and they all greeted back, I took my seat and the only sound was from the babbling toddler in wande's arms. He took a seat next to his mother.

The old man broke the dreading silence

Him: "You are probably wondering who we are,"

I nodded because this was a rhetorical question

Him: "We are your father's family,"

I looked at him, then looked at Wande whose mind wasn't even here, his mother avoided eye contact too.

Me: "I don't have a father,"

Him: "I know it will come as a shocker mntwanam, but we are. You are King Jongikhaya's daughter. I am his brother,"

Boniswa: "I am your father's second wife sisi, igama ngu Boniswa. This is Nozukile, she's the wife of the old man here,"

Wande's mother looked at me with a weak smile, I felt...  
backstabbed.

Her: "I couldn't live with the guilt of knowing your whereabouts child without informing them,"

I took in a deep breath and let it out slowly,

Nozukile: "Unangaphi?"

Me: "31,"



Boniswa: “Nguye, she even has the birthmark below her right ear,”

Old Man: “I am sure you would like to know why we are here.”

I nodded again.

The lady who was outside decided to bless us with her presence, as she closed the sliding door

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I gasped!

How could someone look like a clone of me like this! She stood still for a minute before walking, I have an Identical twin! How could? Thulani said she died, what's this now?

My eyes went to Wande and he was still not paying attention to anything except for the boy.

She smiled...

Her: "Hello,"

She extended her hand and I reluctantly took it

Me: "Hi,"

I said confused, her nose is a little narrower and her hair is straightened but she looks exactly like me.

Her: "Am I allowed to hug you?"

Her eyes teary as I was confused!

I stood up and we shared a hug,

The old man started reciting clan names, which was awkward considering how things are.

The hug was warm, it felt I had reconnected with something I had lost before.

She broke the hug, sat down next to me and folded her arms looking at the elders with attitude.

Her: "We need explanations,"

Fierce... the straight talker who doesn't sugarcoat.

Boniswa: "I still remember that day like it was yesterday, each and every detail... your mother -Nobuhle, she was my best friend. We used to work together at the hospital. This day, my other friend-MaMokoena went to check on her, it was right after our day shift at the hospital. We got to her house and well, we talked about everything. When it was around seven Nobuhle cried saying she's feeling pains on her lower abdomen.. singahoyi because we thought they were just minor contractions, the pains became intense she couldn't even hold it, she went into labour... her water broke as we were preparing to take her to the hospital. MaMokoena told me that it would be too late and so we prepared for home birth.

She paused and drank her glass of water

Boniswa: “The delivery was a success but your mother was in trouble, giving birth to triplets at the time when she was abandoned by her own family, we knew we had to come up with a plan. We named you guys Busisiwe, she came first and then you followed Bulelwa and Bukiwe here came last. After hard thinking Nobuhle gave up Bukiwe and then years later Busisiwe died of complications. It was the right thing to do at the time and that is how you were separated,”

I exhaled...

Me: “And how did you become a royal wife of your friend’s lover?”

She looked at me with a smile

Her: “When I took Bukiwe as mine, I had to go back to the village because things were bad for me as I am of royalty too. It

worked both in your mother and father's favour. I had to protect Nobuhle and told them that all the time I wasn't home, it was because I was hiding that the newly appointed king had impregnated me. The child wafaniswa and the elders agreed it was indeed his, anyway the plan worked for the both of us. I was taken as the second wife,"

Thotyiswa walked in with refreshments lighting the mood in the room. We thanked her as she served everyone. Mawande was still in his own world with the kid.

Nozukile: "Aren't you married?"

She asked with an attitude.

Bukiwe: "You have no business asking her that!"

She said pissed off.

Old man: "Zibambe Nozukile!"

Nozukile: "Tyhini bathembu! I was only asking!"

Me: "I'm not married, No,"

I felt his eyes to me but I didn't dare look his way..

Boniswa: "You didn't have to tell us sisi, you don't owe us anything. It is us who have to be humble towards you,"

Nozukile: "Haysuka! Soon you'll be kissing her feet iyafana,"

I shot my gaze to her and she was sipping her tea dramatically

Bukiwe: "Okusalayo we are not here for that Manci!"

She laughed... Was I intimidating her?

I looked at Wande and he just smiled at me... faintly

Old man: “Sisi, what we are here for is to humbly request you to come see your father, he’s not in a very good space and we would appreciate it if you could bless us with your presence at the royal house,”

Boniswa: “the most important part is to apologies dearly for the confusion we’ve caused, yes we would have loved to reach out to you earlier but it was close to impossible as I didn’t know where to start, your father was getting worse each and everyday and everything is falling apart,”

Nozukile: “Let me not bore you with all the sugarcoated things! Your brother; Thulani, is not the chosen one to lead the kingdom! What they are not telling you is that you hold the power to that royal house! The ancestors want you undiluted sisi and what I’m seeing now is that you don't have the guts!”

I looked at her and she immediately moved her eyes elsewhere.  
How rude...

Bukiwe: “If you didn’t want your son to badly take over the throne then you wouldn’t have been this bitter! Your evil ways have now caught up with you that you can’t even look Bulelwa in the eye!”

This family needs a reality show! Angekhe.

Boniswa: “This is not the time nor the place bethuna!! Hold yourselves yhini! What we are here for is to meet this child and humble ourselves to her as we all here elders have robbed both of these children their right! This fighting and talking as if Jongisizwe is dead already must end! Hold yourselves Bathembu. Bulelwa I am deeply sorry for this attitude you’re getting. We don’t need you to answer all our requests now as we believe you need time to process everything. Thulani has been running away from us since your mother’s ceremony, with you we want to take things slowly even though I should add that your father doesn’t have much time. But please, we are not rushing anything,”

What ceremony? So Thulani knew these people all along...



Bukiwe: "The problem starts when you talk to her as if she's obliged to do everything you ask of her, as if you know her and you've been part of her life. Stop that attitude,"

Old man: "All I've heard is you talking and talking not even giving this child a chance, Bulelwa please tell us how would you like to handle this situation?"

Finally time to voice out...

Me: "I'm honestly baffled by all this, I don't want to lie. It is a shocker and it explains a lot of things. Right now I am still going through a lot of things which I think failed to prepare me for this moment. My only concern is why should I help him? He knew about me all these years and my place of birth but still didn't bother, also, my own mother was not honest with me and there are a lot of things unexplained,"

Nozukile: "It's because they lost touch with you... your elders and everything that connects you to your paternal family was tied,"

Me: "By whom?"

## THIRTY THREE

The room fell into silence as Nozukile prepared to tell the story of how the elders couldn't find me...

Boniswa: "We don't have time Nozukile,"

Nozukile: "There was always conflict between the two families, it goes way back sisi we don't have time to tell that story. But the family you were married to knew you were of royalty and you hold this power within you, power that could gain them our land and wealth. When the third wife of the king -Majwarha was brought to the royal house, it was a way of two families sorting their differences, little did we know she was sent there to milk information. They found that Bukiwe had a twin, their initial plan was to kidnap Bukiwe but they changed and decided to do you since you were at a vulnerable place and not in the safety of royal guardians. So, Daluxolo was sent for the mission, which he failed because they later found that Nobuhle got pregnant and he had fallen in love with her. He was then killed in a car accident. They then kept you under their watch and when you were old enough, Siyabonga was used and you fell into their trap, they tied you so you cannot have a child as

you'll be more aware of things when you get pregnant. I assume you are now as we are here... finally found you..."

Bukiwe: "And you know all this because you also were part of the plan, why aren't you telling that part huh?"

They don't see eye to eye.. That is evident.

Nozukile: "Don't start with me ntombazana!"

she warned and the old man exhaled...

Old man: "Umfazi unzulu!"

Boniswa: "I would like to think we have said enough for the day,"

Bukiwe: "Yes, I hope what was said here shed light to most of your unanswered questions, I would love to know you better as

a twin, which is awkward because I feel like I've known you my whole life,"

I smiled and I had nothing to say to any of the things told here. All I wanted was to have time with Bukiwe and talk to her all night and day. The rest of the people here I don't care about and I believe Siyabonga's family will pay for everything they've done to me...

Wande got up from his seat and moved to where I was, he handed me the toddler he was playing with the whole time.

He just smiled and the little boy babbled a lot of things giggling in the process... it warmed my heart. I kissed his cheek

He babbled louder throwing his head like he was telling some happy story, jumping too.

Me: "What's his name?"

I asked smiling at this beautiful soul in my arms.

Bukiwe: "Bathembu,"

I chuckled.

Me: "I'm starting to think names in this family have to start with a "B""

Bukiwe: "Now that you're mentioning it,"

She laughed

Me: "Exactly,"

Old Man: "Thank you very much Majola for leading us to this child, we'll forever be indebted to you and to your son for

showing us the way too. Uhm and I think we should be leaving right now, the drive will be long,”

Boniswa: “Ewe, we thank you for it all sisi,”

Wande’s mother smiled and nodded

Old man: “And thank you Bulelwa for not backing down but remained seated and listened to us, thank you because you don’t owe us anything. Uhm we should get going right now.”

They all agreed and stood up from their seats

The child in my hands was still babbling, Wande held my waist as we walked out of the house to Bukiwe’s car.

Me: “You have a handsome young man here”

Bukiwe: “Thank you sisi, he’s my miracle baby,”

I smiled and handed her the boy who didn't want to move from my hold

Wande: "Look at him not wanting to go,"

Bukiwe: "And he's going to cry iyho,"

Me: "Ahwuu,"

Wande: "Say goodbye Madlomo, so that he knows,"

I chuckled, kissed him goodbye and he loosened

Wande: "There you have it,"

He smiled and held me next to him. I knew what it meant... he couldn't wait for our own baby.

I smiled and could feel tears near as bukiwe strapped him in.

Bukiwe: "I hope we'll keep in touch hey,"

She smiles as she closes the passenger door.

I nodded.

Me: "Yes...uhm, I would also love that."

The thought of having a sister made me happy

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afterall I am not alone...

We shared a hug and said our goodbyes.

Wande: "How are you feeling?"



He asked as we walked back in the house,

Happy, sad, angry, bitter and hopeful.

Me: "I am having mixed emotions, I look forward to having a relationship with Bukiwe, however, I cannot say the same about the rest of the family, mad at Thulani and I don't know what to do with myself moving forward,"

Wande: "It was expected my love, for you to have all these emotions. I am sorry for throwing the whole thing in your face,"

Me: "It's okay, I am glad you did too because I was going to wonder anyway,"

He nodded

I felt the sudden pain down my spine I almost fell but Wande held me

Him: "The pains again?"

Me: "Not the usual ones, it's my back,"

It shot again, I screamed as I shook my head and my vision going blurry,

Him: "Madlomo!!"

My body felt as if it was in war with something! I had never felt such heat in me as I felt at this moment, I was fighting something and could smell blood it was too strong

I hit something and everything went blank...

.....

"It's not working Ndlovukazi! Akavumi it's too much!"

Dlamangwe told Siyabonga's mother that the muthi was not working and there was nothing he could do anymore.

Her: "Dlamangwe! I don't pay you to tell it's not working!"

She was furious as her plan was failing. Nozukile had called her earlier to tell her the family found Bulelwa and she tried everything to stop them but they wouldn't budge. It was time..

Dlamangwe: "Her elders found her,"

Her: "Tell me something I don't know!"

She shouted as Dlamangwe continued to blow into a bottle that didn't bother bubbling anymore, evident that it no longer had any effects

Him: "Don't shout at me woman! This girl is more powerful now!"

Her: "Is it because of that man she's with!?"

Him: "No!!" Dlamangwe shouted and groaned as he hit the glass, it shattered on the cement floor

Her: "What is happening!!"

Him: "She's protected! There's royal blood around her and Shlahla wants him, shlahla wants royal blood,"

His teeth shattered, shlahla was his snake, the one he fed blood and human remains. It helped him with all the dirty work he does.

Her: "We have no more blood to give if we cannot see the results,"

Him: "Uzalisiwe!"

Her: "Stop speaking in riddles,!"

Him: "The princess is pregnant! The ties were broken and she's more powerful you don't want to mess with her now, even shalala won't stand a chance,"

Her: "We need solutions,"

Dlamangwe laughed

Him: "Don't worry, wait and see. The sun shall not rise as the moon will turn red and that will be the downfall of Abathembu! More is yet to come and we will sit and watch them break each other. The death of the first grandson will be our time to strike. The king will help us,"

Her: "Are you saying what I think you are?"

Him: "I don't repeat myself mfazi! Do not interfere with anything, all will fall in place and you'll reap the fruits of their fight!"

She smiled and nodded at what she heard from Dlamngwe, took out money to pay him

Him: "Ebomvu, ingakhali,"- Fifty rands only, no coins

Her: "Still the same Dlamangwe I know,"

She placed the stack of fifty rand on the mat, got up and walked out of there in a happy mood. Dlamangwe laughed as he took the money

"The royal ancestors are still brewing the lightning that will strike you. You never mess with royal blood and get away with it. There will be consequences!"

Dlamangwe said his last words as he pulled the bag of money under the cupboards. Unfortunately, She had already gone out of the yard to hear his last word.

## THIRTY FOUR

What I had gone through the past hours is something I had never prepared myself for, Had I been told carrying a human being would bring these many complications in my life I would have passed, as stupid as it sounds. I do not think we could ever prepare ourselves for this thing called life. I could hear there were people in the room but my body remained motionless and I didn't fight anything. I just layed there with my eyes closed.

“When are you going to tell her?”

I heard Wande's mother's voice speak, it was raspy and low... the old woman shouldn't have come. I could tell I was in the hospital because of the smell, the noisy beeps and hospital noise of machines in the maternity wing. Which hospital I was in, is what I couldn't tell.

He doesn't answer the question but sighs deeply.

Her: "Nyana, you know that this will only put her life in danger if... if it continues,"

She begged.

Him: "I will find a way to sort it all out mother, just... let's just let it be for now,"

Her: "You don't have time,"

He remained quiet after that... a cell phone rang and I still remained stuck on the bed with all the pipes in my face. I couldn't feel any pain, I was numb... it hit that it's the numbness that made my body not respond to anything. I let it be and drifted off to sleep again.

I woke up with a pounding head, the lights were dim and the bed I was in was no longer stiff but soft, too soft... My eyes adjusted to the dim light, I was in my bedroom, in my house and alone in bed.



How could it be possible?

I moved and turned the side lamp on, the smell of impepho was strong. I walked to the bathroom and emptied my bladder.

How did I get in here? And where is wande, what happened at the hospital after that cellphone rang?

All these questions ran through my head as I walked out of the room, down the little passage to the front. The lights were on and it was pitch black outside.

My eyes moved to Thulani who was seated on the couch watching something on the TV.

I cleared my throat and he turned his attention to me.

Him: "You are up?"

Me: "Yes,"

Him: "Are you hungry?"

I nodded and he got up from the couch, we both walked to the kitchen and he handed me a bottle of water.

Silence fell as he prepared what I made out to be a sandwich.

Him: "I am sure you are confused as hell,"

I nodded again and he looked at me plainly then back to what he was doing.

Me: "What happened?"

Him: "A lot, what do you last remember?"

Me: "Quite a few things, I remember falling after the meeting and then waking up at what I made out to be hospital, my body

all numb and motionless... And now waking up with a headache in a dark room smelling of impepho,”

Him: “That all?”

He seemed shocked, kanti what happened there?

Me: “Yes, that’s all... is there more?”

Him: “All I can say is you owe that man of yours everything. No matter what you do, keep him by your side,”

Me: “Mawande?”

Him: “Yes, he saved you. I know as a big brother I am supposed to hate every man in your life but I guess, he’s an exception. Keep him by your side,”

Me: “You are confusing me even more and where is he?”

He gave me the look.

Him: "He has his own house,"

He handed me a plate of sandwiches and a glass of juice.

Me: "Thank you, don't you know where my cellphone is?"

Him: "He will bring your things tomorrow, only your car is here,"

I nodded.

Me: "I met the royal family today,"

I saw him tensing up.

Him: "I was told, did they say anything new?"

Me: “They shed light on many things, I could highlight being a triplet and not a twin. The other sister is still alive and well you wouldn’t be able to part us. Also things that led to mom leaving the village, the whole history,”

He nodded...

Him: “Bukiwe is her name right?”

Me: “Yes, have you met her?”

He kept quiet and I sighed... I wouldn’t bother with asking for a further explanation.

Him: “Buli...”

I held my hand in air as a gesture for ‘I don’t wanna hear it’

He sighed and rubbed his forehead

Him: "I am sorry for keeping things from you but it was for the best,"

Me: "Meaning?"

Him: "You were safe not knowing the royal family,"

I was conflicted.

Him: "They are not good people, your father included! It was for the best of your future to not let you know them,"

Me: "I seem to have been told another version, explain,"

Him: "Bulelwa you are the chosen one to lead the royal family, you have the ancestral power and that gift is dangerous! It places you in a spot of vulnerability and they could kill you,"

What was this ancestral power everyone seemed to say I had!?

Me: "I do not understand!"

He chuckled

Him: "Look at how you paint your art! You think just anyone could paint the way you do! Bulelwa your paintings tell the story of what's to become!"

That is absurd...

I laughed!

Me: "You must be joking! I am not some Rafiki, Thulani. My paintings are just what the world needs and nothing more, nothing less. This is real life not some supernatural mystery,"

He sighed and shook his head.

Him: "You see the paintings that you said you dreamt?"

Me: "Yah,"

Him: "Go back to them, that's not just a talent sisi, your ancestors communicate to you through those! They use your imagination as a way of telling you a story. Your paintings aren't just a learnt talent, they convey a far deeper meaning and that is a blessing and a curse! You are the only one who can read them,"

Me: "That's just stupid!"

His cell phone rang just as he was about to talk...

He took it out of his pocket and walked out of the kitchen leaving me confused.



How I could have missed all this in my painting was what confused me even more. It all did not make sense because I could have picked it up on the way, or maybe people who buy these paintings should have somehow noticed.

How could I paint a future? Yes I had been told that I tell stories through the art and that is why everyone loves my art but to be Rafiki? How's that even possible?

He walked back and handed me the cellphone

Him: "He wants to talk to you,"

Me: "Who?"

He just plainly looked at me and gave me the phone,

Him: "I'm going out, I'll be back before breakfast,"

I nodded as he walked out...

Me: "Hello,"

Him: "Madlomo,"

His voice husky and low, My heart smiled..

Me: "Dlamini,"

Him: "How are you feeling sthandwa?"

Me: "I am okay, just a minor headache

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Him: "Drink water it will be good,"

I smiled.

Me: "Okay, Wande what happened?"

He remained silent for a dreading second..

Him: "It's better if you don't know,"

Me: "What do you mean?"

Him: "Exactly that, you shouldn't worry about it,"

Me: "Wande don't start please! I was off for hours and you tell me I shouldn't worry about it!"

He sighed...

Him: "A lot happened Madlomo, it is not what we can discuss over the phone,"

Me: “I hate this Mawande! This thing of people hiding things from me. Expecting me to just move from it and accept whatever. To find that later these things catch up with me and none of you is affected nxa marn!”

I got up from the chair and placed the plate and glass in the sink... proceeded to the couch.

Him: “Because these things are more complicated than you think Bulelwa! We do not like to hide things from you, we do so to protect you,”

He argued!

Me: “Well then stop this protection! I don’t need people to put me in a bubble like someone who cannot think and act for herself! I am a grown woman haibo!”

He sighed deeply on his end... I could sense frustration.

Him: "Well, how would you have protected yourself from people working on you? Would you have stopped those people you call doctors from terminating a pregnancy because you were unresponsive!? I think you are being unfair at this point!"

I gasped! Was this us fighting?

Me: "What do you mean?"

Him: "I love you Lelwa and I would do anything to make sure you are happy and at peace, I will tell you everything you need to know tomorrow..."

Me: "Wande..."

Him: "Madlomo,"

Me: "What do you mean the doctors were going to terminate my... our pregnancy?"

Him: "They were... you were not breathing and not responding to any of their works and out of the blue I was told to give consent for the termination of the pregnancy... A lot happened I will tell you about it tomorrow,"

Me: "I do not understand how a minor fall leads to termination?"

Him: "It's more than that and I will explain it to you in person. Take care of yourself and rest,"

Me: "Okay, I will,"

Him: "Bye and... I love you Madlomo and I mean it!"

I smiled and nodded as if he could see me.

Me: "I love you too,"

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“Boss it didn’t work, the doctors couldn’t do it because of that man! He was there the entire time and that fucking brother of hers,”

That seemed to upset April as he banged the table and threw the glass of whisky across the room, causing it to smash on the wall and spill all over the carpet.

“What the fuck do you mean Bongani? Everything was planned very well, how could you botch it up like that?”

He said in anger.

“Boss this thing is not easy as you think, Madam is now surrounded, the sedative worked but unfortunately the doctors had to go by the protocol and ask for the father’s consent,”

Bongani defended on the other side.

“Since when do we follow rules? We make them not follow them! You fucked up Bongani and you and your deadbeat guys will pay for it! Couldn’t do a single Job. Useless bunch of fools!”

He dropped the phone call and punched the cellphone hard on the wooden table as frustration and anger had him.

They had planned everything well with his mother, Nozukile and Thotyiswa.

They paid people for everything to go according to plan only for it to blow up in their faces.

Dlamangwe told them he could no longer help them with the princess as things will fall accordingly in the near future but finding that she was carrying and even more open to know things, they had to get to her out of the way. No.. get the pregnancy out of the way.



Thotyiswa told them Bulelwa's health was already in question, and she could pull through by making sure she lands at a hospital, then they can take care of things on that side.

April bribed a few doctors in the maternal wing and with the help of his contacts and Bongani's people that owed him, the plan was going to be smooth.

The doctor would sedate Bulelwa and then claim her as being unresponsive, they would then fake results and say the only thing that could help is terminating the pregnancy but things went south in the hospital as Thulani threatened the whole medical team if they do anything that will harm his sister's pregnancy, he'll sue the whole hospital.

The door flew open and Siyabonga jumped at the sight of Thulani walking in his study...

"Mthembu!"

He knew him, he's the one responsible for his drug syndicate falling out, he is the reason no one wants to work with him and the ministers took their businesses somewhere else.

"I thought I made myself clear the last time to stay the fuck away from my family,"

He laughed as Thulani walked in and closed the door. He pulled the drawer on his side to take out the gun but Thulani warned him against it.

"Don't even think about it, April!"

April chuckled again, looking at how his mate had grown so fast, there no longer was the submissive Thulani he met those years back..

"I love how you've grown over the years, I didn't think you would, taking that you were such a good boy,"

They had met years before, way before Siyabonga met Bulelwa. Way, way before when they were still boys. Siyabonga had moved to Grahamstown at the Age of 15, him and Thulani were only a few months apart, making April the elder one.

“Don’t fuck with me Siyabonga!”

Siyabonga laughed again, seeing that he had hit a nerve

“I used to fuck you remember! I tamed your demons boy and we would do it with the pastor! Don’t you miss those days? I made you tough and now you are kicking doors in my house!”

That furied Thulani even more, he pulled out his gun and aimed directly at April's head!

April knew he had him right where he wanted...

“Siyabonga, stay the fuck away from my sister! Stay away from my family because things will only get worse for you and your family!”

He said tilting his head to the side and not backing down.

“You know, Thotyiswa was such an easy person to recruit! She’s the one who made sure Bulie is taken straight to the hospital I had in mind! We had planned everything well... all I wanted was for her to lose the pregnancy, come back to me and leave that stupid man of his who doesn’t even know how to treat a woman!”

Thulani walked even closer to him but Siyabonga laid back on his chair and watched the boy who once shared sheets aim him with a gun, the boy who enjoyed licking his sweat and the touch of both him and the pastor of the local church.

“You wouldn’t pull that trigger Thulani! I know you, remember I once lived in you! I once licked and learnt how you respond to my touch. I was 15 but knew which places to touch you. The pastor trained me well- no wait.. he trained us well but you chose to be the submissive one... I still yearn for you some days you know, how tight you felt and I hope you still are,”

He laughed and Thulani pulled the trigger but missed his head deliberately.

“That was only a warning shoot! You utter that nonsense again and it would land between your eyes njandini!”

“Sit down and let’s just talk like men!”

April backed down as he saw that anger in Thulani, he knows how he gets when he’s angry! He doesn’t think twice. He had seen the anger before when he stabbed the pastor to death that fateful night at the pastor’s house. They had gone to such an extreme that the boy was tired of everything. The pastor had introduced whip to the boys and that night, the pastor did not only whip the boys but fought with Thulani as he was not obedient and had threatened to tell the congregation of what the pastor does to the boys in church... it never went well as the knife that was used to cut off the ropes the boys were tied with, pierced through the pastor’s stomach... The anger that the boy had was too much that he stabbed him to death.

And now, that same anger was evident in Thulani's eyes and April knew better than to keep on pestering the man!

"I only need your sister to help my family, help remove the curse and bind the two families again, much damage has been caused and I am losing everything I have worked for,"

He said, his voice low...

"Unganya kwedini! No sister of mine will help you after the years of abuse she has endured from you and this family! She's now at a happy place and I would be damned to risk all that for you stupid cunt face!"

Thulani roared

"Well, we both know she won't survive at that royal house so either way you are damned. Remember I know how she paints, this very moment right here was once in one of her portraits! We both know that. You won't kill me Thulani because you

need me! You need me to remove the tie in her womb! You need me to appease your ancestors! You need me!!”

April roared

Thulani seemed to go into remembrance again! His head was blurring with the mention of ‘need’ he felt the flashbacks of those days he would be cuffed in bed with the Pastor telling him ‘Boy you need me’ . the images vividly playing in his head and the dizziness slightly washing him, he was going into panic and April went over to his side, he knew the panics because he also had the same episodes, the trauma was heavy on both men.

“Thulani breathe!”

He shouted as Thulani let go of the gun, held on to the table and he breathed heavily like an animal in pain! Everything was coming back strongly. His therapist in Australia had warned him about bottling up, he was bound to have this episode!

His chest closed up as April continued to hold his shoulders shouting at him to breathe! He couldn’t let him go.

Thulani’s knees hit the ground as air seemed to leave him.

## THIRTY FIVE

“You need to come to the hospital now! It’s your brother”

“What happened? Is he okay? Which hospital?”

He harshly said the hospital name as I kicked the blankets off and rushed to the shower, why would Thulani get sick and why would I be called by Siyabonga?

All these questions were rushing in my mind as I got out of the shower and dressed up in warm clothes. I grabbed the cellphone, car keys as I rushed out of the house and drove straight to the hospital. Port Elizabeth traffic not helping too!

“What happened and what are you doing here?”

I asked as I reached the bench outside the ward where the nurse directed me. My stomach was already in knots seeing him there.



Him: "Anxiety Attack, he will be okay, the doctors are still busy with him,"

He said looking up at me with pained eyes.

I sat down next to him, that scent again... I remembered how it used to trigger me and send shivers of fear down my spine. I pulled the cellphone and sent Wande a text letting him know my whereabouts.

Me: "What were you doing with him?"

Him: "He came over to my house to talk about business,"

Me: "Business? What business? Thulani cannot stand your guts! I am sure you did something and now you feel guilty,"

I said pissed off. He just looked at me and went back to staring at the wall.

I tapped my foot on the floor nervously and kept checking time on the cellphone.

After what felt like forever he looked at me.

Him: "I heard you are pregnant, guess I was the problem this entire time,"

Me: "Of-course you were,"

Him: "You do not have to be cold, you know that?"

Me: "You don't tell me how to react,"

The cellphone rang, I got up from the bench and answered the call

Me: "Hello,"

Him: "Is it something serious, I was in a meeting when you sent the SMS,"

Me: "No, uhm.. They're saying it was an anxiety attack, he should be fine but doctors are still busy on him,"

Him: "Okay, do let me know how it goes, I have back-to-back meetings and I cannot leave now,"

Me: "It's okay, uhm.. I'll manage,"

Him: "Okay, How are you? You know you should be resting?"

Me: "I am okay, never been better,"

Him: "No pains?"

Me: "None,"

Him: "Okay, make sure you eat something and... I have to go sthandwa my next meeting starts in a minute,"

Me: "Okay, bye,"

Him: "Take care, I love you"

Me: "I love you too,"

He dropped the call and April cleared his throat, I turned and he was standing his hands in his pockets.

Him: "Uyaythanda nhe le Bhokhwe yakho?"

I chuckled at his statement...

Me: “What makes you think I’ll answer the rubbish you’re asking?”

Him: “You don’t have to, it was rhetorical,”

He got up from the bench and stood in front of me.

Him: “Where did we go wrong Mamthembu?”

He cannot be doing this! He cannot!

Me: “Move back please,”

He was too close to me, one would think we were about to kiss, his hands were still in his pocket but fed my nostrils his scent.

I took a step back and he chuckled, I avoided his eyes.

Thanked God we were in a corridor rather than a room, Had I hit a wall, things would have gone south.

Me: “I need you to stay the hell away from me Siyabonga, had this not been a hospital, I would’ve caused a scene! You are fucking asking me where we went wrong when you know! I do not want anything to do with you, don’t even think you can try.”

Him: “I was actually being nice yazi, it’s not like he will treat you any better than me. We men are all the same. We’ll always treasure the first months and then after, we show the real us. Just know you are now with a master manipulator Bulelwa,”

I chuckled and looked at him in the eye

Me: “The problem starts when you place every man living out there in the same bag as you. Not all men are like you Siyabonga! And the one I am with right now is definitely not at your level, so please Bhuti

khawume kancinci!”

Him: "You'll regret ever leaving me,"

Me: "Clearly you are sick!"

I moved as a nurse walked out of the ward,

Me: 'Nurse, How is he?'"

Her: "Are you related to him?"

Me: "Yes, I'm his sister?"

Her: "Okay, he is responding well to the medication, the doctor will see you know,"

That's all she said as she rushly walked down the passage.

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Never in my years of living have I thought I would ever revisit the past I buried, I never thought my brain would betray me and replay images I had worked hard to forget... the death of another human being in my arms.

He was known as Pastor Joshua in the Mission, he was a leader of the local church alongside his wife whom we called Sister Anna and she was a very nice lady. She would always invite boys to her house for some odd job and sometimes would make jam sandwiches. Every boy in the area loved the pastor's wife, she was a very warm lady who amongst other white people in the mission, was the only one who was seen as human beings rather than primitives. There were always rumors that the pastor was sleeping with other men but his wife kept it a secret that is why she had boys coming in and out of her house. By my logic, it was to satisfy her man's needs. What didn't make sense in the area was that; no man boy cried rape or sexual assault, I guess he never touched them in the presence of his wife but I know after Sister Anna's death- the pervert pastor showed himself. Or rather he did sexually harass them but because he was a master manipulator, no boy dared to say anything like me and Siyabonga.



We were his victims, he raped us repetitively and made sure we kept quiet, we never said anything too. No one in the Mission would believe two black boys are being raped by the pastor who was held in such high esteem by the community, the color of his skin worked in his favor alongside the privileges of being born a male.

How Siyabonga ended up staying with the man was; the local school didn't have a hostel for boys. When his family decided to move back to the rural areas, the headmaster, his father and the pastor decided that he would remain in the care of the pastor. Not only the church leader was a widower, he never had any children with Sister Anna, rumor had it that Sister Anna had a baby girl who was healthy but a week later she drowned her in the bathtub. As much as she was a nice person, she carried a dark aura with her. So April was groomed by the man, when we became friends the man would look at me in uncomfortable ways, months later in his office church my anus felt like it caught fire... that's where it started, in his church office then later in his house, and proceeded to him forcing the two of us to do it while he watched. It was the most traumatic thing. He was a man of God on the outside but inside a monster was living, unfortunately I had to see that monster come to life.

Things changed from then, I became this submissive boy who was raging with anger. I would get into fights with means of numbing the pain.. For months and months I resented the man! I hated everything he forced us into... it went on until that fateful night.

He had tied us with a rope and was whipping us, me to be precise as I wanted out and had threatened to tell the congregation on Sunday about what he did to us. April had feared for his life as he knew the pastor being exposed will only bring problems for him.

He said “You are black and I am white, No one will believe you boy so don’t even dare try!” and he meant every word. When he untied the rope with the knife and told us to suck his manhood, I knew I had reached my point. The anger in me had me releasing a loud groan with tears already flowing down my face, I was the submissive and so deemed weak! My pride and Ego was bruised and so I reached for that knife. With all the strength I had in me, it went straight to his stomach. Rage filled me and I stabbed him multiple times, what was going through my mind was “Kill him!” It was as if a voice was shouting and cheering me on... it was only after I saw the pool of blood I

jumped off him, April stood frozen with his eyes bulged out. My shirt was full of blood and so was the floor.

The number of blacks in the mission protected me with their all, it was my mother who found us first. The days before the killing, Bulelwa had used her crayons to draw a pool of blood with a man down, she was only 10 then and mother knew Bulelwa was not like the rest of the children. She was a special child with a gift, her gift being to draw what the ancestors showed her in her dreams. So when she saw that drawing before the night, she knew it meant something bloody was to happen. Finding two boys standing over a lifeless body, she never said anything. She told us to go to the shower and clean ourselves. To this day, I wouldn't tell what she did as when we got out of the shower the house was spotless and not a single drop of blood was present. There was the housekeeper, two men who cleaned the church and the lady who worked with mother at the hospital.

The pastor was given a dignified send-off, we never uttered words about that incident nor did we talk about what led to me killing the man. Months after, I was taken to the rural areas for cleansing. Life became a lot more bearable without the fear of a vulture. Even so, the after effects remained with me.

For years I struggled with post traumatic depression, I attended therapy in Australia, it never helped. I decided to stuff away the pain and forget about it, unfortunately bottling up has caused me to have panic attacks, anxiety attacks every now and then.

“Thulani!”

I heard her soft voice from afar, I couldn't respond to her because I was severely sedated. She placed her warm hands on my arms and God knows I wanted to respond and assure her I am okay. For sure she has questions about how I ended up here with her ex-husband.

“We should probably let him rest Bulie”

April said to her and silence fell in the room. I could hear her resisting but they eventually walked out and left me.

Explaining all this to Bulelwa will be challenging....

## THIRTY SIX

“Have you gone through your paintings?”

Wande asked as we were seated on the floor in my bedroom. I leaned on the wall as I looked at him resting his head on the floor, placing his palms over for support.

Me: “I haven’t, I don’t even believe in that,”

It has been three days since that incident, Thulani was discharged the next day and we sat down and talked about everything that has led him to falling out. My heart broke when I learnt the things he had gone through in his childhood. I was stunned at learning the real reason the pastor died.

Him: “Why don’t you?”

Me: “Huh?”

Him: "Why don't you believe that your paintings tell the future?"

Me: "Because that's outrageous,"

Him: "I think you're in denial,"

Me: "I could be"

We remained silent for a while...

Me: "You still haven't told me about what happened at the hospital,"

He has been shying away from that! Either changing the subject or distracting me with kisses. He sighed.

Him: "It has passed now and you don't have to worry about it my love,"

He said ever so calm. I took a deep breath and let it out slowly. It felt as he had sliced a piece of my heart the way it stung as he dismissed me again.

Me: "Why do you keep on doing this?"

Him: "What? Protecting you?"

I looked at him and shook my head.

I hate what he keeps doing.

My cellphone rang as I was about to talk some sense into his big head.

I pulled it out of my pocket and answered.

Me: "Hello,"

“Hey, it’s Bukiwe. Can you talk?”

Haven’t talked to her since that day of the meeting.

Me: “Yes, I can. Something’s wrong?”

She was whispering

Her: “I am driving out of the royal house now, I need to talk to you urgently,”

I shifted and sat up straight

Me: “Yes,”

Her: “I mean face-to-face. I am leaving the village and I might arrive in P.E in 4 hours or so, depending on the traffic on the



way. Can I please drive straight to your house, I will book a b&b after. I first need to talk to you,”

Me: “Oh okay, Uhm, I will prepare the spare room, there’s no need for you to book a b&b, when you arrive in P.E let me know,”

Her: “Okay, thank you. I will see you then,”

Me: “Sure,”

Her: Bye”

She dropped the call and Wande looked at me with questioning eyes...

Me “Bukiwe is driving here, there’s something she urgently need to talk to me about,”

I filled him in before he could ask.

Him: "Oh, you look worried,"

Me: "I just wonder what it is about, I hope it's nothing bad. Anyway, I do not like what you keep doing Wande,"

I looked at him as I placed the cellphone back in my pocket.

Him: "Sthandwa sam, trust me I want to tell you these things but It's not easy Madlomo."

Me: "What are you scared of Mawande?"

For a moment he looked as if his ancestors raised their hands on some "Boy, you're alone"

He cleared his throat and I glanced at him

Him: "Of losing you,"

The sincerity in his eyes couldn't be missed.

I chuckled as he sat up and pulled my legs to cross over his.

Me: "Why would you lose me?"

Him: "Some things I have to keep away from you so I can protect your peace. What happened at that hospital is something I don't want you to bother about. Ever. It is better if you don't know. Please Madlomo trust me on this,"

He looked so sincere... maybe I shouldn't bother.

Me: "If you say so,"

He brushed my legs with his warm hands.

Him: “We haven’t talked about what you plan to do with the whole royalty situation,”

I haven’t had much thought of it too...

Me: “I am not sure if I want to go there. The whole royal family thing to me seems like a lot of work, my life is less complicated without them. I do not want to go to a family that will not accept me or plot against me. Many things are involved here and with me being pregnant places me in a spot of vulnerability,”

He nodded while he kept on brushing and moving up to my thighs.

Him: “What will happen when your father dies without you knowing him, remember he’s on his deathbed and is asking for you? Your ancestors keep searching for you, what will you do about that?”

He has shifted closer to me and my legs are parted making it easier for him to brush the area between my thighs.

He's looking at me with eyes filled with lust, his smile is unmissed as I keep on losing my breathing pattern because of his touch.

Me: "I honestly do not care about the man, the ancestors might have to understand that I have my own life to live, and stop teasing me with your hand please,"

He smirked.

Him: "Is it working?"

I smiled

Me: "Well, yes..."

I moved closer to him and positioned myself on his lap, my arms holding on his shoulders as I straddled him. My fingers kept twisting his long dreadlocks. His hands held on my waist as we smiled at each other. The heat exchanged was way too high.

Him: “Madlomo wam,”

I couldn't help but blush as he smiled, his eyes gleaming with love.

Me: “Sthandwa sam,”

This was it! The moment I want to treasure my whole life. His hand caressed my face as he smiled.

Him: “Umntu Wam, yazi the elders chose you for me. The most beautiful lady there is, I love you Madlomo. So much that I wish to put you in a glass and admire you my whole life,”

My cheeks were heated,

Me: “I too believe the elders came together and decided we belong together, remember how we randomly met,”

I laughed as memories of the first day played in my mind.

Him: “I do remember and how clumsy you were. Ayy uBulelwa. Actually

that wasn't the first time meeting you, the very first time was in my dreams of course and then the time you were in Tanzania, I went there with Ziya and when we saw you at that hotel, I knew I had seen my partner,”

He smiled...

Me: “I can't believe you saw me first and decided to wait until months later,”

I playfully rolled my eyes

Him: "It's not like you'd have taken me serious, take off the hoodie,"

I raised my hands and he pulled it off my body, leaving the T-shirt

Me: "I would have, like I did at the party,"

He laughed and pulled the T-shirt too leaving me naked with only the underwear.

Him: "Your skin is so soft my love,"

He brushed his forehead onto my chest as I unbuttoned his shirt, He moved from my chest and took it off, and I ran my hands on his torso. Trailing on the faded scars below his left nipple.

Me: "What happened here?" I asked as my fingers traced on the faded scars



Him: "Being a Thwasa came with its challenges, I was scratched by something I don't even know till this day, the other ones are from a fight I got into years back,"

Me: "You've been around, I see,"

I unbuttoned his trousers and he kept on touching my body. I balanced on my knees and he took off the trousers.

Him: "Way longer than you have been,"

He chuckled, I smiled.

Our foreheads met and I took the moment to gracefully appreciate him.

Me: "I love you,"

Him: "I love you too, Madlomo,"

I placed my arms over his shoulders, he pulled me even closer and held on bum giving it a light squeeze. Our lips met, so warm and inviting.

I felt his hard bulge against my warm thighs, his hands moved to caressing my body, moving slowly up and down my back, to grabbing the side of my boobs.

I was drenched as the kiss deepened. I slowly humped against his hard on, I needed to feel him.

His hand reached for my panties, giving my lady part a brush, I moaned at his electrifying touch

The lace fabric ripped...

"That's like the 100th underwear you're ripping,"

I whispered as he rubbed my open core, teasing my clitoris.

“Nawe you should stop wearing these things!”

I giggled as his fingers flickered with my clit causing me to throw my head back and moan loudly. My body vibrated and I held onto him. He went for my neck and the combo sent me to heaven and back, my hips moved a bit to meet his fingers...

“Babe...” I moaned,

“I need to feel your warmth Madlomo,”

I moaned as I felt my body jerking up to respond to the coming orgasm. He pulled out his finger and I cried...

“I’m close,”

Before I could complain any further, he raised my butt up and I positioned myself as he entered me, my walls clenching at the warmth of his hard on.

I gasped as he filled me up.

“Now rock with me baby,” he whispered and moved my hips slowly, his hands on my waist guiding my pace.

My hips swayed back and forth, side by side... how he filled me up like never before. His groans filled the room, the temperature in the room was high as we sweetly made love, claiming each other and stamping our love.

He flipped me over and my back met the plush carpet, he held my legs up on his shoulders. His deep penetration fastened with each pounding.

The pleasure was too much, he went in twice, thrice, four times and I let out a loud scream as I came for him. My legs felt

wobbly as he took my thighs to his hold and went in harder and harder I built up again.

His pace was quicker and within a minute he let out a loud groan as he shattered inside me. He placed my legs over his waistline and came to suck on my neck, making me jerk up and let out a moan as I reached my climax again.

I felt him going soft inside. I wrapped my arms around him, not minding his heavy weight on top of me.

“Can you reach for the duvet?”

I whispered as we held on to each other,

“We should sleep move to the bed, you’re pregnant remember,”

Oh shit!

He rolled over as I loosened my hold.

He got up and walked to the bathroom leaving me looking like a dead cow on the floor. My limbs seemed to not function because of the pleasure..

He came back with a warm towel and wiped me clean then pulled me to bed.

“Bhabha,”

I called him.

“Mhh-hh”

He answered climbing on the bed spooning me, our warm bodies met.

“I love you,”

I truly do.

“I know sthandwa and I love you too,”

He kissed my shoulder as he pulled the duvet to cover us.

I was content.

## THIRTY SEVEN

“How will me going to the village solve anything? Will he recover and be well? Andiyiva tu le into niyithethayo,”

I said pacing up and down...

Bukiwe arrived last night, at around 9pm. She was too tired for us to talk. We ate, she bathed Bathembu and we decided we'd talk in the morning with Thulani too.

Mawande slept over but left before breakfast.

Now we were seated on the dining table with Thulani as she told me about the falling apart of the kingdom, my father being sick and everything not working the way it was supposed to. Her and Thulani joined forces in begging me to reconsider my decision.

Thulani: “Bulelwa, I know all this is freaking you out,”

Me: "Damn well it is,"

Him: "You need to calm down and think about this, how will it affect you going on,"

Me: "I don't know man..."

I rubbed my hands in frustration...

Him: "Talk some sense into her Bukiwe. Your twin is just stubborn,"

He got up from his seat,

Me: "And now? Where are you going?"

Him: "To sleep,"



He walked past me and disappeared in the passage. I sat down and looked at Bukiwe

Me: "I am most scared of losing my life and baby, the things I heard in that meeting got to me. There's so much spiritual fights in that royal house and the fear of me not coming out alive still hovers around me,"

I sighed

Her: "That is understandable, but you are the most protected twin. No one will try anything funny with you there because they need your help. I... I consulted the royal seer before I came here, she gave me good and bad news,"

Me: "Start with the bad,"

She cleared her throat and sat up straight fixing her posture

Her: "Bad news is, if you do not present yourself in the royal house, bad things may happen. Which include you losing your

most precious gift... A storm is brewing, your husband saved you the first time and he might not be able to next time such a thing happens and I'll assume you know. Good news, well unfortunately I'm not a bearer of good news... There aren't any,"

Wait... Wait ...wait

Me: "I am divorced Bukiwe, how did my husband save me from whatever you're talking about,"

Her: "Mawande, the seer meant him and not that douche-bag. He saved you from..."

She stopped halfway as I looked at her clueless

"He untied your womb sisi,"

I nodded, she meant that!

Me: “And how in the hell do royal ancestors know about my existence, what I mean is how am I even connected with them....”

Such a stupid question because I was untied, I am carrying a child and my eye is more open to knowing these things. They are also bound to know a missing child.

Her: “You held Bathembu, he connected you back to your elders,”

What does that mean?

Me: “Bukiwe you are messing with my head, explain!”

Her: “Bathembu is a special child, he connects with the royal ancestors... don't give me the look I also found out before I came here. When he held you and started with all the jumping and happiness in your arms he was kind of taking in your scent... the seer explained all this in riddles Bulie. The night after the meeting, Bathembu would cry non-stop, he'd only

stop when he's in... In... Father's hut and next to the kraal. Father said I should beg you to come home, the seer said the same thing as father but she elaborated more that the child picked up your scent in which the elders connected to you again,"

That explains why he was so clinging on Wande that day of the meeting.

Me: "How old is Bathembu?"

Her: "2 years, his speech is impaired that's why he babbles all the time,"

I nodded. we remained silent for a few minutes. everything is at stake here, refusing might cause harm to my children and relationship with Wande. there so much spiritual fights with Mother's spirit being back at the village.

After years of feeling empty and not having a family, Time is precious and I am the only one trusted to do all this work and

rectifying mistakes done by the past generation. From all this, I might find a family.

Me: “Can you stay two more days, I will fix things at work and then we’ll drive to the village together, you can get everyone to prepare things,”

I looked at her, she was smiling and nodding.

Her: “I’ll call Boniswa and let her know,”

I nodded...

Me: “I’ll go lie down. You don’t mind clearing the table for me right?”

Her: “No, not at all sis,”

I smiled and got up from my seat. Before I could disappear in the passage she called my name.

Me: “Mhh-mhh”

Her: “Thank you for doing this, I know you don’t know anyone but when you wake up I’ll fill you in on the details about the family. We are quite a huge one,”

I nodded and smiled

Me: “I would love that Sis,”

I smiled and proceeded to walk to my bedroom. I closed the door and threw myself on the bed.

I reached for my cellphone on the pedestal and called him.

“Lelwa,”

Me: “Are you busy?”

Him: "I just got out of my first meeting

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I'm free for the next hour. What is it?"

Me: "I'll be going to the village this Friday,"

Him: "You are!?"

He sounded surprised.

Me: "Yes, I think I have to do this and just get it over and done with,"

Him: "Thulani will be coming with you?"

Me: "I doubt, though I haven't asked him,"

Him: "He'll have to, I can't come with you and someone has to be there to look over things,"

Me: "You mean babysit me,"

Him: "You'll be entering a dangerous territory Madlomo, you already have people hating on you without having seen your face and I do not want to test waters with you. Day before you leave come sleep at my house,"

He cares.. So cute.

Me: "My prayers will carry me,"

Him: "I know! And that is why you need to come sleep over at my house so we can phahla and pray together before the journey. Bukiwe and Bathembu too. Thulani is strong, he takes care of himself,"

Wow...



Me: "You never mentioned that Bathembu is a special child,"

Him: "It must've slipped my mind, he is but still too young to understand anything,"

Me: "Mhh-hh, let me take a nap ke, will I see you today?"

Him: "I'll come over for dinner,"

Me: "I will see you then, have a lovely day,"

Him: "Have a good one too Madlomo,"

I dropped the call and sighed deeply as I threw my head on the pillow. How life has quickly changed.

.....

“Nozukile!!”

Boniswa shouted as she walked around the homestead, the king has been unwell for months now. All he does is sleep without talking or saying anything to anyone. The only time he eats is when Bukiwe blackmails him, doctors and healers have tried but it was nothing that could be fixed through western medicine. They all knew he had to go to the river with all his children and with the most important child; the one with a gift from the royal ancestors. Things he thought he had avoided in the past were now catching up with him, placing not only the kingdom but his health on the line too. The ancestors were torturing him and punishing him for all these sins.

“Ndingapha!!”

Nozukile answered as she was watering the dead garden, everything was dry in the village. Nothing seemed to have life, the sun was up in arms burning the living out of everyone. Drought seemed to be a factor too.

“Usayikhathalele ngantoni na le gadi ifileyo,” – Why do you still care for this dead garden?

Boniswa asked as she reached her. The garden was dead indeed, the corn was dead, and the grass turned to a color close to bronze because of the dryness. Nothing was growing, the soil was no longer healthy.

“It’s all a matter of holding on and hoping that we might get something,”

She said as she placed the watering can on the side and walked to the bench Boniswa had occupied. She sat next to her and took off her sun hat. She looked at the mountains afar that seemed to have no life, the skinny cows on the field looking dead like the king of the place.

“I see... I received a call from Bukiwe,”

Boniswa looked rather pleased and that confused Nozukile.

“Ngoku? Uphi khona andikamboni oko ndingene apha,” – and?  
Where is she I haven’t seen her since I entered the yard.

“She’s in Port Elizabeth, she never told anyone where she is going. She left late with Bathembu, after that consultation with the seer,”

“MamHlanga was here?”

Nozukile asked shocked, Mam’Hlanga - the royal seer who comes to the royal homestead unannounced, she gives people their news and what the ancestors told her to pass, she’s never summoned only she summons people to her yard. So, whenever she visits the royal house, they know she brought news that might make or break them. In Nozukile’s case; she feared that Mam’Hlanga would spill all her secrets and dark things she had done in the Kingdom in means of getting her son to be the next King.

Boniswa nodded

“She was only here for Bathembu and Bukiwe, The boy was crying nonstop. After that, she got in her car and drove. She just called me and all to find, she drove to Bulelwa’s house,”

This was not good news in Nozukile’s case. She nodded and listened

“Bulelwa has agreed to come home and they will be here on Saturday,”

Boniswa said with a little joy in her voice and Nozukile gave the fakest smile. Boniswa knew what the wife of her husband’s brother was capable of, she was rubbing it on purpose.

“Tyhini that is good! Hayke we must get people to prepare a feast for the home coming. Everyone has to be here on Saturday,”

Boniswa nodded in agreement.

“Yes, yes. Finally things will fall in the right direction. I’m hoping that will kind of get my husband out of that bed. Let me go and tell the sister wives,”

Nozukile was deep in thoughts as Boniswa got up from the bench and walked away from the garden. She sighed heavily and scratched her head. She feared such could happen, she never thought Bulelwa would eventually get the guts.

It was time she traveled to the mountain again, a storm was indeed brewing and it would not end well for any of them.

She clapped her hand and went back to watering her non-existent plants.

## THIRTY EIGHT

“What do you mean I have to come with you?”

Thulani asked as I was chopping carrots preparing lunch. Bukiwe was in her bedroom getting a hyper Bathembu to sleep. She won't succeed with that kid, he's on sugar rush.

Me: “Exactly that! I need someone I trust with me,”

Him: “You know I don't want anything to do with that family,”

Me: “And I do? Look, we both don't care about them but we have to do what we have to do. As shitty as it is, we cannot deny we have royal blood in our veins. I could've easily used my Christianity in defense but after... let's just say I fear ancestral wrath. I do not want anything to go wrong and then it be inherited by my children,”

Him: “It will be hard for me to set foot in there again but because of you, I will go,”

Me: "Thank you, we are leaving Friday morning,"

Him: "Okay,"

I continued with cooking, my mind still going on to the paintings. I haven't checked any of them. Scared of what might be interpreted by them, scared to know how things might fold out. For now they will catch dust in the store room until I know I'm fully ready.

Thulani has been doing pretty well, he was given a leave at his work, and I guess they knew he might break down because they did that without him having to apply or anything.

He's been coping but I could see something was bothering him, coming face-to-face with a past you never dealt with is not easy.

Bukiwe walked back to the kitchen, holding a babbling Bathembu.



I laughed and shook my head as she sat next to Thulani

Me: "We gave up now?"

She laughed

Her: "Akafuni tu, he isn't even faking,"

Thulani: "He didn't want to sleep from the start, you should wait for him until he is sleepy,"

Me: "Yes, you should've done that,"

Her: "I guess he is growing, because he's usually asleep at this time of the day,"

Me: "Thulani will be coming with us this Friday,"

She smiled and looked at him

Her: "That's great! Wow, I am really thankful for what you guys are doing,"

Thulani: "Don't sweat it, we are doing what our mother should've done those years back,"

I caught a glimpse of wonder in Bukiwe's face, it hit that she never got the chance to meet the lady that gave birth to her

Bukiwe: "How was she? As a mother and nje a person,"

She was a good mother who kept secrets that damaged us and covered up a murder for her son but I am not judging...

Thulani: "She was a great mother, we never lacked anything with her as a mother,"

Me: "She was a lovely lady,"

She nodded and Bathembu started babbling.

Thulani: “How was your childhood?”

He directed the question to Bukiwe who started telling us about growing up in the royal house with her father having multiple wives, the drama and the challenges that come with being the princess.

She touched on subjects that left me feeling uneasy and thinking if this whole royalty thing really matters

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the hate in the yard and the spiritual fights they are constantly on because of father's mistakes, the grandparents' to great grandparents. What caught my attention was the tree planted at the back of the house, a tree she says gave a very dark shade. It sounded creepy and dark as she further narrated that the tree never dies nor does it lose its shade.

She had quite an interesting childhood, Boniswa never made her doubt if she was indeed her mother.

Me: “Boniswa is an angel,”

I commented as I took a sip of my juice, lunch was over.

Bukiwe: “She is and she’s the only one who has kept the royal family together. Her position in the house is highly valued,”

Me: “As it should, uhm... Mawande will be joining us for dinner,”

Thulani looked at me and then looked at Bukiwe, they burst into laughter

Me: “What?”

Bukiwe: “You need to soundproof your room, sisi une noise!”

Thulani shook his head

Him: “I had to search for headphones! And before you say it; we know it’s your house but please keep it down you have guests,”

I flushed and felt my cheeks burn, they continued cracking up as I put my tail in-between and got up to clear the table

Me: “I will say it, kukwam apha!!”

I rolled my eyes and walked to the kitchen with the plates leaving them dying with laughter.

.....

“They are all coming back home Tata,”

Boniswa softly said to her husband who was refusing to eat lunch. He has been bed ridden for over three months now, the wives have to take turns taking care of their husband. He has been unresponsive, his limbs not working and his speech impaired. He could hardly do anything for himself. Multiple doctors had visited the royal homestead but nothing worked on him and they all knew it was more than just a sickness.

He shook his head again, looking at his dear wife. Boniswa, undoubtedly his favorite wife, the first in everything but romance. Their relationship was solely based on what bonded them, nothing else. Boniswa agreed to being the security and the pillar of the family but love and romance wasn't, rather platonic. They did sleep with each other at times. They kept on with the rules of marriage and with him, Boniswa knew her place and position.

Boniswa: "Please eat to gain some strength Dlomo,"

She pleaded with him and he finally opened his mouth and ate the food.

He was happy that her children have agreed to come back home, whom he couldn't wait to see was the twin, things without her in the royal house have turned south for everyone. The ancestors demanded her back home despite the sacrifice that was done. Despite things they have gone to the river and sacred mountains for. She was demanded back home even umhlontlo in the garden has been dying, something that has never happened before and it meant only danger. Danger that no one will survive.

Bulelwa inherited the gift of her great grandmother, a gift that only caused havoc in the village during those days. It was said that the old lady would draw things using the red soil mixed with water, she would use udongwe to craft things. She was artistic and gifted.

She was the one they would go to for consultations in the village but everything changed one night when she was abducted and forced to use her gift. The people that kidnapped her were obsessed with predictions of the future that they pushed her to do something that she couldn't. A gift of drawing a message from the ancestors doesn't need people forcing it out, rather patience as the elders know what message to deliver and at what time. She was executed when she couldn't

deliver what they needed. Her spirit never laid to rest until the birth of the triplets, that's when they made the sacrifice for her spirit to stop tormenting people.

He knew that Nobuhle had given birth to not only two but three girls, his grandfather was bedridden close to death too but there were still things he needed to do before death. When they heard about the birth of the first royal triplets, all three men embarked on a journey to the mountains. Blood was shed and sacrifices were made in expense of the first twin of the royal family. The twin's death was because of a tie between the elders of the spiritual world and the three men.

A plate breaking into pieces on the floor startled the king who was in deep thoughts. He shot his look at his wife who looked like she had just seen a ghost as her hands shivered with her mouth wide open.

"Wha---at?" he incoherently stuttered looking at his wife, his voice refusing sound.



“It's happening again, the cycle. Bulelwa is pregnant and Nozukile said on the car it's a good thing because she might be carrying triplets! Dlomo if that child is carrying three babies! You know what will happen!!” She shouted as she stood up from the chair and started pacing up and down

“No, No, No! We can't let that happen, I would rather be the one used for this sacrifice not her children! NO! I am sorry Tata I have to go Visit MamHlanga”

She said tying a doek around her head and putting on comfortable shoes.

The road to MamHlanga's house was a long one.

## THIRTY NINE

“When last did you speak to your friends Lelwa?”

Mawande asked as he helped me with the dinner dishes. It went really well, Bukiwe is an amazing cook.

Her and Thulani are in their rooms, doing whatever makes their heart beat.

I dried the dishes with the cloth.

Me: “The last time was when I told them I was pregnant, I haven’t had time to talk and I think we were supposed to have lunch, which I totally forgot about! I have to call them later on,”

He chuckled and shook his head

Him: “You should let them know about your family, Bukiwe to say.”

Me: "I'm already imagining their faces when they see there's a double of me. They are going to freak out,"

Him: "Especially Zininzi, rather warn them before introducing her,"

Me: "I will do that,"

We continued with the chore in a light conversation until we were done. We moved from the kitchen to sit in front of the TV, with him pulling me closer to him and brushing my stomach.

Him: "April wanted to abort your pregnancy, that day you were at the hospital, Nozukile, Thotyiswa and his mother had plotted against your pregnancy. Thulani and I fought tooth and nail with the doctors,"

I swear my heart stopped!

Me: “What!?”

He pulled me back to his arms and kept on brushing the stomach.

Him: “Don’t shout and don’t stress about it, nothing will happen to our pregnancy. I will protect you Madlomo, I just told you this so you know not to trust anyone where you will be going. Don’t take food from just anybody rather eat takeaways or cook for yourself. This journey you’ll be taking is not going to be easy my love, there’s so much you have to fight. Don’t let anyone touch your stomach too!”

Me: “No accepting food, no touching, don’t trust anyone. Mhh-hh I’m listening,”

Him: “Andidlali ke Madlomo, do not just pee anywhere. In fact make sure they don’t catch a drop of your fluids!”

I pushed him off and giggled, I went into ice mode as I was met with a cold stare, he really wasn’t kidding.

Me: "I got it sthandwa sam,"

I placed my head back on his chest

Him: "Madlomo I won't be there to protect you, Thulani cannot be with you 24/7 so I need you to take what I am telling you very seriously. The royal house has many spirits lingering, not good ones at that, so you need to be careful. I will give you things for protection but you also have to take extra care of yourself. Attend to only what needs your attention Okay,"

I nodded as a wave of fear showered me, I held on his hands.

Me: "I will make sure I am extra safe my love, nothing will happen to me, I will be fine.. But know I will miss you,"

Him: "I will miss you too sthandwa, I will call every hour to check you up,"

I laughed and he held me tighter.

Him: "Have you checked your paintings,"

Me; "Not yet, I'm hesitant,"

Him: "It's understandable. In all of the precautions, get to know your siblings, half sisters and brothers. You have quite a lot of them,"

I laughed.

Me: "I will do just that, I think having another Bukiwe in the household will freak them out, even though my bump is already round and I have just my afro, she has braids,"

Him: "Still, you guys look-alike, nifana nqwa!"

I laughed.

Having Bukiwe in the house had me not looking at the mirror anymore, she also looks like the other me. Her pointy nose is what people with eyes could differentiate us with. The weight makes me think I am a little bigger than her. Also the scent is different.

Me: "And how do you differentiate us?"

Him: "I know who I sleep with,"

I looked at him and laughed... this man. He pulled me closer and kissed my forehead.

.....

"I will miss you sthandwa, please take care of yourself my love. Remember to pray and ufuthe please and don't forget what we talked about,"

That was wande whispering as he hugged me. We were standing right out of his yard and Bukiwe was securing Bathembu in his seat. Thulani was doing a round check on the car, how typical.

We slept in his house, did all the things he felt would keep us safe. We prayed and asked for protection and guidance. Thulani only came this morning with our bags.

Me: "I will miss you more, call every hour please."

I held him tighter and took in his scent one more time,

"Haibo! Suthi nca Madlomo!" Bukiwe shouted and I laughed as I moved away from him, he held my hands and smiled.

I tiptoed and gave him a kiss, which he gladly received and deepened it.

The hooter of the car went off and I giggled as he pulled me one last time and for a hug.



Me: “Sthandwa,”

He let go and smirked

Him: “Drive safely Madlomo,”

He kissed my forehead

Me: “We will, take care of yourself too,”

Him: “I will,”

I squeezed his hand and then let go as I climbed in the car.

Thulani: “I will follow you guys with my car, or we can just stop at town before we take the turn to the village, Bukiwe don’t let Bulie drive you know her condition! Let her look after le kwedini,”

He meant Bathembu who was playing with his fingers.

Me: "I'm pregnant not sick

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my bump is not that big too,"

Bukiwe: "Still, you're not driving sisi, buckle up please,"

We bid goodbye and we finally hit the road.

It felt like I was in a 'Khumbulekhaya" car as Bukiwe drove with jazz music playing, the atmosphere in the car was light and we kept having conversations about each and every place we passed... talking about the people who reside there. She briefed me on which family members to stay away from and Nokuzola and her husband are on the list, her father's youngest wife too... and the rest of the village people. How would I avoid village people? When they are everywhere.

I couldn't help but notice how her left hand kept on shaking, not just any shaking but too intense she would have to move it from the steering wheel and lower the car speed.

It would go on about 10 minutes and then it would stop.

It happened about four times in the first hour. I brushed off until the car almost swerved off a curve! She quickly controlled it and drove until we reached Peddie.

Me: "Don't tell me everything's okay Bukiwe, what's wrong?"

I delivered it as softly as I could. She sighed and looked at me.

Her: "I am sick Bulie, the doctors can't find anything wrong neither can any healer. My arm just becomes numb and my hand shakes... it has been happening for years but not as severely as it gotten over the past three months,"

She rests her head on the driver's seat as she exhaled.

So she drove all the way from the village to me, with only Bathembu. I was shocked

Me: “How do you work with Bathembu! Oh my God, now I feel so bad!! Why didn’t you tell me?”

My mind drifted back to when I asked her to help with dishes around the house. She just smiled at me.

Her: “I manage well with him, he’s a good boy. I do things around the house with my right hand and I manage well with it, the problem comes when I’m driving or packing things,”

I was conflicted!

Me: “And you managed to drive from the village to P.E alone with only Bathembu! Hayi Bukiwe I don’t care what Thulani said I am driving!”

I got out of the car as she did too, Bathembu woke up from his sleep and started crying.

Me: "I will feed him, let's sit on the bench at least it's not hot today,"

I took Bathembu out of his car seat and his bag as we sat on the bench. I took out his purity and started feeding him.

Bukiwe: "Let me go buy us fruit, I know some ladies who sell nice ones in these stalls,"

I nodded and felt an ache in my heart. Her problems are much bigger than what I complain about.

I fed Bathembu and he suddenly babbled happily. Throwing his hands in the air.

"Where's the father? You should've taken him with you,"

I looked up to find an old woman with a smile plastered on her face, she was wearing a loosely fitted floral dress with a faskoti and a white doek.

Her question was kind of insensitive but with that smile on her face I failed to take offence rather I smiled back.

Me: “He’s my sister’s, not mine..”

Her: “I have eyes and I can see unzima, you should’ve brought him with you. He will be needed,” she confused me more and in that, a boy in his teens came running to us.

Him: “Ndicela uxolo sis’wam, umakhulu akathathi kakuhle.” – sorry my sister, my granny doesn’t comprehend well.

I saw her give the boy a deadly look and another man who was in a black suit, a classy man by the look and the way his cologne greeted me first.

Him: "I am sorry sis if my mom disturbed you, she is... you know.. Mentally not okay and she's blind too. I don't know how she got out of the car.."

Me: "It's okay. She didn't disturb me, I didn't even notice she wasn't well,"

I looked at her again and her eyes seemed to work, if she's blind how did she see my bump or people hear pregnancy these days!

Him: "Sis'khaya Masambe, please..." He begged his mother who was hesitant.

She looked my way and her eyes weren't those of someone who was blind.

Her: "You should've brought their father, be careful of that turn Nkosazana,"

I felt my blood going cold and Bathembu babbled louder and throwing his arms on my neck.

I nodded and I realised she can't see.

Me: "Ewe Ma," I answered. She smiled again and the two males walked away with her. The elder one turned his head and gave me a weak smile, I only nodded to assure him.

What a weird interaction.

Bukiwe finally appeared holding two plastics, they probably pushed her to buy everything.

She sat next to me and handed me a bottle of water and fruits,

Her: "Put him between us sisi, he won't fall,"

I did so and we ate the fruits. Bulelwa the artist was thrown out of the window the minute we drove in Peddie. This Bulelwa



who sat on a bench having grapes was one you'll never find anywhere else. We had packed food for the road but the fruit and water is what we felt like having...

We had a conversation about everything and for a moment I forgot about that blind woman and everything my life has been. I focused on the moment I shared with my twin sister here who was sick with something no one cannot diagnose or even have an idea of what it was.

We finally got in the car and I took on the wheel. We dove swiftly with nothing in our way in the next 3 to 4 hours... We eventually reached the town, which felt deserted with only a few shops, supermarkets and the locals packing their stuff, the day was over. Fridays are always short days. The road is dry . I can even see donkey carts... so much of grahamstown but worse. I could see the valleys and the homesteads from where we had parked the car.

“I had been waiting for the two of you for over 45 minutes now!” Thulani says as he gets out of his car.

Me: “We stopped at peddie to refresh,”

Him: “Okay, Bukiwe you two need to change,”

Bukiwe nodded and gave bathembu to Thulani.

Me: “What for?”

They both looked at me like I was mad.

Thulani: “You can’t walk in a royal house with a short dress Madlomo,”

I rolled my eyes and looked at Bukiwe.

Bukiwe: “You can’t show your legs sisi, especially if you’re no longer a girl and what’s worse is you’re pregnant. Long dress, comfortable shoes and a doek,”

What? Are we in the 80's

Me: "What the fuck for?"

Thulani: "Oh No swearing too!"

Me: "Hayi Suka marn, where are we going to change?" I said irritated. I am tired of driving, my back aches, I need to sleep.

Thulani: "The garage has clean toilets, go there,"

Nxaa marn.

We walked to the restrooms and quickly changed. Bukiwe laughed at my irritation

Bukiwe: "It's the rules Sisi," She said as she fixed my collar and wiped the lipstick.

Me: "Thank you,"

She nods and smiles.

Her: "Are you ready to meet the family?"

Me: "Uhhh, I think so.. I have to do this hey,"

Her: "Yes! And you will be fine, don't stress,"

Her cellphone rang, and she looked at me for a brief moment.

I raised my hands and took the bag from her leaving the restrooms.

I walked across the road suddenly feeling a whiff of fear, Am I ready for this? To finally meet the family I never had... come face-to-face with demons and hearing things I would have to do in order for everything to go well.

Someone screamed my name and before I could make sense of the direction of where the voice came from, my head looked to my side and a car came at a high speed! My heart stopped at that moment! I screamed closing my eyes and it was lights out as I felt the collision...

FORTY

“Madlomo,”

“Is she okay!!?”

Voices shouted around me as I laid flat on the ground numb.

“She’s pregnant! She might need a doctor”

One voice shouted!

“You would have to drive to the next town or the hospital but I don’t guaranteed great service from them,”

Another deep voice I couldn’t recognize added.

“Is she pregnant? You need to move her from the cold ground,” a squeaky voice belonging to a woman suggested.

“But we don’t know whether she broke a limb or not,” the man with a deep voice answered.

I didn’t feel any pain, just numbness of my body and my racing heart. The car didn’t hit me because I jumped the side and landed on the ground. It only screeched near me but the shock took me down. I smelt the tires near my face.

“It’s all my fault, Mawande is going to kill me! Madlomo!”

It was her, my twin. Her voice was low and teary.

“I didn’t hit her I swear!!” another voice of a man screamed on top of the other but it was unheard.

“I’m here!! Everybody give her space!” a voice that held authority shouted.

Soon after, I was off the ground and in the stretcher with an oxygen mask already going to my face, the medical team checking my high blood pressure and giving injection. I laid there for a few minutes and dozed off.

After what felt like forever, I felt my body again. The numbness was gone and the only pain I felt was on my left elbow and right knee. I coughed through the thing and my eyes opened to see a red eyed Bukiwe sitting next to me.

I removed the mask and looked around the room, it looked like someone's practice and not a clinic.

Me: "I'm hungry," she chuckled and I saw relief in her eyes,"

Her: "I am sorry sisi, I shouldn't have answered the call,"

Me: "No don't blame yourself, I should've been more vigilant. We were in a fill up station anyway. My left elbow hurts and where's Thulani?"

Her: "He went to the toilet, I will call the doctor and bring you something to eat. Please do not move we are not sure if anything is fractured as of yet,"

Her phone rang again, she looked at at and sighed

Her: "He's been calling for the past hour, please assure him you're okay,"

She answered the call

"She's awake,"

She looked at me and I raised my right hand to take the phone from her. I remained silent as she walked out of the room.

Him: "Ufuna undibulala Madlomo?" - You want to kill me Madlomo?



His voice was low and sounded defeated...sounded like he was in pain and needed to cry.

Me: "I didn't see it coming,"

My voice was raspy.

Him: "How are you? Is there anything broken? Are you feeling any pains?"

Me: "My elbow and knee, everything else I think is okay, I might have bruised my face and I am hungry,"

Him: "Tell Bukiwe to arrange food for you, I want you to come back home now but I know you cannot,"

Me: "I have to do this once and for all, I need you..."

I wished he was with me. He'd have kept me in his embrace and made sure I was warm.

Him: "And I need you too... I love you Madlomo, kakhulu,"

I smiled.

Me: "I know sthandwa, I love you,"

He released a deep breath and sighed on the speaker

Him: "Please take care of yourself, be careful Bulelwa."

I smiled and made the promise again. The door opened and Bukiwe walked in with Thulani, the grey haired doctor and Boniswa holding Bathembu! How did she? Oh we were close to arriving....

.

A Saturday morning, the sun rose in the royal homestead. I had been to most places in Africa but no place has ever had such a beautiful sunrise as this village. It is indeed dry, drought has taken most of the plantings.

There were about six rondavels in the yard, the main house and a block of three flats. There's a huge courtyard, the garden that has that tree on the furthest side of the yard. The hills and valleys of Bumbane could be seen from where I sat. The river down south also was visible. I could already see a bunch of people there.

Two network poles stood tall on the furthest side of the village, their red light flickering with a minute in intervals. The atmosphere was clean from carbon emissions, the air light and breathable.

“Ulelphi iwele?” - which twin are you?

The voice took me out of my deepest thoughts. I Looked up to see a man holding a metal mug, he had a greying long beard, looked like he was approaching his late 70's.

He sat next to me on the bench I had found here.

Me: “The one you have never met, Bulelwa,”

Him: “Kwek! I see,”

We both sat there in awkward silence. He did not introduce himself in any way. We both sat there lost in whatever world.

We were taken out of those deep thoughts by a sudden running around of everyone in the yard... the cattle boys, the ladies who were cooking and peeling in the other rondavel tying their doeks and calling their children.

Me: “What is with the chaos?”

The man huffed and a smile crept in his face

Him: “Yangena inkanyamba! Tsi madoda kokwaziwana!!” he roared and laughed. It was a mess with everyone going up and down

“Bulelwa!!” Boniswa called and gestured me to come.

Him: “Qina isbindi ntomban, don’t be weak in there!”

I nodded and left him there drinking whatever he had in that metal mug.

I reached Boniswa who ushered me to one of the bedrooms in the main house, I figured it was the main bedroom because the bed was huge

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wall to wall closet and an animal skin mat in the middle.

Bukiwe walked in with my suitcase and I just stood there not knowing what to do.

Boniswa: "Mam'Hlanga is here mntanam, we need to get both of you ready."

Bukiwe: "How's your arm?"

The arm band was still intact

Me: "Healing, still sore,"

Boniswa: "Do you think she will be rough with her?"

Boniswa asked no one in particular but continued to go through my suitcase taking out a strapless long dress with a long sleeved vest and my comfortable pair of pumps.

Bukiwe: "She'll have to toughen up. Bulie please wear the clothes,"

Me: "I haven't washed,"

The time was still 6am in the morning.

Boniswa: “Good! Dress up mntanam,”

Boniswa walked out, Bukiwe looked at me, before she closed the door

Her: “Don’t forget to put in your wrist bands, you will need them this will be hard.”

I nodded and walked out.

I changed...

A noise erupted outside coming into the house. I said a short prayer and walked out. Bukiwe was standing in the passage. She held my hand and led me to the front.

There was a throne in the front with a black and white animal skin cloth covering it. The walls in the room were high and every member of the family was seated on the floor. There was a woman who sat on a reed mat, her legs were shiny, ankles filled with multiple beads and she was barefoot. She held a itshoba and she was looking very calm, the atmosphere in the room was tense but she was calm.

Bukiwe squeezed my hand. We took off our shoes and sat on the pillows which were right next to her reed mat. It was like we were on a stage and everyone was watching us.

Boniswa walked in driving him with a wheelchair

“Ahh! Zwelibanzi!!”

The voices in the room shouted and heads bowed as they entered the room.

He looked way better than he did last night when we got here. We had to go do rituals in the kraal, to let the ancestors know



that we had arrived at the royal house. I guess that allowed him to at least gain some strength. His speech is still impaired and his lower limbs do not function properly but his upper body loosened him.

Thulani also walked him with that man I sat with on the bench.

They closed the door and as soon as they did the woman roared like a lion! It startled me but Bukiwe held my hand. She kept on groaning and tilting her head in response to the voices talking to her.

Thulani lit up the incense and the candles on the reed mat. He introduced himself and father went on telling what we came here to do.

“Mthembu, Dlomo, Yem-yem! Madib! Ahh Zwelibanzi!”

That man again, I guess he’s part of the family too. Could be a distant uncle. He shouted as the king held on his knobkerrie to get up from the wheelchair, Boniswa helped him and he sat

down on the cushion pillow, his legs stretched only to cross at his ankles. I see he still fights hard to keep his pride and not let his people see the weakling he has been as I was told.

“They are all here MamHlanga,”

Father said in his low incoherent voice.

Bukiwe squeezed my hand more and looked at me with a faint smile.

Thulani sat next to me, we were all rounding the mat with ancestral stuff, the smoke spreading and the scent becoming stronger, my heart ached in missing him... now is not the time Bulelwa!

MamHlanga rubbed her hands together and groaned, she was entering the spiritual world.

She looked at me and my blood boiled.

“Bulelwa,” she said looking at me

“Gogo,”

I felt an immediate connection as I said that, she smiled and nodded... Might have been pleased for the recognition.

Her: “Your husband should be here! Where is he? I don’t see him here, he is the one that brought you home,”

I was confused...

Me: “Akakho Gogo,” – he’s not here

Her: “he must be here, nothing will go on unless he sets his foot here. He is the one that brought you home.”

She then groaned again, singing a song only known by her and she kept agreeing to what she was told.

She knelt and used her fingers to turn the candles off, moved the incense to the ground and wrapped her reed mat. She kept on singing and kept to herself. She got up and walked out of the house. Leaving everyone stunned.

I looked at Bukiwe and she shrugged. The uncle I sat with earlier laughed and everyone turned their attention to him

Boniswa: “Jama!” she warned him and he took something out of his pocket, a nip of brandy. He drank it and looked at me

Him: “Inkulu ntombam into oyithweleyo!” – You’re carrying something big my child.

I looked at him with confusion...

Boniswa: “Bulelwa Call your husband, he is needed here. Tell him to bring a bottle of white gin. Everyone, you can get back

to what you were busy with. The ceremony is not taking place today,”

Everyone walked out leaving only us the children born out of wedlock sitting there with our dear father.

Me: “A blind lady, well I don’t think she’s blind but when we stopped at Peddie, she came to me and told me I should’ve came with the father of my children, I didn’t take her serious because I thought there’s no way he would be needed here because it’s something that doesn’t need him,”

The looked at me and I shrugged

Boniswa: “You met Mamvelase!!?”

Me: “She didn’t tell me her name,”

Boniswa: “Wasn’t she with a young boy? Lahluma is always with her,”

Me: "There was a boy in his teens with her, and another one that looked smart,"

I kept describing the lady and she confirmed I saw her. She looked like she had seen a ghost and turned to her husband who just sat there not saying anything.

Bukiwe: "You didn't tell me! oh thiza Bulelwa!! She's one of our elders here in the family, she's not blind just that her eyes get foggy sometimes, she's not mentally unstable too, just her son doesn't understand our ways of doing things. She knows many things about our family history. She was a midwife."

Now that makes sense...

Me: "I didn't know, she also mentioned something about a turn I should be careful of, and As far as my logic can take me the car that almost hit me was nowhere near the turn..."

Boniswa looked at me with worry eyes,

Her: "Go call him Sisi, let him know he needs to be here immediately!"

## FORTY ONE

Not knowing who I could go to for food in the house has made me tense up, on top I had urinated more than 5 times just this morning only. I walked to the bedroom assigned to me, and pulled my handbag.

I searched my cell phone and called him but it rang unanswered. I tried again and the voice answered left me in chills and my heart racing.

Her: "Baby Mama,"

She chuckled after.

Me: "Nelisiwe," My voice was stern.

Her: "Yes, what do you want? Are you not supposed to be doing some rituals or something," My heart sank

Me: “I am and we unfortunately cannot get anything going because my HUSBAND is not here with me. Kindly let him know he is needed, a bottle of white gin he has to bring it. Let him know that I expect him to be here this evening,”

I didn't wait for her to answer, I dropped the call and felt my eyes burn with tears. What is she doing with his cellphone? Early in the morning...

The door cracked open and I fanned myself to stop the tears. Nozukile walked in with a tray of food, my stomach was in knots with the smell of eggs.

I forced a smile and she had a wide smile too.

Me: “Good morning ma,”

Her: “Eweke Sisi, Bukiwe said I should bring this to you, you haven't had anything to eat and I don't think that is okay,”



Nausea crept up as the smell became stronger.

Me: “Ohh Uhm, I... I can't stomach anything especially eggs,”

Her face slumped, I held mine ready to vomit as my stomach continued to boil and felt something coming up.

Her: “I will let her know and prepare something for you”

She walked out and as soon as she closed the door I ran to the bathroom and vomited, my stomach cramped and I went on until my stomach settled.

I walked out and went to lock the bedroom door before taking out things to wear.

My cellphone rang as I was done bathing, his name on the screen. I answered and kept quiet.

Him: “Madlomo,”

Me: "Mhh-hh"

He sighed

Him: "You're okay sthandwa?"

Me: "I am okay. you're needed here, nothing can go on without you,"

My voice was low. I had to keep it short.

Him: "I will be there this evening...Lelwa,"

Me: "They said you should bring a bottle of Gin..."

I couldn't bring myself to ask him about her.

Him: "Okay. Madlomo you seem down,"

Oh... oh wow.

Me: "Morning sickness, I'm 16 weeks pregnant wande,"

Him: "I know, I will be there, I love you okay,"

Me: "I have to go,"

I dropped the call before he could answer. The conversation was already icy and my eyes were burning.

\*\*\*\*\*

They were all sitting down on the mat again, in the same room but now Mawande was present, and he was in his full Sangoma

attire and sat next to his Lelwa. The wives and their kids were present too, the husband and the close relatives. It was dawn on Sunday. A never been better day and MamHlanga was chanting, with an impepho clouding the room.

Thulani was present too. The nervousness and the sweating of Nozukule couldn't be missed, Nokwanele the first royal wife was pissed at seeing the children that came first before hers, she and Boniswa never met eye-to-eye because Boniswa is the most loved and respected wife. Life was hard in the royal house but it was harder for her, even so, she kept going and stuck on the family.

“Heeey!!”

MamHlanga groaned, bringing everyone's eyes to her. The tension was thick even Macbeth's dagger wouldn't cut it.

The most nervous was Mawande, what he did the night before driving to Bumbane with Nelisiwe was a break of rules, he knew at the back of his mind MamHlanga was going to mention it. He feared Lelwa more than he feared his own ancestors.

On his side Lelwa was anxious and boiling, she didn't bother with asking Mawande about her, it was eating her up but the silent treatment she'd been giving him since he walked in the yard and was welcomed, was definitely working.

Boniswa was fighting demons, her arm was getting worse by the day, deep down she knew she was suffering from ancestral wrath too, something she had done years ago when she was still a teenager was coming back to bite her. Her worry was with how it will now affect Bulelwa.

Nozukile knew everything was about to come to light now, her trip to Entabeni was never a success, her powers were no longer in work which made her sweat and be nervous.

“Ndoda, you are here?”

The question was directed to Mawande. He rubbed his fingers together, gently and agreed to MamHlanga.,

“Umdaka,”

MamHlanga looked him straight in the eye, it was a staring contest that sent chills down Bulie’s spine and her eyes got all glossy. In the time she has spent with him, she has come to understand that whenever “Impure” is mentioned he did something forbidden.

“You had sex with her didn’t you?”

Bulelwa whispered but loud enough for everyone in the room and gasps came.

“Hlonipha! Abadala balapha nathi ntombazana

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”

The uncle who had occupied a bench with Bulelwa called her to respect the ritual, he also knew it was now or never, the secrets had to be out and no one stops inkanyamba when it’s here.

Bulelwa held a stern face, Bukiwe on her side held her hand and kept squeezing it.

Mawande said his apologies to the elders, he didn't further explain why he did what he did. Bulelwa was torn but the ceremony had to go on.

“Bukiwe,”

Her heart went Ice cold, she felt it beating closer to her neck.

“Ewe Gogo,” she answered and looked down

“Baphi abantwana?” – Where are the children?

She felt a lump in her throat, something she had buried deep within herself, something she never wanted to speak about ever again... but it was not her choice

“At the garden,”

As she replied, her voice was low. She couldn't raise her head to look at anyone but kept her hand locked to Bulelwa. She needed to gain strength for the coming questions

“Why did you never take them home?” MamHlanga asked

“Because their father wanted nothing to do with them, I was fifteen I had to think of a plan!”

Bulelwa was baffled, her jaw dropped on the floor and it finally hit Bulelwa that when her twin said Bathembu was her “Miracle baby” she meant that she has had children before that never survived.

“They need to be taken out and sent home. You need to give them a proper send-off, they are not resting in peace. Ngabantwana bentombi, funeka ubalilise nabadala babo!”



The shame in her eyes gave away the weakness in her, the wives of the royal homestead were definitely going to talk about her on breakfast.

She was fifteen when her boyfriend impregnated her, she never knew until the day of the delivery. She was at Nozukile's house as she was not feeling well. Nozukile knew she was pregnant but kept it to herself. It was bound to happen as it has in the past of royalty. A girl will get pregnant only to find out in the last month, the first ever twins of royalty would never survive a day. It happened to Bukiwe and instead of giving the souls a send-off, Nozukile scared Bukiwe that day on the shame she would bring to the family. Mamvelase helped with the birth of the twins, they were small but still souls. She heard their little cries, they rested on her chest before she was taken off by sleep, later waking up to a house sterilized and cleaned, when she asked about them she was told they never survived.

She asked to see where they were buried and it was in the garden. A plant grew above them and it never died, it was constantly watered only by her or Nozukile.

MamHlanga sang her song and looked straight to Bulelwa, she wished the earth could swallow her at that moment.

“You are powerful yet weak. Why are you doubting your powers? For all we know you can easily take us all out by a simple drawing. Who are you scared of?”

Bulelwa couldn't answer but look down. She couldn't pinpoint what she's actually scared of. Her disappointment in Mawande clouded her and all she wished to do at the moment was weep.

“You will have to go to the mountains, with your father, brother, sister and husband. You will have to go at night when everyone is asleep, bring a white goat, a bottle of the ancestors and leave your fear behind when you embark on that journey. Your father will be left there with his elders. Your husband is impure he will need to cleanse himself first,”

Bulelwa's heart sank, her belief in Christ didn't allow her to practice such, she respects their rituals but to slaughter and be part of the sacrifice didn't sit well with her. She kept quiet and listened to MamHlanga speak.

“Thulani, your mother is calling for you,”

She told him and Thulani agreed, he knew what she meant by that. Nobuhle wanted all her children back home, his comeback to the village was not only for his father’s ritual but for her mother’s home too. A home abandoned for years.

“The secrets of this family run deep, they have affected the relationship between the ancestors and everyone here. Know that the spirit of the elders still loom around this yard unhappy, put all your children to rest, cleanse yourselves at the river. After all that a new dawn will be revealed,”

Everyone knows when MamHlanga talks, you all listen. She left it up to them to reveal their secrets and find a common ground with everyone in the homestead. They need to appease their ancestors and do things right.

“Your day will come,”

MamHlanga looked at Nozukile, her day where the ancestors will punish her including her friends. The third wife, Majwarha felt her heart beating fast.

“Do what is expected of all of you, have dinner for the ancestors, slaughter and have a feast for the village. The rain will come should everything go well. My job here is done, it is all in your hands.”

She again went into her spiritual world chanting and kneeling to turn the candles off, moved the incense to the ground, wrapped her mat and then walked out of the royal house with Mawande by her side.

They left a dreading silence.

The King was getting better, the medicine MamHlanga gave him was now working, and he could walk with his legs but needed umsimelelo to walk with. Someone still has to guide him when he uses his hands to eat or even wash.

“Everyone may resume with their day,”

They sang praises and everyone walked out, Bulelwa walked with Bukiwe to their bedroom. As soon as they walked in Bulelwa sat on the bed with tears threatening to leave her eyes.

“I am sorry Sisi,”

Bukiwe held her in her arms. She knew this was only the beginning of the hard road.

How would she let her know that the man who impregnated her with twins at an early age was none other than her chosen husband? She knew they had to talk with Mawande and make sure Bulie never finds out about it.

## FORTY TWO

My heart was broken in a million pieces, my head was throbbing even my chest was burning. I did not know what was hurtful more? The fact that he slept with her or that I had been stupid enough to trust a man who once cheated on me and what was worse was the humiliation. I don't even know the family yet he humiliated me like that.

Bukiwe left me in the bedroom crying, she forced me to get under covers and sleep it off. As if "sleeping" will end the deep pain in my heart. I had been here before, a multiple times and it never went well for me. Years in marriage I had been abused and ill-treated. I had hoped with him it would be different. What's more painful was that I came back to a place I thought I had left for good.

I turned to my side and the door of the bedroom opened, Thulani walked in holding a tray of food. It was dim in the room, showing the sun had set and I could hear drums and songs being sung. He placed the tray on the pedestal and sat on the bed.

“How are you feeling sisi?”

I looked at him and forced a smile.

Me: “I’m hurt,”

He nodded at my sincerity and took the plate of food from the tray.

Him: “You didn’t eat anything the entire day, Boniswa is the one who cooked,”

I thanked him and opened the plate of mutton stew with fried spinach and samp, it smelled amazing...

I sat up straight and slowly ate. We talked about abstract things until I finished the plate and drank the water.

Him: “You look much better now,” He smiles and takes the plate from me.

Me: "I feel better,"

I forced a smile.

He brushed his chin and looked at me...

Him: "Please talk to him,"

I looked at him confused for a moment and then I realized who it was. I shifted..

Me: "He humiliated me, I have nothing to say to him,"

He nodded

Him: "I am sorry Sis, and I understand you. But please talk to him, I am not saying forgive him or anything, just for the sake of where we are and the rituals we have to do please talk to him



and find common ground. We can't afford anything going wrong, ancestors don't compromise sis,"

Me: "You mean to tell me I should put aside everything that has happened, forget about my feelings and how this has hurt me?"

He exhaled.

Him: "Bulelwa, no one is going to baby your feelings around here. You need to show resilience otherwise things may go wrong, this is a royal house many people envy you and right now what you're doing is showing weakness. All I'm is for you to temporarily put your differences aside, finish what we came here for and then you can look into how you feel. Just for this time we are here, don't be too emotional please,"

Me: "I'm being asked for too much, my feelings matter,"

Him: "Around here they don't sisi, please Madlomo, we're already a step forward to all this,"

He didn't wait for me to answer him, he took the tray and plates then walked out of the room. He left me in my thoughts and looking at the ceiling... having to bottle how I feel would be like asking the devil to stop burning people in hell.

His scent sold him before I could even look at him.

Me: "What do you want?"

The door closed shut and the scent became stronger as I laid on the bed with my eyes looking at the ceiling.

He occupied the space Thulani had. I felt emotions overcoming me, my heart sunk and my body felt numb.

Him: "Madlomo,"

The floodgates opened, they told the pain my heart was in. I looked at him with teary eyes, his face was full of worry, I saw a wave of pain pass his eyes as we looked at each other.

Me: “You’re not any different from him you know but at least he never publicly humiliated me like you did,” I sniffed and sat up while wiping my tears. “You made me believe you were different, your love was pure or so I thought. Do you know how hurtful is that? Mhhh? Wande? Do you know how much pain I am in?”

Him: “It was a moment of weakness sthandwa sam, I know how much pain you are feeling now Madlomo and...”

I don’t know how I managed to do it, but a hot slap landed on his face before I furiously got off the bed. He was stunned at my reaction.

I fixed the elbow band and flinched at the pain...

Me: “A moment of weakness? It hasn’t been a few months since we got back together but you still did the same shit! Why?”

I spoke on top of my voice anger coming on me at a speed of light.

Him: "Calm down sthandwa please, sit down so we can talk about this,"

I shook my head in disbelief. I pulled the chair and sat on it.

Me: "Tell me why?"

He looked at me like I had just gone crazy.

Him: "She was already at the house when I received news that a car had run you over. She was there because Majola had paid her a visit and I had to consult the elders with her present to find an explanation on why Majola would visit her instead of you. Bukiwe called in distraught and I was worried sick I couldn't function properly, that's when we..."

Me: "Slept together, how was it? Was it slow or you loved it rough with her? Did she scream your name like I do? You were worried sick yet you slept with her!! Do you think i'm a fool?"

I wiped the tears and then my hand held on the other arm as I looked at him. My heart was bleeding and the rising temperature in me was high enough to cook a feast.

Him: "It meant nothing, it was nothing close to what we have, and no emotions were involved my love please don't ask these questions and No you are not a fool Lelwa,"

Me: "You enjoyed it didn't you? For a minute in that process you totally forgot about me right? You forgot that your Lelwa had been in an accident? She even slept over at your house. Do not fucken tell me you didn't enjoy anything. Was it on the same bed I slept on with you?"

He didn't answer but looked at me like I lost my mind. He brushed his nose bridge in frustration.

Him: "It wasn't on the same bed

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no baby."

I looked at him and the tears came again... my chest was slowly closing making it hard to breathe.

Me: "I...I don't know what hurts the most...the fact that you are so weak around her or that it's not the first time you did this and this time around I had to be humiliated in front of my whole family. I'm doubting if the love was ever there or you're just putting up with me because we are tied by our ancestors! I...I.."

I couldn't go on anymore. My heart was in pain. I looked up the ceiling and sobbed. I was hurting, he disappointed me again. My doubts on him were proven. What I feared the most happened again with the same person. Clearly she had a lot of hold over him more than I do. The power she held over him was enough for my insecurities to come back dancing.

I felt his hands on my thighs and I looked down to find him kneeling.

Him: "I hate seeing you like this and me being the cause of the pain. I am deeply sorry sthandwa sam, it meant nothing, nothing like what I and you have,"

Me: "Had... what we had... I am not going to go through the same shit twice. You've made your pick Mawande, there's no more you and I,"

He shook his head and frowned

Him: "What do you mean?"

Me: "We will remain civil with each other, as husband and wife but not as lovers. We will all do what we came here to do, after that you and I are done. I am not going to do this again, not with you,"

Him: "You are breaking up with me? What about our child?  
Madlomo, no sthandwa sam it will not happen again, I am sorry  
please. I will give you space, I will give you your time, just don't  
break up with me, yhini Bulelwa!"

He begged and I looked at him plainly, I had to choose myself  
this time and not compromise all in the name of him being the  
"Chosen husband"

Me: "You've hurt me, you made me a fool twice and I will not  
stay for that. What will happen whenever I have to leave town?  
I will have to fear that you'll sleep with her? no Mawande.  
Remove your hands from me please,"

Him: "Lelwa..."

Me: "I'm not doing it again, I love you so much but you keep on  
going this low with me. I won't stand for that, I'm letting you  
go. I will let you be in your child's life but you and I can never  
happen again,"



He looked like a train just hit him. I couldn't care what he felt because he didn't think twice before sleeping with her. I was a fool to believe all that he had said about loving me when he didn't think twice before opening her thighs.

Him: "I hear you. Just know that I won't stop fighting for you Madlomo. I love you so much and it hurts to see what I have done to you. I am so sorry, truly. We will do what we came here to do and then... and we will do what you asked. I love you so much Madlomo,"

Me: "Love alone isn't enough. I hate how you messed it all up. What for? Warmth?"

I wiped my tears

Him: "I am so sorry sthandwa,"

I didn't bother with hearing his sorries any longer. I got up from the chair and went to wash my face and then walked out of the bedroom in search of Boniswa...

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“Bukiwe!”

Mawande pulled her as she was about to walk inside the house.

“Hello, something is wrong?”

He nodded and she looked at him for a brief moment.

“Come with me,” - Bukiwe

They both walked to Bukiwe’s bedroom finding Bathembu sleeping peacefully.

She checked on him as Mawande pulled the chair and sat down.

She sat on the bed and faced him.

“I messed up, so bad I don’t know how we will recover from this if we will ever,”

Bukiwe knew he was talking about his relationship with Bulelwa.

“You are weak when it comes to this Nelisiwe , that's your problem. And you don’t deserve Bulelwa. She’s too precious for this shit you keep doing to her,”

“I know and I need you to help me with her, what happened with Nelisiwe was a huge mistake... It will never happen again trust me but I am worried about Bulie, she’s going to lead this whole thing with her emotions and that will break her even more. I regret what I did, terribly... I just don’t know Bukiwe,”

He rubbed his forehead in frustration. Bukiwe looked at him and was reminded of the body he once fell for.

He had just arrived in the village, a charmer and a boy who was most loved in the village. He was hardworking and always talked alone. The river is where he spent most of playtime with his friends. He never played soccer and that was weird for a boy who was still growing. He had always given creepy vibes in the village. He was found odd by most of his peers but her father, the king adored him. He was never scarce in the royal house, the king always sat with him in the garden and told him that one day he will get married to one of his many daughters. Unknown to the king that the young boy already had his eyes on Bukiwe.

Bukiwe sighed and crossed her arms.

“Bulelwa will not forgive you anytime soon, that you may know. But my biggest worry is on how will she react when she finds the truth about the twins,”

Mawande raised his head and his eyes had turned a colour close to red because of frustrations.

“You didn’t mention it to her now did you?”

Bukiwe shook her head and he exhaled.

“We have to tell her,”

“No!”

He almost shouted.

“What do you mean No? Bulelwa deserves to know and I really do not understand why you never told her before we even met! You like complicating things marn! You messed up my life now you’re messing my sister's life! Hayi Suka!”

Bukiwe was getting angry. He knew it was more than just him hurting Bulie, but about what he did to Bukiwe.

“I was young and stupid Bukiwe!”

“And I wasn’t? We were both young but you didn’t have the spine to face the consequences! I had to be the one that had to hide my growing stomach! I had to be the one that failed at school! I had to deal with the death of children I never held in my arms for more than an hour! Whilst you were out there living your best life. Your spineless ass got Bulelwa facing humiliation! I thought I was going to keep it to myself but no! Bulelwa has to know!”

As Bukiwe was close to yelling the door opened and Bulelwa walked in followed by Boniswa. He froze and looked at Bulelwa.

“I have to know what?”

Bulelwa asked as she was stunned to find her twin with Mawande. It hit Boniswa that nothing that was discussed here was close to being something for Bulelwa’s ears.

“He is the father of the children I buried in the garden. He wanted nothing to do with them and we were still young.”

Bukiwe blurted out while her eyes were fixed on Mawande. Bulelwa just looked at him with eyes full of disgust. She no longer had tears to cry

“You never mentioned it to me. You knew her before me but never even for one day mention it to me. Anyway, you don’t owe me any explanation, you've lied enough.” – Bulelwa

Bulelwa's words stabbed his heart like a knife.

“It’s been a long day bantwana bam, a hard day. There’s a family meeting and everyone is needed at the main house. Bulelwa, Mawande and nawe Bukiwe I need a meeting of the four of us including Thulani. What you did Ndoda did was very low, even for you but we don’t have time we need to discuss family matters.”

Boniswa intervened, distinguishing the fire that was about to burn in the room. It will only get hard in the royal house! The king and his wives had secrets to tell, people to blame and children to be introduced.

## FORTY THREE

The sun had set and dusk was taking over the village of Bumbane. The crickets were noisy even the dogs were doing silly cries. Another day ended but at least there was a promise for tomorrow.

The children of King Jongikhaya were all seated at the front, the wives occupied the chairs near the throne with Uncle Jama whose Job you can never know in the house except for sitting at that bench and drinking brandy from a metal mug.

There was silence as the king sat on his throne, his whole family was present, his health was improving by the day and his speech was getting better. Things were finally on the good side for him but he knew deep down the journey to the mountains is the end of him.

"Bathembu"

He spoke with his gruff voice and there was silence.



"We all know how things have been here in the past few months, it was because we were not all in one place. Bulelwa and Thulani were the missing puzzles in this home, we should welcome them as they are one of ours"

There were nodding heads and praises from the family.

"They also have to know everyone here in this house, you are all children of the same man, you are sisters and brothers and that should make you stronger. Even though odds were against you growing together, we should make the most of the time we now have."

The king addressed the house. He drank his glass of water and then looked back at the room full of his children. He was a man proud but he knew the family held secrets!

"Bulelwa, is Bukiwe's Twin. They all slept in the same womb with Thulani and Busisiwe who had joined the ancestors. They are your elder siblings, the very first offspring of mine. I want you to get to know them, form a bond and confide in them,"

They nodded again and the entire family was looking at Bulelwa and Thulani.

The first wife wasn't so happy about the elder siblings pitching up, the fight for who's next in line for the throne in the house was not something rare. Even Nozukile had done things in the royal house with means of his son taking over.

"We will need to work together if we want to achieve the goals we have for this village. My wives here will introduce themselves,"

Uncle Jama was sitting on the bench drinking his brandy from the mug. He knew the power the twin Bulelwa had, she had a fire burning inside her and she unknowingly intimidated people in the house.

The first wife Nokwanele got up and introduced herself along with her three children. Siphumeze, Bhongolethu and Simele, they were all grown men who had deep voices. She told her

position in the house was making sure everyone is happy and taken care off...ironically, her children.

Boniswa as the second wife only took care of her friend's children, the twins and Thulani. She took care of them with her life.

The third wife, Majwarha is the one that was sent to the Abathembu royal house as a way of solving a rivalry between two families which was later found that she was a snitch. She was forgiven and only gave birth to a brother and sister, Thami and Anathi... which she protected with her life.

The fourth wife, Linda; she never had a child live past 6 days, they were either born dead or 6 days later she'll bury them. It was a cycle that continued until their husband found a fifth wife Nomfundo. Who gave birth to girls only; Nomtha, Hloniphile and Siphelo.

"Now that you all know the names of your siblings, I want you all to know that no one is above anyone, you are all children of the same man! I do not want bad blood apha kuni! I will leave

this world soon and you need to trust one another and not plan against each other. The future of this village is in the shoulders of all of you,"

He drank his water again and everyone agreed to what he was saying.

"Tomorrow we will start the ritual for Bukiwe's Children. Early at 6am everything should be ready and their souls be taken to the royal cemetery. MamHlanga will be here to guide the process. We should be done with everyone before 12 noon. Umhlontlo ka Bulelwa uyafa, we also have to take care of that tomorrow."

Uncle Jama placed the mug on the side and cleared his throat. Everyone turned to look at him.

"Ehh Bathembu, BoDlomo, we cannot do those things the same day, eli iwele lingu Bulelwa linengxaki kuqala. She has to let her mother know that she has come back home. That way she will be acknowledged. We first need to take care of what Bukiwe has to do, give her children a proper send-off, appease to the

ancestors and have the father of the children let them go. Nozukile needs to be here too, she needs to explain where they buried her placenta. Mamvelase has to come too, I will call uMabhuti and tell him to drive here. Bukiwe's children are unknown, they need names,"

The king agreed. It was set that the first thing to do in the royal house was to take care of what Bukiwe needed to do before moving to the troublesome twin Bulelwa.

The family discussed ways of moving forward... the only thing standing in their way was for Mabhuti to agree to drive Mamvelase to the royal home.

Bulelwa's mind had wandered off as the family continued discussing the way forward and when they would go to the mountains.

She thought of how life was less complicated before she met Mawande, before she got introduced to her family and all this royalty blood. How her life had been easier.

She went deep in her thoughts that she forgot where she was for a moment. She was staring into space when Linda the fourth wife noticed her. She felt pity for her and her heart broke seeing how she knew nothing about the royal house and how things are done.

Linda had observed everything that was happening around her, as someone without children she had less duties and spent most of her time knitting and observing the household. She was the eagle of the royal house.

When the meeting was over, Bukiwe nudged Bulelwa back to reality and she looked around before getting up from the couch and walking to her bedroom.

Linda excused herself from the elders and walked to Bulelwa's Bedroom

She knocked and then walked in, finding her about to change clothes.

"Molo Sisi,"

"Eweke Ma,"

"Do you have a minute?"

She smiled and Bulelwa nodded. The both sat on the chairs.

"Uhm, ndingu Linda. The one who never gave birth!"

She chuckled at her own statement and Bulelwa just plainly looked at her. She knew how hard it was to be in Linda's Position, she had been there before and wouldn't dare laugh at her pain.

"Uhm mntanam, I saw how that boy humiliated you, I know how you feel especially with the whole royalty thing that is new to you. I want to tell you that, you need to prepare yourself for the worst. The journey to the mountains will test your sanity! I've been there and it's not nice at all. Forgive your sister for not telling you that she knew your husband, if you can, try and lose

the anger you have towards your husband. At this point he is chosen for you and you are chosen for him, should you not warm things out nothing will go well! The ancestors aren't fools mntanam,"

Bulelwa feared exactly what Linda was telling her, she feared that she'll have to forgive Mawande before anything could take place.

"Kodwa Ma he cheated, for the second time!"

Linda chuckled and looked at her.

"Baby girl, all men do is lie and cheat! Do not think yours is any better because he is spiritually gifted! Your's is actually worse. And you have no choice but forgive him or you'll block his mind from connecting with his elders. I am sure that the ritual they'll do will be a disaster, he cannot connect to his elders because of you. Listen, abaphantsi acknowledge you as the wife and him as the husband, you tied a spiritual knot! If one is angry with the other, the one who did something wrong cannot connect to the



elders until you have let go and truly forgiven him. Same applies to you

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your ability to draw and paint cannot happen if he is mad at you. Both of you are spiritual children and that alone is one dangerous combo!!"

Bulelwa couldn't believe what she heard from the lady. She couldn't afford things going south for Bukiwe as much as her feelings were hurt. She looked at her and rubbed her face.

"Mkhulule sana lwam! Mxolele izinto zizobakakuhle, find him before morning otherwise the entire thing planned will be a disaster and it will only anger the ancestors. It is very frustrating sana lwam I know. Find his reasons for sleeping with that girl. Force the truth out of him because whatever he told you wasn't true,"

Bulelwa was even more frustrated about this whole thing. She hated the lies that he told her! They irked her.

"Where will I find him at this time ma?"

"He is your husband, you know where he is, I will leave you child. Remember to stay strong, this road is not easy, take it from me. My room is always open if you want to talk,"

Bulelwa nodded and Linda walked out of the room and bid her goodbye.

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"You know it's not good for someone who's pregnant to search for you in this yard full of spirits, why haven't you gone home?"

I asked him after spending over 30 minutes searching and asking people if they had seen him in the yard with only the flashlight in my cell phone.

What Linda said had me thinking about the worst that could happen if he couldn't connect to his ancestors. I quickly wore my shoes and searched for him around the yard.

Him: "Madlomo,"

His voice was low, he sounded as someone who had been crying, the light this side was on. He was sitting on the ground staring into space.

He sniffed and I felt a little stab in my heart. He had been crying...

Me: "Let's go inside I want us to talk,"

Him: "Come sit with me,"

Me: "I can't sit on dirt marn, get up!"

He chuckled and I gave him my hand. I pulled him up. I flinched at the slight pain of my elbow...

Me: "You sound like you've been crying, have you had anything to eat?"

He nodded and smiled faintly.

Him: "You said you are leaving me,

Me: "I still am,"

I looked at him and he was indeed crying, his eyes were bloodshot red. He looked like he lost a life.

Him: "Madlomo, can't we find a way to move past this, I'm really not coping and I need you,"

Me: "Where's your car?"

I asked before he could lose it again

Him: "Parked At the front, why are you asking?"

Me: "You are taking me for a drive..."

I could sense his confusion as we both walked to his car, he opened the door and I climbed in, he also went to his side.

Him: "Where should I drive to?"

Me: "somewhere peaceful, I want us to talk, away from these walls,"

He nodded and started his car, we drove around with nothing but jazz playing on the car, I rested my head and I closed my eyes listening to the soft tune and the motion of the car.

The car came to a halt and he tapped my shoulders.

Him: "We're here,"

I looked out and I could see lights of the royal house and the neighbors, it was dark but the moon and the stars gave the village light. The landscape was breathtaking.

Me: "It's beautiful up here, wow,"

Him: "You want to get out?"

He didn't have to ask twice. I had already unbuckled the seat belt and jumped out of the car. The wind was cooler up here, it was so beautiful the stars came out to play too.

Me: "It feels like I have been here before, It's beautiful,"

We both leaned against the bonnet as I took in the beauty of this village.

Him: "You probably have..."

We stood there in silence....

Me: "I wanted us to talk about Nelisiwe, I fail to understand why you keep going to her fully knowing you and I cannot break up. I know you said it was a moment of weakness but that's bullshit and you know it. So I need you to be honest and tell the truth,"

I looked at him

Him: "Honestly Madlomo, It was stupid of me, very stupid. I know I should've told you or rather asked you. So Nelisiwe came over because Majola had paid her a visit, I needed to break her from my home chains and by that I had to enter her, we used a condom and it had no emotions in there or whatsoever. Same thing that had happened to you I had to do it to her, we were tied and that would've meant problems for us so I had to consult and then claim my right back from her,"

Me: "You are not making sense,"

Him: "I had to untie her from me, clean her and make sure she's not spiritually inclined to me, Or I guess that's how I thought my dream meant,"

Me: "MamHlanga said you are impure,"

Him: "That's because there was another way except for sleeping with her, I am in cleansing now, I have to stay 6 weeks without sleeping with a woman so that I can be clean from all ties."

Me: "I can't say I understand because I clearly don't. and what you're saying doesn't justify the fact that you cheated on me!"

Him: "I know and I am willing to do anything for you to forgive me and earn your trust again,"

Me: "I forgive you but it doesn't mean we are back together, you still have to work your way to this heart again. I am not holding anything against you, I hate what you did to me with



my all. But seeing where we are, I am forced to let it all go so you are able to connect with your elders,”

Him: “How did you find out about that?”

Me: “Just know that I now know that I hold that power over you. You also need to apologise to Bukiwe, sincerely and stop saying you were too young back then, that doesn't make anything better or justify your spinelessness. And from now moving on you need to be honest, fully honest I can't keep hearing things from people,”

## FORTY FOUR

It has been a week since we all arrived at the royal house. A week filled with frustrations, a draining week that had me almost lose my sanity.

What we thought would be a weekend long trip turned out to be longer than what we had anticipated.

My baby's growing and the pregnancy bump was more visible as I marked 17 weeks.

Thulani, Bukiwe, Boniswa and I have done several trips to the river to let mother know we had set our foot in her motherland. We visited the house she grew up in and it was deserted, we found a secure yard with only one rondavel and the grass was long enough to reach our knees. We had to hire people to clean the yard. Thulani is set to build a house, the rondavel had her childhood pictures, it held memories of her whole family we never knew. The neighbours told us that her sister got married and moved to Gauteng with her husband, she has never come home since. The uncle who usually checked

on the yard was none other than Jama. He told us he knew that someday everyone would come back home.

We tried to reach out to our mother's sister but nothing passed. We only carry hope that one day she'll remember home.

Bukiwe's rituals went really well, nothing stood on the way, Mamvelase told the family where they had buried everything... the babies with their cords and the mother's placenta.

The clouds lingered that day, but no rain came; the drought was severe even water at the river was no longer clean. The village problems reported were more.

Mawande hasn't been himself since that drive we had, I'd like to think it has been since then. He didn't talk much, just did what was expected of him and spent most of his hours either walking around the village or with MamHlanga. I asked him about the sudden change and he didn't give much attention to it. He assured me he was okay and I decided to not fuss over it.

Thulani only had to take care of mother and her things, him and the royal house shenanigans were not likely.

"Bulelwa!"

Bukiwe snapped me out of my thoughts as we were placing some pearls on umhlontlo to mark the finish of the morning ritual I had to do.

"I'm still here, just thinking,"

I answered as I placed a cowrie shell around the tree then pouring the bottled river water.

"Okay,"

She answered and moved to do the same with her tree.

Her: "At what time are you going there?"

I felt my whole body shiver as she asked that.

Earlier in the week Wande told me that I had to visit his mother's home to serve lunch to the elders. I had been wishing for the week to never come to an end, heavily pregnant and having to serve adults who are probably problematic was something I never prepared myself for. MamHlanga said it has to be done before we journey to the mountains.

Me: "Before lunchtime, apparently they are having a ceremony for the family, only father, Boniswa and Uncle Jama will be there for our family part. MamHlanga said they are not doing something huge so there's no need for everyone to come, and I'm worried Sis, Wande has been off lately,"

I said as we both walked back to the rondavel.

Her: " Off how? Do you think he's worried about something?"

Me: "At this point I don't know what to think sis, but whatever is bothering him is something huge,"

We walked in the rondavel and placed the watering cans, before we closed and walked to the main house as the sun was starting to rise.

Her: "Maybe he is just worried about this lunch and how you will take everything,"

Me: "Maybe, but I don't think it will be something I can't handle"

Her: "yes,"

I fanned myself as we walked inside the house to the kitchen, and found Nomtha staring into space.

"Nomthawelanga"

I snapped her out of the dreamland and she just smiled and giggled. Something about her was off! She was not normal like the rest of the kids, her voice was pitchy and she smiled a lot! Too much was creepy... But for someone who knew how these things worked I suspected down syndrome or multiple personality disorder.

"Gogo ubulisile, athe you should send her regards to the elders Bulelwa,"

"Which Gogo Nomtha?" - Bukiwe

I was lost and still looked at her.

"MamThembu" she smiled and wiped off her cheeks and smiled showing her beautiful teeth.

I looked at her lost and then nodded... evident that she talked about someone who has passed.

"I will do so my love,"

I told her and smiled too. She got up from her chair and walked out of the kitchen.

Bukiwe: "What was that about?"



Me: "Don't ask, Nomtha has a mind of her own. Maybe she's like Bathembu. Talking about Bathembu, where is he?"

Bukiwe: "He slept with Boniswa, something about bonding with her grandkid!"

We looked at each other and laughed. Bukiwe has been working hard to accommodate everyone in the house, specifically me so a break from the forever hyper Bathembu was needed.

Me: "Should we start with breakfast?"

Her: "Just do something for you to eat, I don't think everyone will have breakfast,"

Me: "Okay, I am hungry and the heat is not helping either! Hayi the rain should just pour already,"

I fanned myself as I walked to the sink to wash hands

Her: "It really should come soon, this heat has killed everything around here, It's like we're in Kalahari or shit like that,"

I laughed

"You know you're not allowed to curse in the royal house,"

Thulani said with his morning voice, I turned and chuckled.

He walked in wearing overalls and some black shoes.

Bukiwe: "You need to wash bhuti that smell is not it,"

Thulani: "Smell se Ndoda esi Sisi wam! A hardworking man doesn't smell all sweet marn! Ikhwapha malikrakra,"

He laughed as he passed Bukiwe irritating her with his pig smell!

I shook my head and took the bread.

Me: "hayi suka! There's no such thing here Thulani! Wonqena nje amanzi wena,"

Her: "We might not have water in the village but that doesn't mean smell like a pig marn!"

He laughed and washed his hands in the sink.

Him: " Ndiyekeni, and wena Bulie, when are you going to feed snakes!?"

Bukiwe almost choked in her saliva with laughter.

Her: "Thulani hayi marn!!"

Me: "Feed snakes? Me? Where?"

They looked at each other and laughed at my confusion. If anyone would be feeding anything, it would be me feeding them to the snakes.

Him: "You? Didn't!!?"

He directed the incoherent question to Bukiwe who just shook her head and laughed.

Me: "Sanundidika!"

Thulani came to stand next to me and he was indeed smelly.

Him: "You my sister will get the shock of your life! I will be here when you're traumatized vha!"

Me: "Sundidika Thulani!"

I rolled my eyes and I cut the bread into slices.

Her: "Leave Bulie alone marn!"

Him: "hayi I will, anyway, father asked you guys to prepare breakfast for the whole family, which I think falls into Bukiwe, Nomtha and Anathi because the rest of the girls are fetching water, the men are at the kraal and Bulelwa here will be with Boniswa preparing for the day, the boys will obviously be around to do whatever, so finish eating Bulie and then go to Boniswa,"

I nodded as He told the agenda of the day, honestly grateful to not be preparing breakfast! There's like a thousand people in the yard! Half of them aren't even here at night when we sleep. But anyway, the royal house would always be full.

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"You've been distant,"

I told him as we sat down on the bench looking at the yard full of people. I thought the ceremony was only for the family and it was supposed to be something small but I guess there's never such a thing as "something small" in the village.

Him: "I've been busy Sthandwa sam

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with everything and... I am tired," He exhaled and his eyes told the story.

He leaned on my shoulder and I held him.

Me: "You want us to talk?"

The herbs he used had a strong scent, a scent that was raw and herbaceous.

Him: "I just want peace sthandwa sam. I don't think I can go on with the voices, it's hard, I only want you next to me everyday and forget about the problems of the world,"

As he talked I noticed his spiritual gift was what he needed a break from. Unfortunately, when the elders choose you there's no backing down.

Me: "You can and you will Dlamini, when all this is over we should take a break and maybe visit Cape Town or Durban,"

He smiled and placed his hand on my baby bump.

Him: "You want us to try again?"

A question I had been dreading to answer. Did I really want to? Yes of course.

Me: "You've been distant lately I didn't think you were anywhere interested. I felt like you kind of gave up?"

Him: " I didn't give up, I just had to give you time for your family and also focus on my spiritual gift. It's hard Sthandwa, I'm on the verge of giving up the whole thing,"

He needed strength.

Me: "I will be here for you, remember no matter how hard it is sthandwa, the elders trusted you with this okay? We will get through this and we'll go to that holiday,"

He chuckled.

Him: "I want to.... I want to drive you somewhere and have you screaming my name,"

He whispered in my ear and I felt my body getting hot.



Me: "Wande!"

He laughed and I joined in. His eyes lit up and saw a light of life again.

Him: "So what do you say?"

He breathed too close to my neck and it sent tingles all over my body!

Me: "6 weeks remember, we are only a week down!"

He groaned and he held me to his arms.

Him: "There isn't one way to have sex you know,"

"Heeeey you are not allowed to sleep together in any way! And you will wait!!"

We both jumped at the voice and turned to meet MamHlanga's gaze.

I flushed and it felt like we were little kids busted while stealing sugar.

“Thokoza Gogo”

Mawande greeted her and she shook her head.

“Give me a minute with your wife Ndoda,”

He nodded and moved from the bench, MamHlanga took the seat and I felt her presence strongly.

Her: “Madlomo,” she chuckled and I smiled at her.

Me: “Gogo,”

Her: "You're taking care of him, well I have to say ntombam. It's been a long time since I saw him cling on a woman like that. But be careful not to be too nice on him, sometimes you should just let his bomb tick until it explodes!"

She laughed and I nodded.

Her: "Teach the man a lesson my darling. Anyway, the elders have arrived and don't worry, everything will go well. Don't be scared of them. Your job is to serve them food and inantsika lento... umqombothi. Nelisiwe is here too and you will take the pot from her okay,"

I nodded and I went ice cold at the mention of her name. Something about her doesn't sit well with me.

Me: "Ewe gogo, ndikuvile,"

Her: "Don't let her intimidate you, she's not worth your energy,"

She got up and brushed my shoulders before humming a song and walking away.

I sat on the bench until a boy came to tell me I'm needed at the main house.

Everyone was present as I walked in, it looked as if the whole kitchen was moved and only the big pots and the gas stove were left. The elders were here, my family and Wande's too.

We did the introduction and I finally met his sisters, they were exactly like their mother. Ziyanda was here too and she smiled when she saw me.

“Ziyanda will go with you to the elders house, they will be there until lunchtime is over, what you will do is take food to them

and tell them who you are, that way they will recognise you because you are the rightful wife,” The uncle spoke up and I nodded.

Mawande's mother took my hand and Nelisiwe dished up the meat and samp in separate dishes, they were big ones and I wondered whether the elders were many.

The ululations started outside.

Mawande's mother handed me a bottle of white gin.

“You will pour this on the doorstep before you enter, you are not allowed to drink so pouring will do for you. Mntanam please don't be scared okay, don't scream or cry just be neutral you can cry all you can once you are out of that rondavel okay!”

I nodded not fully understanding what she meant.

Nelisiwe handed the small black pot to me, she looked distraught and not the feisty lady I once met. Her face had eye bags and it looked like she hadn't slept a wink for days.

“I am handing everything to you Madlomo, take care of the family and everyone here. Do not open this pot, you will place it at the center of the rondavel, leave the empty bottle outside. Ziyanda and Boniswa will carry the other dishes for you, wena only carry this and the bottle.”

She smiled faintly and I nodded and thanked her.

Mawande's sister came to hand me a scarf I should place on my shoulders.

“Majola came with bawomkhulu, we respect here but since you don't understand us, there are about two snakes in the rondavel. Mawande is there and Bulelwa do not freak out!! They are our elders and I feel like I have to tell you because I don't want a thing to go wrong!”

I felt my blood boil and palms immediately got wet. My hair moved and my brain went straight into freeze mode.

Me: “what do you mean? I have to feed snak... you know?”

My eyes were about to pop! My entire body was now sweating.

Her: “They won't bite, nor will they move. You will serve the food and Umqombothi, then tell them who you are. Mawande will hold your hand, please don't fear anything Madlomo, we've been assured everything will go well but it's up to you to make sure,”

Mawande's sister held my hand and fixed the scarf one more time.

I mentally prepared myself as we walked to the rondavel, the yard was full with men singing and drums were loud.

It was like I was walking on a road of darkness, I was barefoot and the scorching sun was not helping on my skin. We arrived at the doorstep.

I opened the bottle, I talked on it announcing my presence.

I poured it all on the ground watching the soil swallow it and the sprinkles of it dampening my feet.

The minute the door opened I felt their presence strongly, the same thing that had happened when I first told Wande about the pregnancy happened again... this time it didn't make me faint.

The Impepho was burning and the smoke was strong. I walked in and My eyes landed on them. About 3, fat and long like anacondas.

One was white, the other one beige brown and another White with black spots. My mind blocked me from thinking and I felt



the movements in my stomach. The very first time I felt my baby move and I wanted to cry.

He recited his mother's clan names as I walked further in and placed the pot at centre and knelt.

I made my presence known and talked to them. I told them about me and what I am to their son.

Mawande held my hand and also spoke to them.

One of them moved and I held the urge to scream and run out of there.

He squeezed my hand. And opened the pot, the smell of blood was strong.

“It's chicken,”

He whispered and held on to me. At Least it was not human blood.

“Take a three cups of it and pour on the ground Madlomo,”

I did as told with my hand shaking!

They all untangled and moved to lie where I poured the blood staining their pattern. I wanted to cry, scream and curse the hell out of them. My heart beat was loud too.

“Now take that dish of meat and do the same, leave umqombothi kwi selwa. Don't worry the ground is clean. The samp should remain where it's at too.”

I pulled the dish and did as told.

He got up and pulled me up too, he hugged me and held my hand. We walked out and closed the rondavel door. The sound of a breaking calabash caused ululations all around the yard.

It was a sign of welcome. I also have a husband to kill for not letting me know before doing all this.

## Forty Five

Had someone told me that months after I set my foot on the grounds of Port Elizabeth: I would be pregnant, divorced and remarried to my rightful husband traditionally; A twin who has a gift of panting “the future”; a daughter of a king who was close to death because of secrets he had kept; A sister to more than five siblings and a wife who has been welcomed to the Jola clan by the sound of a breaking calabash- I would have told them they are mad, and I would’ve told them to go fetch their change from wherever they were trained to tell the future. I wouldn’t have believed that I would fall deeply in love with a man who wears red and white beadwork, a man who can zone out at any time of the day because his ancestors decided to tell him news. A man whose dreadlocks are never untied, who doesn’t eat pork and has to balance his work with the work of his ancestors, A man who has a scent that I could identify a meter away from me.

Who would have thought that when I bumped into him at that shopping mall, he would be the one to lead me back home? I would find the family I thought never had? The twins and the rest of the crazy siblings that sing and tell odd stories about the

village when we go down to the river in the morning. I know I'd never had thought it would turn out like that.

The blood boiling and shaking that happened at that rondavel when I fed the elders had me reflecting back on the life before the breaking calabash.

“What are you thinking about Madlomo?”

He snapped me out of my thoughts as I was alone in the kitchen peeling the veg.

His hands held my waist and then rested his head on my shoulders.

Me: “Nothing much,”

Him: “Can’t I steal you for a minute, Mazizi will take care of the peeling,”

Me: "I have to be here and make sure everyone eats, I actually thought this was supposed to be a small ceremony. The yard is full!"

His chest vibrated with laughter

Him: "There's never such a thing as small something here sthandwa, you see a smoke and pots the entire village invites itself. And you don't need to do anything, we haven't paid Lobola yet... Masambe Lelwa,"

He pleaded and I laughed. I grabbed a cloth and wiped my hands. Thank god there was no one with me in the kitchen, the stares I would have got!

"Where are we going?"

I asked as I closed the car door with the engine already roaring.

Him: "I'm taking you somewhere,"

Me: "And where would be that?"

Him: "You will see,"

He smiled and drove the car.

He stopped at a hill, the mountains of Bumbane ever so beautiful and the view of the river water looked fresh and clean downhill. This side of the village; the grass was green, the sun shone and the little waterfall caused by the river rocks was magnificent.

"This side of the village is beautiful,"

I said as I stepped out of the car. He walked to my side and his hand held my waist.

"Just like you,"

I chuckled

Me: "Flattery will not get you anywhere bhuti,"

Him: "But it will get me to the right side of your bed,"

I looked at him and shook my head.

Him: "Let's walk near to the water, I want to show you something!"

Me: "We're going down this hill? How in the hell are we going to walk up. I'm pregnant Wande!"

Him: "I'll carry you up sthandwa,"

Me: "Take out a bottle of water, we'll go,"

He quickly took out the bottle and we walked down the hill hand-in-hand.

Me: “I didn’t know this side of the village, it’s so full of life and it feels like I have been here before,”

Him: “That’s because this is the sacred part, we are on the other side of the mountain, the mouth of entabeni. This is where we all come to feel close to our ancestors and a place where I slept on months before I accepted my calling,”

I smiled and felt warm that he had brought me to a place that meant a lot to him. Indeed there was peace on this side. Birds were chirping, the sun had made the plants that grew on the river bank to be more beautiful, the clay soil and iingcongolo were healthier.

He ordered me to take off my shoes as we reached the water, he went in first and announced his arrival as well as that he was with me. He asked the elders of the water to welcome us.



I would say it was magic but it was never close to that, the water was calm after, showing off its sparkling beauty.

He reached out his hand for me to take, the minute I stepped inside I strongly felt the spirits. It was not like the other river I went into several mornings, the water was cold and held peace.

I held my long dress up as tiny rocks welcomed my feet.

I smiled.

My soul felt like it connected with heavens that I closed my eyes for a minute and said my prayers inside. He held both my hands and allowed me to thank God for everything further asking for strength to carry on.

I opened my eyes and the environment felt a little different. I was lighter like my prayers had been answered immediately.

He looked at me with a smile.

Him: "You felt the connection didn't you?"

I nodded.

Me: "And you made me let go of the dress, now It will be all wet!"

Him: "Wet? Mhh I like that," he had a corny smile and I slapped his hand playfully.

Me: "Don't say stuff like that marn!"

He chuckled and I giggled.

We walked further in and I held on to him. I felt the little kicks and I smiled with my hand already going to hold my stomach.

We didn't talk much inside, he made me kneel so the water would reach my waist, it was still the shallow part of the river he held my hands and declared his love for me. Again.

He accepted me as his "wife" and then we got out of the water and walked on the bank taking in the huge mountains and rocks that surrounded the place.

Me: "Is this the place we would have to come and leave father?"

I asked as he held my hand.

Him: "Yes, One day you will come here for me,"

I looked at him and he shrugged his shoulders.

Him: "You see that tree with a rock under its shade??"

I nodded as he pointed on the other side of the river where a tree full with green branches that looked like they never bear fruits stood tall with a big rock under its shade.

Him: "That is where I will be, you will need to take ibhayi with my beads and itshoba and come place them there for me to rest in peace,"

My heart sank as he talked about death that I squeezed his hand.

Me: "Don't say things like that please,"

Him: "I am sorry sthandwa, but one day it will happen. Death is something we cannot escape,"

Me: "Let's not talk about it ke, I don't like the idea of you not being here with me,"

Him: "At Least I'm not the one to die after you

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I plainly looked at him and he laughed at me.

Him: “I am sorry ke sthandwa... and do you know that you’re the only person I’ve brought here and never freaked out,”

Me: “Serious? Who else have you brought here?”

Him: “Yes. I once tried with Nelisiwe but we never even make it to the river bank, we had to turn back because the storm was coming and she freaked out,”

I felt needles at the mention of her name. I looked down as we walked.

Me: “Mhh,”

He tightened his grip on my hand and we stopped. He looked at me but I looked down. He pulled my chin up and made me look at him

Him: “Sthandwa, I know I should’ve handled her matter better, I know that I wronged you Madlomo and I am deeply sorry, I know what I’m saying won’t change the fact that I did you wrong, I sincerely apologise Madlomo,”

I looked at him and I felt a tear leave my left eye.

Me: “Why was she there today? And she looked drained,”

I tried to move the topic but he still looked at me with eyes full of remorse. His beard had grown and made him look older than his age.

I wiped the tear and moved away from him but he pulled my waist

“Bulelwa!”

I felt my back shiver at the mention of my full name.

Me: “Let’s rather not Wande,”

Him: “She was there to hand over the duties to you, she came here because MamHlanga had to cleanse her and make sure she doesn’t carry any spirits with her because of me.

Madlomo... I am tired. And I fear doing this with you, I am scared that one day I will turn to that monster I was and harm you and our children, and this is why I kept on going back to Nelisiwe. Before I am a spiritually gifted person, I am Mawande; the man who was once lost. The cleansing may happen sthandwa but it doesn’t heal our fears and anxieties. I’m human before I am a child of my elders...”

He didn’t finish what he was saying, he looked down... I knew his feelings were valid and true. He was bound to be unsure of his future at some point. I had forgotten all about his past the day he was full of joy that I was pregnant.

He made a mistake of letting his past judge his future. We all move forward and seek help, he obviously never did that.

I took his hands to mine and looked at him in the eye. The change of colour was evident, that was how he revealed his cries, his eyes would turn red and veins pop in his forehead.

Me: "I know you will be a better father, and I know that you are capable of coming out of that place your fears take you to everyday. We both have a history that we wish we could erase or change, but unfortunately God never gave us that power. Dlamini I need you to allow yourself to feel and talk to me, I will never judge you based on what you were, in fact, if I did, we wouldn't be standing here at this place together. I am your safe place Dlamini, with me you can be as weak and vulnerable as you can I will never judge you. Remember: I was chosen for you and you were chosen for me"

I chuckle and he joined in too holding me closer to him



Him: "I will walk this journey with you Madlomo, I will hold on to you. I am not promising you a perfect husband but at least I'll be the best for our family,"

His hand held my tummy.

Me: "Promise me that you will seek help,"

Him: "Sthandwa..."

Me: "Mawande... you don't have to attend therapy, just see someone who is trained to attend to such matters. Who will understand the gift you have. I can only listen to you but not tell you what you can do or deal with your traumas,"

He nodded and smiled, then pulled me to his arms. He hugged me tightly.

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The door of the bedroom cracked open as I was preparing to sleep.

The night was quiet, too quiet it seemed as the village had slept earlier than usual. The only sound was of dogs whining at a distance.

"Bulie,"

The voice whispered as I turned to turn on the lamp... my eyes met with his.

Me: "You're not supposed to be here! And how did you?"

I asked getting off the bed wrapping the gown around me. I quickly pulled him in and closed the door and locked it.

He didn't look like the Wande I went to the river with just this afternoon. He took off his shoes and climbed on the bed resting his his on the pillow.

Me: "Wande you do know that you're not allowed at the royal house today!"

I walked to the bed and sat next to him. He smelt like vodka mixed with strong impepho and smoke.

He moved and then tapped the space he left

Him: "Iza Madlomo,"

He spoke in a low gruff voice, whatever he drank after we left his home got him strong. His mouth wreaked strong alcohol.

I took off the gown and climbed on the bed, I sat up balancing my back on the comfortable headboard that probably cost an arm and a leg.

Me: "You are drunk,"

Him: "I'm not... turn off the lamp,"

I did as told and the room turned dark, he laid his head on my thighs... we sat in silence until I felt warm liquid on my thighs. I remained still.

He sniffed and held on to me. My heart clenched. I rubbed his back like a baby encouraging him to let it out.

It went on for a long time until he moved his head and pulled my nighty dress. I helped him take it off and left me with only my panty.

His glass beads felt cold against my skin.

He planted a soft kiss on my lips. I moved my face to the side at the smell of alcohol that made my stomach act up...

Me: "You smell of alcohol..."

I whispered and pushed him to the side. I got up and turned on the lamp, grabbed my gown and tightened the belt.

I looked at him and his eyes were red. He looked nothing like the man I knew.

I crossed my arms.

Me: "What's wrong with you huh?"

Him: "Turn off the lamp Madlomo,"

He whispered

Me: "Why? I need to understand why first and what are you doing here at this time!"

I tried to talk as low as I could. He moved and sat upright on the edge of the bed looking at me. His feet were on the mat.

Him: "I saw it coming, it was my fault, I didn't even warn her... I wanted to but It was too late,"

I moved closer to him and held his hands.

Me: "What happened?"

Him: "Mama undishiyile, she didn't wake up from that nap... please turn-the- lamp-of,"

He choked on his words and looked down. I held him tightly and his face laid on the baby bump.

I brushed his back and reached for the lamp switch with my other arm.

The bedroom was dark again and I heard him release reluctant groans and sniffs.

Me: "Let it all out Dlamini, don't hold back,"

I gave him permission. I had to.

I looked on the roof to stop my own tears from wetting my face.

I knew the pain of losing a parent. It's never one that can be healed by anything... it never heals, we just learn to live with it.

Him: "She didn't fight Madlomo... she... she just let it be,"

He whispered with pain evident in his voice.

He let out a loud groan and he released his painful cries.

"Ngxesi Dlamini,"

I softly said to him and tightened my hold. I continued to rub his back and offer comfort.

FORTY SIX

"Right there my love!! Ahhhhh!!"

I screamed as another wave of pleasure showered me!

We had been at it for the longest, him on top and me under him with a pillow under my waist for balance and giving him room to thrust in harder and faster.

Today marked exactly a year since he lost his mother and I lost a mother inlaw. Things had been nothing but hectic. The only time he cried was on that silent night when he came to tell me about her. Since then, we never touched the subject of how he felt about his mother's death.

But what can be told is that he grieved for her in a very odd way, a way that caused our relationship to take a toll, he was distant. It became worse when we came back to Port Elizabeth



from the village, he had me move in with him but he would stay half of his day in his hut, only come back to eat and then spend the rest of the day in his home office working.

The only time he became okay again was when we went on a vacation to Cape Town, we met with his old friends and he became alive again. The late night walks in the Cape forced us to talk about our fears and where to from here. We talked about the strain in our relationship and what we could do better. It helped. The relationship became alive again but there's always that thought of 'until when'.

The year was strenuous to me and my royal family. But safe to say, every road we walked was worth it... each challenge we faced changed us to be better and more intact.

A week after Mawande's mother was buried, we had to take a long walk to Entabeni. That was the longest I had walked. The walk that almost killed me.

Each ritual performed there was for me, Bukiwe and Busisiwe. To my shock, Busisiwe was used as a sacrifice by the royal family to better the health of the forefathers. I was told I had to give away a child too but I fought and told them straight that it will never happen, they had to find another way to solve their problems. My children were never going to suffer because of some generational curse. I stood my ground and it helped.

Father had to pay for his sins by giving away one thing that mattered the most to him; his throne. He had to step down and further do a feast for the ancestors, slaughter goats for each and every child that was used as sacrifice in his line of generation. It meant a lot of secrets the wives had kept had to be exposed. They had to come forward and confess their sins for things to be okay. They had to bury their children in a rightful manner, give them names and a warm place to rest.

It was a week that took a lot from me, a week where my sanity was tested to the limit but apart from it; trees were uprooted, others were planted. We buried bones of children we never knew. We were cleansed at the river and a feast was prepared. The clouds lingered but the rain never came.

Father knew he had to go. He had to leave the royal house and go to the mountains alone. The rituals were done, everything went according to plan but MamHlanga insisted that father did not complete what was asked of him. And so, later that night, the dogs whined again, made funny sounds and no one was allowed to leave their bedroom.

We woke up the following morning to a quiet house. No one knew what was the move, and so we remained neutral and got on with our daily runnings.

Uncle Jama protected the throne with his life. He made sure no one came and claimed that there was no leadership in the royal home, he took on the work of the king alongside Linda and Boniswa. The youngest wife left the royal house. No one knows

where she went, but she woke up one morning and decided she was over and done with the nonsense. She left her children behind but the elders said she would be back soon.

Three days later after father's departure for the mountains, we heard a noise at the front gate.

It was the family from April's homestead. Apparently, his mother had developed blisters and sores all over her body and nothing could be done for her by her healers and even western doctors. She was bedridden and the businesses they owned were failing. Their evil ways had caught up with them and unfortunate that the mother had to pay the price.

MamHlanga told them to go where she spent her red money. That none of us were in position to help her, she would remain like that until her last breath. And so they left with tails between their legs.

Later in that same evening, Father pitched up holding a dagger and a rusted brown case. He looked like he was starved.

The elders of the family took care of him, I saw them gathered under that tree Bukiwe once told me it was creepy.

Boniswa told me I had to pour salt water under the tree and ask for guidance from the ancestors. I took the rough sea-salt and mixed it with water from the river in a 2litre bottle that I shook until the salt dissolved into the water.

As we stood under that tree after I had poured the whole salt water; storm raged and the long awaited rain finally came.

We heard screams of joy and the whole village got out of their houses to celebrate the long awaited rain.

It rained heavily for the whole week, while the family sorted throne issues.

Lobola was paid the following week after the rain, I was introduced to the Dlamini clan and was accepted as the wife to their first son.

Thulani's project at building my mothers family home seemed to be going well, even though building at a village has its challenges, he's a person who loves it there and every weekend he is at the royal home.

Bukiwe had been doing really well, she called last night and told me about how Bathembu was now talking, his speech had improved and was talking non-stop. Her arms were okay too. Nomthawelanga was close to me because I understood her better than anyone at that royal house. We share the same love for painting.

I gave birth in February of this new year to my beautiful daughter twins. We named them Thalande and Lilitha, they marked their 6th month of being in the world last week and I've never been happier. They adore their father so much... more than they do me.

"Madlomo..."

He whispered softly as he spooned me after the love making session.

Me: "Sthandwa,"

Him: "Thank you for that, I had forgotten how good you are..."

He kissed my shoulders and I smiled.

We haven't had sex for months, he feared he would hurt me as I gave birth through natural birth and had about six stitches

because of the girls' weight.. I gained my strength that day I pushed them out as I cried loudly at the excruciating pain I felt. The weeks after their birth were the worst. The pain from the stitches made me swear to never ever get pregnant. But more than that, I was happy because I now had tiny human beings that took my face, their fathers eyes and my fatness. Human beings who'd call me mom and depend on me for everything.

Him: "what are you thinking about?"

He took me out of my thoughts as he brushed my thighs

Me: "nothing important, I'm just happy oft how far we've come as a couple and now as parents,"

Him: "mhh-hh, we've been through a lot Sthandwa, but we are here now, Still going strong and pushing everyday,"

Me: "Oh yes and my love for you grows everyday you know that,"



I turned to face him and he pulled my leg to go over his and I felt him growing again in between my thighs.

Him: "I love you so much Madlomo, you've given me a gift for life, you've walked with me even on my darkest days and in hours I thought I would survive. You held me with your hands. Ndiyakuthanda vha!"

Me: "You're going to make me cry now, Ndiyakuthanda nam,"

A kiss followed and my leg was pulled even closer.

Him: "come on top,"

Me: "andifuni,"

His chest vibrated with laughter as he slid in whilst we laid on our sides facing each other. He didn't move but looked at me with a corny smile.

I was breathless as I welcomed his length

Me: "sthdw..ahhh! move.."

I structured an incoherent sentence.

He quickly changed position and I found my body on top of his with me taking the whole of him.

I screamed in laughter as he did that.

Him: "Now move with me babey... do that thing of yours  
Madlomo

"

I giggled and shook my head at his statement.

I placed my hands on his chest, positioned myself on top of him. I took him in again and the pleasure of it entering my

insides made me gasp and I threw my head back for a second. I moved slowly and enjoyed the ride, I looked at him and he looked at me back as I slowly created the "O" letter with my hips.

He released a groan and I smiled, still keeping eye contact. I felt the love between us, I felt the strong connection and it proved to me yet again that I had finally found home and what was destined for me. In the man with faded scars in his chest I found love.. a soul mate.

His hands found their way to my thighs and he increased the pace. I closed my eyes and rode him like my life depended on it. His groans were loud and my screams were even louder.

I humped, bounced on top of him and cried at the intense pleasure, I felt myself going into ecstasy as my body released fluids to mark the five seconds of intense orgasm and the pleasure of intimacy. I fell on his chest and my legs felt wobbly and numb.

He held my butt up and he took care of himself. His deep groans were louder near my ears, I held him as he reached his five seconds of pleasure.

I rolled off him and he took the towel on the pedestal to wipe me.

Him: "I love you..."

Me: "I know you do my love,"

Sleep was already taking over me.

Him: "Even in the next life, I'd still choose you Madlomo,"

he kissed my forehead and pulled me to his arms, I was drowsy.

"Mhhh-hh" I answered and he chuckled.

Him: "let's sleep my love,"

I snuggled closer to him and he tightened his hold.

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Thandiswa Mazwai with the Ingoma song burst through the speakers of the TV in our room as I stretched my arms, the bright light coming through the window marked the start of a new day.

My eyes searched for him and I smiled when he walked out of the bathroom wearing a black suit. His dreadlocks neatly tied as always and his scent stronger. He walked towards and I sat up on the bed scratching my afro.

Him: "Good Morning Madlomo,"

He gave me a morning kiss.

Me: "Good morning sthandwa, you're going to the office today?"

Him: "Yes, I will be back at lunchtime, cook something steamy..." he laughed and I got out of the bed

Me: "For you, it will be more than steamy,"

I whispered as I stood in front of him. He chuckled and held my waist, my arms wrapped around his neck. My silk nighty met with his suit.

Him: "I cannot wait my love,"

He planted another kiss on my lips...

Him: "And there's something I want to discuss with you,"

Me: "Yes,"

Him: "So my sthandwa, sqova sam. I was thinking, since we did all the other traditional wedding ceremonies, won't you like to wear that white dress for me? Hold that white bouquet and be all breathtakingly beautiful for your love?"

I smiled, a heartfelt smile at how he delivered his proposal.

Me: "You want us to stand at a holy matrimony and say our vows for everyone to hear?"

Him: "I want to see you in the white dress, walking down that white carpet looking beautiful and I want you to confess your love for me in front of everyone,"

Me: "I will do it even in front of the whole universe, Let's do it mylove,"

I smiled and kissed him.

Me: "let me go shower then, check the girls for me before you leave, I hope they didn't bother Ziya,"

Him: "Okay, you're going to the gallery today?"

I moved my hands from him. The mention of the gallery made my stomach twirl. I have been scared of painting anything again after I heard the news that I paint the future. The gallery was functioning only on paintings we received from young painters and the events like book launching that we do every now and then. The one in Grahamstown, I had to take out my old paintings and also have it to support upcoming painters.

I last painted when I was still heavily pregnant and was neglected by Wandé.

Him: "Madlomo..."



He brought me back to reality.

Me: "let me go shower sthandwa, I still have to prepare breakfast for you,"

Him: "At some point you'll need to get back out there! That's your calling sthandwa, lose this fear you have or else you will feel lost. I will see you at lunchtime, don't worry about breakfast, I'll have fruit,"

He squeezed my left hand and then kissed my forehead.

"Check the 2nd drawer from the bottom when you're done washing, something meant for you is there,"

He whispered and then bid goodbye.

As he walked out, I searched for the TV remote and turned it off. I opened the windows and took the sheets off the bed, placed them in the washing basket before taking a clean bedding.

I cleaned the bedroom and then went to take a warm shower.

I got dressed in a summer dress with sandals, styled my afro in bantu knots and walked to the chest of drawers.

I pulled it open and found beadwork made with glass beads, a message card, 10 red roses and a tiny black velvet jewelry box which made me smile and shake my head.

I opened the box first and found a gorgeous diamond ring. I felt my eyes burn with tears as I smiled.

I closed the box and took the message card out, it had a picture of us at our traditional wedding.

I read the message on the card,

"Even in the next life, I'd still choose you,"

Exact words he had said to me last night.

I wore the wrist beadwork on my left side and put on the ring too. I took my cell phone out of the charger and took a picture of the beautiful combination on my left hand.

"I choose you... and you could've went down on one knee like a gentleman,"

I wrote the text and sent the picture to him with smiley faces and a heart emoji.

I closed the drawer and then walked out of the bedroom in smiles as I read his reply...

## FORTY SEVEN

"We need to set a date, oh you need a dress Bulelwa! A venue, bridesmaids, shoes, cake Oh my God!"

I chuckled as Zininzi fussed over the wedding thing. I knew she would act like this and want to go all out. She arrived after I called her, with all these bridal magazines.

Me: "You better calm down Zizi, I don't want anything extraordinary, I'm already married to this man, this is just... formalities, let's just say. And all I want is to wear that dress for the man I love wholeheartedly, the rest may come second,"

I took the juice out of the fridge and placed it in the kitchen counter. I checked on the pots, stirred one and turned off one plate.

Zizi: "hayi sisi, we will have the wedding of the century, we were not there when you did your traditional wedding. So this one, we will go all out!"

Me: "I know all that Zizi, but I just want something that will include my friends and family at a private location. I've had a big wedding before and it's not nice starving at your own wedding,"

Zizi: "You're a royal princess for heaven's sake! Go big and don't hold anything back. And to be honest, this is your last wedding,"

Me: "That doesn't mean I have to go all out. And this being my last wedding, it's giving more reasons for it to have close family and friends as guests,"

Zizi: "You won't back down ne?"

I chuckled and shook my head.

A small wedding that would have only our families was all I wanted. Having a huge wedding with every tom, dick and harry would never work. We have finances to look out for. To feed, accommodate and then entertain a room filled with a million people won't work out.

And a huge wedding would need one to be vigilant at all times... the thought of being uncomfortable at my own wedding creeped me out. Zininzi looked at me with questioning eyes.

Me: "Small Zizi, and Zamacirha? oh God, Do you think she will come?"

I had been so busy with my family that I forgot to attend her wedding. I tried to reach out after I saw her wedding pictures on instagram but she wanted to hear none of it. That was when I called Zizi and explained to her why I had been distant. She understood and was happy that I had found my family even though the thought of having a clone of me creeped her out.

Zama wanted nothing to do with me, she was angry and blocked me on all her social media platforms. I tried to reach out via her email but I gave up and left her to be like that.

Zizi looked at me and shrugged.

Me: "Can't you talk to her for me? I've been trying for months but she never answers my emails, she also blocked me from her social networks,"

Zizi closed the magazine and poured herself a glass of Juice.

Zizi: "Unfortunately, the same happened to me, it seems like she blocked us from her life. The last time I saw her was at her wedding and I have to tell you she was not okay, her voice was lower and she had eyebags, don't let the pictures and that make-up fool you. I saw on her face that she was drained and tired. But you know, Zama will always smile even though she's going through the most,"

Me: "Oh my God! Do you think she's okay? These men are sick out there!"

Zizi: "Honestly, even if we knew we wouldn't be able to help her. They moved back to Paris. I really don't trust that man Lelwa. Her face screamed for help behind that smile. I know Zama, and we've all been friends since forever, so for her to block us out over a mere thing of you not attending her wedding while you were busy with your family raises red flags. Something is not on,"

She drank her juice and my heart sank in worry.

What if that monster abuses her? What if by blocking her friends he wanted her to himself. Men are sick out there.

Me: "We can only pray for her safety, I will email her an invitation to the wedding. I hope that she's safe yazi,"

Zizi: "I will also try on my side, anyway, I think you should call Bukiwe to come help you with planning the wedding. I'm here



too and it would be nice of you to kind of include her in things you do, especially things like a wedding,"

I nodded, she had a point. My bond with Bukiwe had grown a lot in the year and it would be an honour to have her as a part of the planning team.

Me: "And I need bridesmaids! Oh this will be a lot,"

Zizi: "I am here, Bukiwe, Ziyanda oh and Mazizi. Your circle is actually small yazi,"

Me: "Tell me about it.. Mazizi, well.. I don't think she will want to be part of my wedding. like me and her don't... I don't know how to put it but she kind of blames me for her mothers death," I said it as low as I could.

Zizi: "What!?"

Me: "Yes,"

Mazizi and I had a disagreement the day after we buried Majola. When the family was called for a meeting later in the evening, I was called too. I guess it was because I was in the yard and it was nothing more than that as I hadn't married in the family yet. Mawande walked out before the meeting could start and Ziya's mother held my hand and pleaded with me with her eyes to not leave too. The family talked about everything, from the money spent in the burial and what was to follow. The uncles mentioned me in the talk as someone who would soon join the family but Mazizi looked at me like I had grown horns and said to me

"you're the reason we are here mourning for mother, had you not come to my brother's life he would've noticed early that something was wrong with her and had her deal with it early. But no! He was busy tiptoeing around you as if you're some God!" And I couldn't believe she would be the one to utter such nonsense. That was something I expected from distant aunts and dabawos, not from her.

Ziya's mother called her out on that attitude, that it was something to not be said in that manner, she further went on telling everyone that the time for their mother to die was near and they had to deal with it and move on.

I answered in my defense and told her that she should deal with her loss and stop blaming everything on everyone she sees fit... she spat some rude words to a point I couldn't take it, I threw my handbag at her as she got up from that chair but the family interfered before a fight broke out and I left them there. I never told Wande about that incident and when I married to her family, she did what was expected of her and didn't say a word to me. Till today we never had any conversation except greeting.

"Bulelwa!!"

Zininzi snapped her fingers on my face and shook her head.

Me: "What?"

Her: "You zoned out... and I don't want to hear about your rivalry between the two of you, I think Ziyanda's mother would love to be part.."

Me: "Ziya's mom and I aren't that close, but I will try her for the sake us being a family,"

Zizi: "Sisi kanti, who are you close with in your husband's family?"

She laughed.

Me: "Ziyanda, my twins and my husband. I really don't care about the rest shlobo,"

Zizi: "Yes wena makoti, and Oh Bayolise will be so happy to take on the flower girl role!"

The kitchen door opened as I agreed to her statement. His scent welcomed him first and I smiled as he walked in and greeted us.

Me: "I thought you wouldn't be back until late,"

He placed his things on the kitchen counter and took out bottled water from the fridge

Him: "I took a half day my love, and I also got a call from Mazizi,"

We looked at each other with Zizi, I moved from the chair and checked on the stew,"

Me: "Oh, what did she want? Did something happen?"

Him: "No, everything is okay but she wants to visit this weekend and to see the babies,"

That was a first.. she never even came to their ceremony now all of a sudden she wants to see them?

Me: "I will prepare the spare room for her,"

He nodded and drank his water.

Zizi: "And now that both of you are here, you've got to set a wedding date,"

Me: "We haven't put a lot of thought into that..."

Him: "The sooner the better my love, I say in three weeks?"

What? Three weeks... he obviously drank something on the way home.

Me: "But sthandwa, three weeks is such a short time to plan a wedding, let alone getting a dress! Hayi babey please be realistic,"

Zizi: "Three weeks is such a short time, At least seven or eight weeks,"

He walked to where I was standing and held my waist as he stood next to me..

Him: "My love, we both know people in places. I am sure if you get a professional planner for all this, the time will be more than enough. Shopping for a dress should take you 3 to 7days. Don't worry about finances, I will take care of the whole thing. Make sure you get a professional planner that will pull off everything in 5 weeks ke. 5 weeks is all I'm giving or else you'll wear that white dress in the house walking down those stairs as an alternative for the aisle,"

I couldn't hold in the laughter, I blurted out and shook my head. What the hell!

Me: "Sthandwa, we don't have to rush when planning this wedding. Yes we want it simple but we must not rush,"

I tried to let him see in my way but he was adamant that in 5 weeks, I should be walking down a white carpet in a beautiful dress fit for a princess of Abathembu.

After the wedding planning talk, we ate lunch with Zizi and Ziyanda. Zininzi soon left after lunch, Ziyanda also had a place to go to after we cleaned the Kitchen.

Wande took a shower and changed clothes which left me with my babies. Lilitha was sleeping with her stomach on the sofa opposite me with a pacifier on her mouth. She's the quiet twin, who only cried when her stomach was empty or a full diaper and when colic struck.

Thalande on the other hand- the troublesome twin who cries whenever, without any reason at all. She's one twin we struggled a lot with in the house.

She laid next to me playing with her mouth rubber, and kept on swinging her legs in the air and making funny sounds, they were loud as the T.V was on mute. Her curly afro had her



brown skin tone glowing and her eyes gleaming as I entertained her babbling.

"Madlomo,"

He called as he walked down the stairs holding his tablet.

"Ngapha sthandwa" I replied,

Thalande got excited and almost rolled off the sofa, I grabbed her quickly and laughed at how excited she was at hearing her father's voice.

Me: "haibo Lithalande!"

I laughed and held her closer to my chest and Wande sat next to me.

He teased her and she almost threw herself out of my hands.

Me: "hayi mthathe Wande, yho intombi katata,"

He placed the tablet on my lap and took her from my arms. He played with her and she babbled louder, he entertained her and I just looked at them.

He's a natural when it comes to these girls, they put him at ease and adore him without holding back.

Lilitha shifted on the sofa and let out sobs to mark her awokeness from dreamland.

Him: "Awu naye wavuka,"

I laughed and I moved to take her before she rolled off the couch. Unlike her twin sister, her hair was not curly, it was just short baby hair. Her nicely shaped eyebrows give shadow to her beautiful sparkling eyes.

They are identical twins but their facial features differentiate the one from the other.

Thalande has her father's nose and eyes. Lilitha had my eyes. I dominated their ears but they both took the brown skin tone of their dad.

Me: "These girls love you, and I'm thinking they prefer you more than me even though I'm the one who live with them all these days,"

Him: "Don't be like that Madlomo, you also love me nje,"

He chuckled. I sat next to him with Litha on my arms and her head rested on my chest, she's lazy.

Me: "haysuka, and what were you going to show me?"

I reached for the Tablet and handed it to him.

Him: "Choose our wedding song,"

I looked at him and smiled. I never thought I would get an opportunity of having someone who would include himself in the planning of the wedding. Let alone to choose a mere thing such as a wedding song.

Me: "We need multiple songs, one for me walking down the aisle and one for our dance,"

Him: "Yes my love, so go through that list and check for the ones you love,"

The conversation of the wedding song went on and on further progressing to the finding of groomsmen and the venue for our wedding. We agreed on finding a professional wedding planner and having the wedding in 5 weeks. The rush I couldn't understand but I trusted him when he said, the sooner the better.

## FORTY EIGHT

"Mazizi,"

I smiled faintly and we shared a brief hug before I stepped aside and welcomed her in her brother's house. She hugged her brother in all smiles and joy. Ziyanda also appeared with Thalande on her arms

Ziyanda: "S'ofundayo,"

She smiled as she greeted. I took Thalande from her and she embraced Mazizi.

Wande pulled her bags in, she brought quite big ones.. She was indeed here to stay.

I closed the door and we all sat comfortably on the couch.

Mazizi is the last born girl but she has an attitude for days. Mawande once mentioned she was a daddy's girl and couldn't get it why their mother had to move back to the village with them, she was too young to grasp what was happening in the household and she has always held much anger in her.

The conversation with her sister's child was getting louder. Ziyanda, I noticed she never clicked well with her mother, but with her mother's sister and Mawande.

Ziyanda's mother resides in Durban with her husband but never in knowing her, has she talked about her. Let alone even say the word "mom"

During the funeral at the village, I noticed that she called her by her first name "Noluthando" or called her "Sis Thando" . They had a civil relationship but not of a mother and daughter. Rumours from the ladies eziko, had it that Ziyanda ngumntwana wentombi and the man Ziyanda's mother married never wanted Ziyanda at all, he never accepted her and it was because the man was a deeply rooted Xhosa man from Willovalle.

Ziyanda was excluded even in things like her mother's wedding, both traditional and white. I had asked Mawande about it but he never gave an exact answer, only that their relationship was complicated and no one understood it except them. They had a weird mother and daughter relationship.

I felt his hand on my shoulder as I played with Thalande's hair. Ziyanda and Mazizi had fully left me out of whatever they were talking about. All I heard was loud noises and laughter.

Me: "Lilitha is still asleep?"

Him: "Yes,"

Me: "Hold this one and let me go check on her, angonyukwa yedwa,"

Him: "let's go together,"

I got up from the couch and their laughter died down

Mazizi: "Unjani kodwa Sis Kwakhanya?"

The name that Ziyanda's mother gave me the day I sat on that mat being told ways in which I had to submit to my husband as if I knew nothing. Such a nice name she gave me, she said it represented the light which I brought in the home.

Me: "Kuyaphileka Sisi, we are all doing good ntonje usifumana simanxadanxada zinto zomtshato omhlophe,"

I had to put on my smilest face. This was the same lady I threw my handbag at and my husband who stood next to me knew nothing. Lying about being busy with wedding things had to be the best and also hold the conversation and not make things awkward.



Mazizi: "Ndiyabona, hay we will talk later kodwa sisi, you can see ndisatefelwa ngu Ziyanda,"

I faked laughter and Ziyanda was clinging on her with her dear life. They really were close.

Mawande: "You'll also see amawele later, Ziyanda prepare food for Mazizi, I am sure she's dying with hunger,"

She laughed and I knew another conversation would start brewing. I excused myself with Thalande and held my dress up as I climbed the stairs.

I had to wear a long dress and a head wrap today in respect of her coming. How her importance mattered is what baffled me

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I thought the last born sisters do not matter at all but the married older sisters.

I walked into the room and placed Thalande on the bed and checked on Litha, she was still sleeping so peacefully.

I walked to the window and watched the golden rays of the sun sit at the horizons of Port Elizabeth. The noise of taxis and the number of cars that passed on the street marked the end of yet another day. I closed the window and the curtains. I turned the volume of the TV up and fixed my head wrapper on the mirror.

The door opened and he walked in smiles

Him: "You won't believe what Mazizi just told me, yhu,"

I never believed a thing from her. But for the sake of peace I smiled and didn't take it literally as he closed the door and walked to stand behind me. I stared at his reflection through the mirror as he held my shoulders.

Me: "Mazizi has jokes for days, what is she saying?"

I kept an interested face.

Him: "That uncle Jama found a girlfriend that's been keeping him on his toes, his baby mama ke phofu is still causing drama at the royal house shouting him that akondli, and elder being shouted for not taking care of his child,"

He continued telling weak jokes and I forced a laugh here and there.

As he held me I felt a disconnection of some sort, a void in me and a strange feeling of worry and fear. I frowned and tried to pay attention to the emptiness that was followed by a loud scream of a baby. I held my breath and shook my head for a second and I closed my eyes. I regret doing that as I saw clear visions of bits of blood stains on a white bed sheet, two knives being boiled in a 3 legged pot on a fire pit in this place looked like a deserted house. A stench tickled my nose that I almost fell.. it had a strong awful smell of blood and imithi.

I gasped and opened my eyes to a Wande who still went on talking like he hadn't noticed that I went away for a minute.

I frowned and looked at him then quickly moved and my eyes landed on the bed where Thalande sucked her thumbs and Lilitha slept peacefully.

Him: "Madlomo, what's wrong?"

Me: "I thought I heard one of them cry.. something weird just happened..."

I trailed off in failure to put into words of description the realm I just went into for a minute.

Him: "What's wrong?"

Me: "Get me a pencil and a paper.. something to draw on Sthandwa... my painting things nje.."

I walked all over the room as the inability to function properly overcame me.

Him: "Charcoal or graphite,"

Me: "Colour sthandwa, I need colour. Take the charcoal and crayons for colour and leave the paint... take colour red, white, black, yellow and blue.."

My hands trembled as I gave him orders on what colour to take and the type of pencil. I had to quickly draw down the picture on my head. My life had always been drawing and bringing pictures to life but this one I had to draw was not just any picture but a powerful message delivered to me.

Me: "And something that will portray emptiness. We need candles..."

I told him as he went through the drawers taking out the drawing material, my palms were getting sweaty with each

minute that passed. I pulled a chair on the desk, I sat down and he placed everything on the table.

Him: "You're okay,"

Me: "Please check the twins and not let them disturb me, this will be quick!"

I said as I held the pencil and the white paper. My mind went into a zone of its own as the charcoal pencil met the paper.

I heard the loud cries of babies, new born babies. Loud, sharp cries that pierced the ear. They were in pain but I couldn't see their bodies except the stains that were drawn by the colour red in paper.

...

"Wande what's happening? That wasn't normal at all and what could it mean? And I kept hearing baby cries,"

I asked him as I sat on the bed and watched him study the drawing I gave him.

Lilitha started crying.

I walked to her side and shushed her. Her hands kept going to my chest and she kept spitting the pacifier out.

I positioned her and took out my breast for her to latch.

Him: "This can only mean one thing..."

I turned to look at him, he rubbed his eyes and exhaled loudly

Me: "We have another ceremony or ritual to do?"

He shook his head

Him: "I didn't think the demand would come now, I thought we still had time,"

Me: "You're confusing me Dlamini,"

He looked at me and I tried to look deep in his eyes to search for answers but his gaze was plain.

Him: "We have to go back to Bumbane Madlomo..."



## FORTY NINE

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We had been here before, we walked the gravel road and had our feet guiding us up the hill to her yard. The last time we were here, we came out as a happy couple, we came out stronger and we were able to defeat whatever will come in our way.

We both confessed our love and vowed to stick together. I wasn't a wife wearing amajereman and iqhiya emnyama with a scarf over my waist protecting my fertility, I was still Bulelwa who was chosen by the ancestors and not Kwakhanya who sat on a reed mat and ate utsiki. I was still oblivious to matters of the royal house and couldn't understand when the wives in the village would invite me to intonjane, ukuhlolwa and other ceremonies that took place in the village.

Before the metal case father walked in carrying that day when the village was blessed with heavy showers, I was still carrying my children in my womb. I took care of them with my life and tried hard to protect them from harm.

Never in the months I've been a mother had it crossed my mind that we would have to be back to where it all started, where it all started way before him and I.

It all went wrong with a kidnapping of a great grandmother.. whose spirit was never at rest because of the way she was taken out of the mortal world. Her spirit roamed for some time around villages that when it finally found peace it was never enough.

We were here again, at this house with both our children. The weather was foul,

We left Port Elizabeth in the early morning, Ziyanda and Mazizi were still sleeping, we packed what we needed and he drove us here. We didn't even pass by the Royal house but straight to kwaMamhlanga. We walked a steep road to her house and we arrived as she was outside crushing medicine. She said to us "You're late," I thought she would tell us to go back but she didn't. Infact, she told us to take off our shoes and walk in her hut.

We did as told and now our twins slept on the mat between us.

MamHlanga: "You will lose him, this is not a battle you will fight alone Madlomo, it needs both of you to hold hands and be united. Mawande ndoda, your are no longer a one man but you have Bulelwa on your side! You now have a family to look out for, don't let his spirit lead you astray!"

Me: "Gogo, who will we lose?"

She looked at me and then at Mawande and shook her head. It was visible that something was hidden from me.

MamHlanga: "Mazizi is carrying the royal heir, don't be happy about it he will never see the light of day. Thulani and Mazizi shared bed sheets and he left his seed inside her. She will lose that child and it won't be a happy thing. Mawande, you know what should be done after she loses that child. Take your sister to emampondweni where she will be taken care of, she still hasn't taken the death of her others well and this one will be the last straw,"

As she said that to Mawande I felt him go uneasy, his eyes roamed but she kept her look on him, as intimidating as she was he finally looked at her for a brief moment before she took the goatskin wristbands from her leather bag and handed them to me. She took out beadwork and gave it to me.

MamHlanga: "Keep them closer to you, wear the beads on your wedding day and keep the goat-skin on your purse with you. You are a part of him now and he is a part you, sometimes the ancestors will send a message to you when he is blocked,"

I agreed and accepted them.

She then kneeled and removed the baby blanket that covered Thalande. She was sucking her thumb as her eyes closed, her chubby face gleaming in her sleep. She was the prettiest.

Mawande: "They demanded her,"

MamHlanga: "They can never get to her or any of them. These children are protected by ancestors,"

Me: "The demand? What is it about?"

MamHlanga: "They want him to pay for what he did with that man, he was not supposed to marry or even meet you according to their rules,"

I looked at him and he didn't back out.

I always held that fear of what he did in the past would affect us, but when we got married and my children were delivered safely, I thought it was over. I stopped worrying and accepted

that he was forgiven. But when the crying voices of children started tormenting me at night I knew something was off. I never mentioned it to him that after birth I always heard babies crying but when I opened my eyes Thalande and Litha would be fast asleep. I thought it was PPD but it was hard to say as I didn't show any other symptoms to confirm.

Me: "Why would they come for him? He did what was supposed to be done, he was cleansed and then trained the right way again, this is confusing Gogo,"

MamHlanga: "Ndoda,ndifumanele umhlonyane pha egadini,"

She held Thalande and laid her on her lap, she took off her clothes as Wande walked out. She hummed a song only she could understand and rubbed her with ivimbela elimhlophe.

I kept quiet and watched her.

MamHlanga: "You don't feed innocent souls to the evil and then think a minor cleansing and ceremonies here and there would fix everything. Those women he wronged are unable to hold their pregnancies for a full term because of him. There's a lot he still needs to do and it includes uprooting the placenta and bones that were buried in his yard,"

Me: "What does this mean for our family?"

MamHlanga: "You are fighting a spiritual battle and unfortunately it won't at all be easy, you have to fight or else history will repeat itself, not with you and him only but with your brother and your sisters and you alone. This time you are fighting battles with him. Remember he was there for you in that whole fight with the Royal family, stick with him even in this because to him; he feels as he is ready to leave this world. You can see even in the way he is holding himself, he thinks he has lived enough and you give him that satisfaction,"

She handed me Thalande and then took Litha to do the same. I was dumbfounded at what she told me. I always thought Wande was strong enough for everything and it was me who always came with problems in this union. It never crossed me that sometimes a healer needs a healer too.

MamHlanga: "The death of Majola hit him hard, he is still taking it hard mntanam. Now I'm talking from woman to woman and not as your elder and healer, that man is broken Bulelwa. You are the only one who gives him life and hope, sometimes he even doubts himself! Being a chosen one for him doesn't mean everything will be easy, hence you will have cases such as him

feeling low and unable to connect with his ancestors. I can tell you that it gets better but the both of you being spiritual comes with hardships and challenges! Remind him of why he bumped into you that day. Don't try and heal him because you cannot, just remind him that this life is worth living, do what you have to do,"

Me: "I hear you Gogo, but it's hard because he never lets me in, he always gives me this brave and "I have it all in place" face. It's hard to crack him up and I hate this habit he has of hiding things from me

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MamHlanga: "hayike sanalwam, we healers are all like that, there are some things we have to protect you from finding out and we are forced to hold it in. If I were to talk and not hide things this whole village would be in flames. Families would be broken and children would be left homeless, we cannot always tell what happens inside these walls. Just be patient with him, teach him how to handle some matters,"

I nodded and he walked back in as I dressed Thalande and wrapped her with the baby blanket.

MamHlanga: "You did good by coming back here children, but from here on there's nothing I can help you with. Let your ancestors guide you, Bulelwa pray sisi and pray hard!

Mawande, you are not weak, you never have been! don't start now. The road for the both of you will be hard, lean on each other and be each other's strength."

She was telling the honest truth. Nothing is ever easy in the world of marriage especially where there's a union of spiritual people.

I had gone through the most before finding him, I had been abused mentally, physically and emotionally. There are still some things I don't want to touch on my past marriage with April.

There are events that happened but never got the chance to deal with, even in that; I never defied myself the chance at love. Fortunately, above all that; I found my safe home in Wande's arms. And he in return had found a heart to love again, a human being to welcome in his life as flawed as he is. He also didn't allow his past to blind him of me- his soulmate. We are both flawed people that life dealt with in the worst way, but in our flaws we are stronger.

I lean on to him and he leans on me. "Ndiyakuthanda Madlomo" he would always whisper at night when he is patting the empty space between us trying to reach for me. And when



his hands land on my body, he would pull me closer to him and lock me in his hold. I would then know that whatever he dealt with that day was heavy on his shoulders and I was the only one who he could hold and feel safe.

Thalande woke up as we walked out of MamHlanga's yard, the rain would come soon because the clouds were darker and it won't be just any rain but heavy showers that will cause a mini flood. But good for the gardens and plants.

We said our goodbyes to MamHlanga who held my hand for a moment and whispered "Umjonge Sisi, lookout for him," and I nodded. We both smiled as we walked down the hill holding our children.

"We wake up and there's no you, where were you?"

Ziyanda asked as I joined them on the table for breakfast. We arrived late in the night and we didn't get a chance to eat together.

The twins were sleeping with him in the bedroom.

Me: "We had to do an emergency trip to Bumbane, Wande wasn't feeling well,"

Ziyanda: "Okay, I hope he's good. I've noticed the change too but I brushed it off,"

Mazizi walked in as I was about to answer Ziyanda, she was wearing an oversized hoodie and a jean. Her face looked like she battled with demons all night long.

Me: "Good Morning, Mazizi"

Mazizi: "Eweke Sisi, uvuka njani noko?"

She pulled a chair and sat down next to Ziyanda. Isat on the opposite side of the table.

Me: "Siyacenga Sisi, we've had better days. How are you?"

Mazizi: "Hayi kuhle ngakum, I can't complain except being tired nje and my body aching, but it's nothing I can't handle,"

I nodded and I saw her flinch and her hand quickly went under the table, probably to touch her tummy.

Ziyanda: "Will Uncle join us?"

Me: "I don't think so, the drive drained him, so I think he's still resting. We can go ahead and eat,"

Mazizi kept on shifting on the chair as if she was in pain. I felt a little guilty that I knew she was pregnant but the baby won't make it. Thulani would be nothing but miserable, I never even thought of then as an item? Mazizi was uptight and stubborn but Thulani was this soft-hardcore man who shuts the world out. How they were a combination is what confused me. We

ate breakfast and Ziyanda got up to answer her cell phone while Mazizi offered to clear the table.

The cry of Mazizi and the glass breaking in the kitchen was what made me jump from the chair and quickly walk to the kitchen, where I found Mazizi on her knees crying and praying for God to help her. Ziyanda also walked asking what was wrong.

"Mazizi!"

I knelt next to her and held her to me, she was burning up and I pulled her hoodie leaving her with the vest and the bump of the pregnancy was visible. The line on her belly was darker, even her belly button was starting to stretch out.

"Bulie it can't happen again! NO! Please tell him to stop this I can't lose this one too, yhini ndenzeni kangaka,"

She was crying and held on to me.

"Ziyanda go call Wande!"

I shouted and she stomped out of the kitchen. I unbuttoned her jeans. I unwrapped the towel I had wrapped over my body on top of the night wear and held her closer to me.

We pulled the jeans down and wrapped her with the towel, no blood was visible but by her cries she was in deep pain.

"I need you to breathe Mazizi, in and out! Please don't panic,"

I was asking for the impossible. I felt the guilt hard that I held her and prayed for her.

The last scream had her jerking up and then losing it as we noticed the change of colour in the towel.

She was bleeding hard that her cries became louder, she was praying and cursing at the same time.

She became quiet and didn't fight anymore. We sat there and my mind went to a zone of its own as the blood continued to stain the towel and the floor.

She held on to me and sobbed lightly.

"There's nothing he or you can do, what's supposed to be done is done. I lost yet another soul and I don't blame it on anyone. But Madlomo, your husband, my brother made me like this. I never carry them full term because of what that friend of his did to me. His ancestors are blocking him..."

She uttered those words and my heart clenched. MamHlanga did mention that the women Mawande had wronged were unable to give birth. I never thought his sister was on the list too.

"Mazizi, can you feel your legs?" I asked.

"No, they are numb, all I can feel is this warm sensation.." she chuckled and giggled for a second.

Mazizi: "It reminds me of him, your brother I mean... he loved it when I came hard that it would slowly go between my thighs. It's sad that I lost the one thing he looked forward to. You should've seen the happiness in his face..."

She laughed again and I knew this woman had left the conscious world. She was blocking out reality and depended in her own mind to at least carry her to peace.

I felt his shadow behind me.

Me: "We need to get her to the hospital, we don't know how far she was and her womb needs to be cleaned. Please call the ambulance,"

I said in the lowest tone as tears ran down my face. No woman deserves this! It's going to kill Thulani. He will take it so hard that I fear the relapse.

Mazizi kept on moaning in pain. I brushed her head lightly assuring her that she would be okay. I was comforting her with lies because there's no way she would be okay after this.

Mawande and I had to talk.

## FIFTY

A white dress fit for a princess, a diamond necklace perfectly gleaming in response to the bright light in this hotel room. A silver bracelet with wrist glass beadwork and a 2inch platform heel with detailing on the sides, it was without a doubt that he and I would be the same height.

My face was done in a nude and natural look that highlighted the knotless braids tied up with a white flower crown to compliment the black colour of the braids.

My teardrop earrings sparkled as they reflected the light hitting them which flowed to the full chest of my showing cleavage on the sleeveless dress that went all the way to the floor and a bouquet of white Lily flowers for a finish.

"It's not too tight right?"

Sindi asked as she tightened the dress on the back.

"It's just fine Sindi,"

I answered as I admired myself in the full mirror. I was ready to walk down that aisle to my husband. The only thing he wanted

was to see me in this beautiful dress. His 5 weeks went by really fast.

We were in one of the hotels owned by Manange, the wife of the Minister we visited when we came to Cape Town for our vacation. It's a beautiful hotel overlooking the table mountain and from the other wing you could see the view of the ocean and the buzzy city of Cape Town.

Sindi: "You are beautiful Bulie,"

I smiled.

Me: "Thank you Sindi, I feel beautiful too,"

I looked beautiful and felt it. For the second time, I wore the white dress but the second time I wore it with love and contentment. I wore it not contemplating whether it was a wise decision to marry as it had been that case with April. Yes, I wore it with pride and joy in me.

Sindi: "Bhut Wande will be happy to see you, you look dazzling Ma'am,"

I nodded and my hands ran down the left side of the dress feeling the fabric of it.

The door opened and the room was suddenly filled with high pitched voices of the ladies going on full ecstasy at the beauty of me. I turned and smiled too.

Me: "So ladies, what do you say?"

Bukiwe: "You look breathtaking ma'am! Oh my god Yes!"

She exclaimed and Zininzi joined in followed by Ziyanda and Thando -Mawande's elder sister who took the role of being the mother in the wedding. She played it well and made sure everyone was comfortable and okay. Even when the royal family wanted the wedding to be done at a lodge she convinced them that Cape Town was even more beautiful than a lodge surrounded by trees and all. She made sure the families were taken care of and everyone was safe.

Nomtha also chipped in her happiness, she still stuttered and was louder than the rest but we came to understand her and she used her hands to express herself more than her speech. We all smiled and gave her a moment to express her happiness.

Mazizi was the one missing, the thought of her made my heart ache and my mind blocked the thoughts of that painful day. It



was my wedding day and going back there would only bring tears which I didn't want. I fanned myself and gathered my mind back to the ladies at this room.

Zininzi: "And this hotel Bulie? It is so beautiful I cannot believe such beauty, and you don't want me to get talking on how gorgeous Cape town is! Your day is beautiful sisi,"

Thando: "Intle! Intle Makoti and oh everything's in place, the groom is already waiting for you,"

Ziyanda: "Won't we drive to a church? Or everything will be done here?"

Me: "There's no church Ziya, everything will be done here, the hall here is big enough for everything. And driving to church and back would be a waste of time, we will have the matrimony here as well as the reception, last night I got a peak and oh my God it is heavenly but they weren't finished yet.."

Thando: "You will be blown away sisi, the planner got everything in place and where is she?"

Zininzi: "Carol is making sure everyone is sitting at their table, everything is in place Madlomo!"

She smiled and I returned it. I couldn't wait to see my husband in all of this. We haven't seen each other in a week. I had to fly

to Cape Town before the actual event to check on things, shame he had to stay with the kids and luckily nothing bad happened and when they got here yesterday I had a bridal shower and didn't get to welcome him, I only saw the twins briefly. Bukiwe and Boniswa were taking care of them with the help of Ziyanda.

A popping champagne bottle took me off my train of thoughts and glasses were already in the air!

Sindi: "To more of these beautiful moments Ladies! Bulie take your glass and let us have a toast! Oh yes!"

I laughed and my glass was handed to me.

Zininzi: "All I have to say is; to happiness"

"Oh yes!"

We all clinked and toasted to happiness and more of these moments. I might have turned too quickly as I felt a pain on my lower abdomen. It was quick like labour pains! I only flinched and listened for a moment but it didn't come again.

I looked around the room and my bridesmaids were beautiful in their knee length white dresses with a touch of space blue. Bukiwe being my matron of honour; was not here in the room, probably taking care of the twins. Bathembu was clinging on

Boniswa, who came to me early in the morning and she reminisced on the day she helped my mom give birth to us. We had a heartfelt conversation that left me emotional.

I wished mom was here to witness this beautiful day, even if it was Wande's mom but life decidex either way and it remained nothing but a wish. The knock came and carol walked in looking beautiful in her planner suit. All black with a tablet on her hand.

Carol: "Awusemuhle sisi! Wow!! I know you're beautiful nhe but I didn't think you were going to be this gorgeous!"

Her face was in shock and she had all smiles. She walked her slim body in clicking her stilettos on the laminated floor.

Me: "Thank you very much Carol,"

Carol: "Oh wow, umhle sisi, uhm heey we are ready to get you married. The family is seated as well as everyone and as you said -strictly family I made sure of that and we have about 150 people, excluding you here. The hall is spacious for dancing and all and yes we are ready. We have about 5 minutes left on the time of the programme, let's get you wedded Ma'am,"

I pulled a deep breath and let it out slowly. Everyone got up and placed the glasses away.

Oh this was it.

Thando: "Let's hold hands and say a prayer before we leave, this is a blessed event and we should welcome the heavens,"

The door flew open before we could even start and a person whom I didn't expect at all walked in hurriedly. She wore a slim fitting space blue suit with a white shirt that had rhinestones in its collar. Finishing with Black stilettos and a curly weave.

Me: "Zama!"

I said her name loudly in shock! She walked in dramatically and threw her handbag on the bed and welcomed me in her arms in a tight hug.

Zama: "I wouldn't have missed it for the world Bulie, I am sorry I was a bitch my friend please forgive me,"

I felt my eyes getting hot and she broke the hug

Zama: "Oh hell No! Don't cry please!!"

Her voice had a hint of British accent. In

fanned myself and took a breather.

Zininzi: "And the bridesmaids are now all here!"

Carol: "Ladies the reunion and prayer has to wait! We are now left with 3 minutes! And you know how time is vital is here. Ladies please let me see you outside that hall ASAP I have to take care of a little thing please please!" She was already by the door, we all agreed and laughed at how time managing she was.

The hall was just a floor away, and anyway; the bride was always late.

Sindi: "Let me follow Carol, Madlomo; let's meet when you walk down that aisle okay, and don't ruin your makeup please,"

I laughed and nodded as she left too. Thando held Nomtha and they also left the room leaving me with Zizi and Zama. My friends.

Zininzi: "We will talk about you and ditching us later! Right now, I am happy that you made it in time! It would've been a bitchy behaviour if you didn't pitch up,"

Zama: "I am sorry that I left you guys on the hang, yhoo I've got a whole story to tell you but we will save it for later under a glass of red wine. Lelwa you heard Carol we are running late, time to get you wedded lady!"

Me: "Yoh you guys are talking non stop I can't even think!  
MaCirha, I am happy that you made it!"

She nodded and we held hands for a minute smiling at each other.

"Okay help me to my husband please"

I said in a high pitched tone

They both screamed like the ratchets they were!

Zininzi: "OH Yes! Ma'am, let's go! Go!"

We laughed and I was happy that they were here.

...

Carol shouted at us when we reached the outside of the hall. The doors were closed and the only people outside were Bayolise the flower girl and the twins in their seats. They looked so cute in their dresses and little bow ties on their heads.

Zama took Thalande and Zininzi took Litha. They fussed over their chubby cheeks and cute eyes.

Carol: "No time ladies! We are 10 minutes behind already! Let's get this started! Bayo, remember to scatter the petals as you

go, ladies we will have to use the other entrance let's give ma'am her time. Okay okay! Be happy it's a wedding!!"

Zininzi: "Okay, remember to smile for him my love,"

She held my hand for a brief moment and then let me go. Zama smiled and they turned and disappeared to the other side.

It was me and my thoughts. Bayo held the basket of flower petals and the door opened from the inside.

For a moment I stood still and Bayolise walked in.

I took a breather and stepped inside as the band played a Johnny Gill's you for me. I held the bouquet and walked down the white carpet, my heart beating in an abnormal way. Everyone stood up and my eyes landed on him, the man waiting for me at the end of the white carpet. In his dark blue suit, I could see his dreadlocks were styled. I couldn't help but smile under the veil as I walked to the front. Indeed as the song played we were once strangers all by ourselves and we didn't know that someday we would bump into each other and later meet again at a party. That we would later find that I was his wife chosen by the ancestors, we became one and stood together through it all. Through all the challenges that life kept throwing at us, from curses to blessings but a year and

something later we were still a couple and we also became parents to two beautiful twins.

His herbaceous scent hit my nostrils strongly as the bouquet was taken from my hand and my hands then joined with his. He wore the blue and white beadwork around his neck and wrists.

We stood facing each other and holding hands, the electricity that we exchanged was enough to light up the whole of South Africa. I saw glasses of tears in his eyes as we looked into each other's eyes.

For a moment we stood there holding each other's hands and looked into each other's eyes, the love was strongly visible. How it had been a thing of a moment; the sound of my cell phone meeting the floor and him picking it up in all apology and sorries, how he had quickly picked up the negativity in my spirit and told me to not bottle things up. I think from that moment I fell for him. I went in deeply that day I was drunk with wine and he came over without wearing shoes, shame he probably thought I'd be annoyed with him but little did he know that I had fallen harder and deeper; When he held me tightly and never took advantage of me gave me promise that he was goodman. Indeed he was. Yes, with his flaws and all but I loved him regardless. Even if I didn't love him I would be stuck with him for life as our union was certified way before we even met.



We yet again confessed our love in front of God and a hall full of witnesses. We sealed it with a kiss and a touch in the presence of the most high God. We exchanged vows and made lifelong promises to each other. To good and bad, to sickness and in health we both agreed and gave each other a set of wrist beadwork with a mixed colour of blue, red and white. A symbol of our fiery love one that had been filled with trials and tribulations but in spite of it all we will keep going and holding on to each other.

“You look beautiful Madlomo

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he smiled at me as we held each other for our wedding pictures. These were going to go to be framed and be in our offices and bedroom. We were smiling and laughing with everyone who came to celebrate this day with us.

The long speeches from family members soon started and everyone started reminiscing on the memories I or Wande shared with them. They gave us words of wisdom and threw in

a little advice here and there. I looked around the hall and everyone was smiling, it was a happy occasion at this space blue decorated hall with the view of the ocean that can be seen from the beautiful glass windows.

Soon the sun set and the lights went dim in the hall. It felt like we were in space, even the windows had a reflection of the stars. I knew it was time for him and I to have our wedding dance as the band played Dave Koz's The Dance.

He let out his hand

"Can I have this dance, sthandwa sam,"

I smiled and took it and he led me to the dance floor. His hand held my waist and my arms went on his shoulders. Our eyes locked and he guided me through the steps. It was slow and heartfelt. I was dancing with him, my love. As the song proceeded I pulled him closer and my head laid on his shoulders, I took in his warmth, his scent. I was happy, content! The earth stopped rotating at that point and the only thing that mattered was him and I, me in his warmth and hold. Our lives were indeed yet to change....

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"Wamhle sisi umtshato wakho,"

Thando said as we sat the couches at this suite waiting for the others to come with their bags. The elders left in the morning,

they chose an early flight because they had things to do in the day.

As we sat, waiting for others to finish, Mawande was clinging on me like I was going to up and leave. He woke up not feeling okay this morning, I suspected he was homesick.

The wedding was really beautiful, everything went well without any hassle. I slept next to my husband too and he got to undress the white dress and made love to me. It was sweet and we connected on a much deeper level. If 9 months from now we don't get another big headed child it would be a miracle.

Me: "Enkosi sisi, it would've been nicer if Mazizi was here too, I just hope she's doing well wherever she is,"

Mawande moved and placed his head on my shoulders.

Thando: "Ei Mazizi and I haven't talked to her in weeks, let's hope she's well,"

I nodded and Thulani walked in followed by Monwabisi, Luzuko and Thando's husband who looked like a creep. They placed their bags by the door and joined us on the couches.

Thulani: "Tyhini, nangoku senitshatile usamthe nca! Molweni,"

We laughed as they made fun of Wande who just chuckled and shook his head. Something was definitely wrong with him

Luzuko: "Don't be like that Bhuti, ngumkakho ngoku soze aphinde ahambe!"

They teased him and Bukiwe walked in followed by Zama, Zizi, and Ziyanda who held the crying Thalande! For a moment I forgot I had them.

Wande jumped and went for Thalande and the rest of the room vibrated with laughter.

Thando: "Inene! You can never separate a father and his daughters!"

Me: "Soze kaloku!"

I joined in the laughter and took Litha from Bukiwe who was silent and kept sucking her thumbs. She saw me and laughed showing the glow in her eyes. I tickled her and she giggled and babbled a language heard only by her.

Mawanda came to sit next to me and as soon as Thalande saw me her cries subsided.

Ziyanda: "I guess they just missed their parents, they could've just said so!"

She laughed and threw herself on the couch. Luzuko looked taken by Ziyanda but he quickly moved faces and looked at Zininzi with a smile.

Zama: "I don't think I can ever know who is who from these babies! I also had a heart stopping shock when I saw Bukiwe! I was stunned like what the hell!"

Zininzi: "Right, It's better now they have different hairstyles, yhoo you would've probably hanged yourself when they both had braids! But I know Bulie's nose is different,"

Monwabisi: "Now that you mention it!"

We laughed at his clownery and my cell phone beeped, the shuttle was here.

Me: "The shuttle is here everyone, let's get going!"

Thando: "Finally!"

We all made our way out of the hotel. I got to the receptionist and left a note of thank you for Manage, she couldn't make it to the wedding as her and the minister were out of the country. I also received a gift pack from the staff. I thanked them for their generosity and kindness, they were amazing..

.

Mawande was still not feeling well as hours later our car was parked outside our house. The twins were sleeping on their car

seats, I was sitting in front with him. We held hands and looked at each other, the sun had long set, the moon was shining brightly. We were back here in this house we need to vacate in a week. Ziyanda had gone with her mother, Bukiwe also left for Bumbane.

It was now him and I.

Me: "We need to fix things Dlamini,"

Him: "I don't know where to start Madlomo,"

Me: "Let's start from where it began. It won't be a happy road but we've been through worse sthandwa sam,"

Him: "I feel like I have let our family down. I am really sorry for all this trouble we have to go through Madlomo, if it were by me I would ask..."

I squeezed his hand and shook my head.

He was not about to voice out his desire to leave this earth!  
Who would then raise these kids!

Me: "Don't even say it! We will pass this Wande! we will go through it together and we will come out together. Right now we need to start from the beginning. You need to beg the elders to light your way and guide you this time,"

He nodded and kissed my hand.

I unbuckled the seat belt and opened the door.

I climbed out and then opened the back seat door and took Thalande. He took Litha from his side.

We only took the kids' things and left ours in the car. He locked it and we walked in the house.

Me: "And we are here,"

Him: "Yes love,"

I dropped the girls' bags on the floor and laid Litha on the couch, he did the same with Thalande and then went to lock the door. He sat on the couch and rested his head. I walked over to his side and held his hands. I smiled at him and he pulled me in for a kiss. It was warm and welcoming.

I moved back and held his dreadlocks.

Me: "Umhle yazi,"

His chest vibrated as he laughed at me

Him: "Ayinconywa indoda,"

Me: "Uyindoda yam and I will compliment you whenever I want. Tshi! Yazi u cute ndiyakubuka,"

Him: "Hayi Bulelwa!"

He was blushing and I loved him like that. We both laughed and I moved back and his hand still held my waist.

Me: "Let me go see what's in the fridge, what do you wanna eat?"

Him: "I want to eat you!"

I looked at him for a moment and laughed! I didn't expect that.

Him: "A sandwich is fine my love, but I still want to eat you!"

I nodded, he let me and spanked me.

"Ouch!!" I yelled and then laughed as I walked away from him shaking my head.

I turned to the kitchen and it was dark and smelt of concrete.

I lit up and gasped at the state it was in...

"You are here, what Am I asking I heard the car come in!"

She chuckled and my heart skipped a beat and I suddenly felt the heat. There was a black garbage plastic next to her, dust was all over the kitchen. The tile was damaged it seemed as if she hit it with the hammer and spade that lay next to her.

She was on the floor with her head laid on the cupboard and her legs were spread on the floor.



The dress was stained, it had spots blood and it was dirty. I wondered how long she had been seated here, the floor was for sure cold for her to sit like that.

"Mazizi,"

My mouth finally said her name. She looked distraught, her eyes were bloodshot red. She also had a glass and a bottle of red wine next to her, undeniable that she took it from our collection.

Mazizi: "Don't call him please! I am sorry I turned your kitchen like this. I am lost, I feel lost. I don't know whether I'm coming or going! I've lost my will to live and this is the only way I can move. I've tried killing myself but it only made my things worse. I wanted to attend your wedding, but I didn't want to cause any troubles,"

She didn't need me to say anything rather listen to what she was saying. She had eye bags and looked nothing close to the Mazizi who I once saw at that ceremony. I pulled a chair and sat next to her.

Me: "What did he do to you?"

She knew who I was talking about.

Mazizi: "He damaged me, he killed my spirit and took all of me. He apologized but all the children I've lost still haunt me at night. I can't hold anything in my womb, I lose them all. I am tired Bulelwa, I'm tired of being lifeless and having nothing to look forward to. I am bruised deeply. What you see here on this plastic bag are the remains of my first child, I dug them outside. I was just mad and took out the anger on the tiles... I needed to break something and hit something and it couldn't be your cups and glasses.." I held my breath and when I breathed out I felt his strong presence. His scent is not a thing that I would ever miss.

.....**The End**.....

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